INTERACTIONAL PRAGMATICS OF HYPNOTIC INDUCTION

Alain Trognon

Since Morris the analysis of the relationships between signs, or syntax, and between signs and their meaning, or semantics, has been opposed to the analysis of the relationships between signs and their users, or pragmatics. Thus, pragmatics is the use communicators make of signs and of linguistic signs in particular. Therefore, the psychotherapeutic practices that consist in using signs to a therapeutic end belong to pragmatics with good reason. And since using signs to a therapeutic end amounts to acting in an interlocutory situation it could even be added that therapeutic practices are related to a limited field of pragmatics, that of conversational pragmatics.

The analysis of conversational communication should thus constitute the base from which psychotherapeutic interactions should be thought of. This is all the more so for, as Heritage notices (1990: 45, note 6):

Ordinary conversation is the predominant medium of interaction in the social world and the primary form to which children are exposed and through which socialization proceeds. There is thus every reason to suppose that the structures of mundane talk forms a kind of benchmark against which the more specialized forms of communication characteristic of, for example, the courts, the classroom, the news interview, doctor-patient interaction and so on, are recognized and experienced. This supposition has been confirmed by an increasing body of CA studies focused on these forms of institutional interaction. It is clear, therefore, that the study of ordinary conversation offers a principled approach to describing the distinctive character of these more specialized forms of interaction and also interactions involving the asymmetries of status, gender, ethnicity, etc.

Historically however, it seems that it is rather the study of therapeutic interactions that has nursed the theory of conversations. The fact that therapeutic interactions belong to conversational interaction and consequently the fact that it is possible to find properties of conversational interaction when studying therapeutic interactions, added to the greater availability of the materials issued from therapeutic interactions explains why the analysis of conversations owes a lot to the study of therapeutic interactions. For instance, without going back to Birdwhistell (1970), one of the finest models pertaining to the change of speech turn in conversation (Duncan 1974; Duncan and Fiske 1977) relies on the grouping of the first nineteen minutes of two a priori different interviews: First, an interview preceding a therapy where a patient, a secretary in her twenties, is interacting with a therapist in his forties. Second, a conversation between the mentioned therapist and one of his colleagues (who also is a therapist) and whom he has known for the past ten years. But the most accomplished example certainly is Therapeutic Discourse (Labov and Fanshel 1977). This work has allowed researchers to theorize numerous interlocutory events of ordinary conversation. It is often considered to be paradigmatic of "Discourse Analysis." Nevertheless it relies on the recording of the first fifteen minutes of Rhoda’s twenty-fifth
therapy session, Rhoda being a nineteen-year-old mental anorectic.

Now that conversational pragmatics has become a scientific field of its own, it should be possible to go the other way round and to understand more fully what a therapeutic interlocution is, and what its different modalities of accomplishment are. How are therapeutic conversations generated from the principles, components and rules of ordinary conversation? How is it possible to make a distinction between various types of therapeutic interlocutions? Cognitive therapies, non-directive therapies, psychoanalytic therapies, hypnotherapies indeed achieve structures that are different from those that a study using the results obtained in conversational pragmatics should reveal. How can one bring to the fore the peculiarities of the use of signs which, though anecdotal in ordinary conversation, are central in the corresponding therapeutic practices as the use of "free association" (Bertoni and Trognon 1992)?

In fact, conversational pragmatics should allow us to understand more fully the linguistic uses that take place in therapeutic interlocutions as much as these should allow us to approach more closely the objects of pragmatics itself.

Here I would like to focus upon the first movement. Using a contrastive method I will try to depict induction by hand levitation. On the one hand, I will examine the “Classic” method (Weitzenhoffer and Hilgard 1963). On the other hand I will examine Erickson's practice (Erickson 1959). In order to point out the differential properties of induction I shall thus use pragmatics, more precisely conversational pragmatics, and even more precisely the Interlocutory Logic which I present now.

1. Analytical elements of interlocution

1.1. Exchanges, structures and transactions

First of all, it is necessary to define what an interlocution is, and to identify the types of objects that make it up. From the most microscopic to the most macroscopic level these objects are exchanges, structures and transactions. They respectively are to interaction what atoms, molecules, and macro-molecules are to matter.

The exchange is the basic unit of an interlocution. It is "basic" in that it constitutes the smallest "dialogical" unit of the interaction (Goffman 1973; Roulet et al. 1985; Moeschler 1985, 1989; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990; Ghiglione and Trognon 1993). Although authors’ opinions differ on the size of the exchange and sometimes on its composition every author in Conversation Analysis has defined it as the basic unit of interlocution. Therefore, I shall not develop this point further. This question is supposed to be known and has been very well presented elsewhere (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990).

At a more macroscopic level, exchanges are organized into structures. Within these structures, they can be found according to two types of chaining. On the one hand there are linear chainings in which exchanges follow each other and belong to the same speech level. On the other hand there are hierarchical chainings where exchanges depend on each other. The hierarchical structure of a conversation naturally emerges from these basic elements. Indeed, the only function of the inserted exchanges is to prepare for the relevance of the second element of an exchange (see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990: 234 ff.; Ghiglione and Trognon 1993: 207 and ff. for more information). Besides, among the different structures
some present a typical organization that can be functionally interpreted as relying on a collective intentionality. To communicate information (Grusenmeyer and Trognon 1995, 1996, 1997; Trognon and Grusenmeyer 1997), to debate (Trognon and Larrue 1994; Ghiglione and Trognon 1993), to negotiate (Trognon and Kostulski 1996), to lead a group (Larrue and Trognon 1993; Ghiglione and Trognon 1993), to make a decision within a group (Trognon and Kostulski 1996; Trognon and Galimberti 1996) are all examples of it.

The third component of an interlocution regards institutionalized language games such as psychotherapies (Labov and Fanshel 1977; Trognon 1990; Bertoni et Trognon 1992; Proia 1994, 1996), consultancy interviews (Bange 1987), or information collection interviews (Blanchet 1991), medical questionnaires, human-machine dialogues (Saint-Dizier 1996; Trognon 1996), etc. These are situations of interaction that are conventionally overdetermined, and that are organized according to the expectations they carry and to the institutionalized roles they play. A lawsuit for instance is a particular form of transaction that is distinct from other forms of transactions. A transaction refers to a recognizable interlocutory structure which has an organization that is socially accomplished or is regulated by a group of conventions. The organization of transactions is built on an ad hoc mode: None of the patients challenges the way a medical visit takes place and its internal organization (diagnostic, decision, prescription, recommendation, etc.). Numerous transactions have been analyzed in the literature, especially as regards school environment (Sinclair and Coulhart 1975). The restricted framework of this article does not allow for a complete inventory of these studies (see however Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990 for a partial list).

1.2. Internal structure of the exchange and its properties

An exchange is built upon the properties of simple speech acts (such as a request for information for instance), or of complex speech acts (such as a request followed by its justification, for instance: Shut the door because I am cold) that make it up (Ghiglione and Trognon 1993). This amounts to saying that speech acts constitute the basic components upon which the exchange is built, despite the almost ten-year long criticism (Trognon 1995) of the use of the theory of speech acts in conversation analysis. In fact, on the one hand this criticism only works for a certain version of the theory of speech acts, and that version is not the one that is being used here. The version we are using is interested in the components of speech acts, that is to say in an analytical texture that is finer than the analytical texture that is usually used. On the other hand there is a fundamental theoretical reason in favour of speech act as a basic component of an exchange: To depict and to generate conversations requires the availability of a component that reproduces both the actional and the representational aspects of utterances. The components of a conversation must therefore somehow reflect intentionality. The definition of the speech act as the application of a force to a propositional content corresponds exactly to this need (Trognon 1991, 1995; Brassac and Trognon 1996). This can be expressed by the formula F(p) where F represents the force of the speech act and p its propositional content. The force defines the type of action (assertive, commissive, directive, declarative, expressive) that the speech act accomplishes. As for the propositional content it defines the representation (or the cognition) on which the force "acts." As Searle writes, this is "the state of things, or the action predicated in
speech acts with a determined force” (1983), representing the conditions of satisfaction of speech acts. Thus, the propositional content is somehow like the cognitive “matter” on which the force acts. It is the representation on which the force acts. The propositional content of a directive utterance for instance is the representation that the speaker wants to make true (e.g. to realize in the world) by using a directive utterance.

Since illocutionary acts are made up of a force that is applied to a propositional content, they possess two types of semantic values. They also have conditions of success and conditions of satisfaction. These depend on the conditions of truth of their propositional content: "1) values of success, e.g. success and failure and 2) values of truth, e.g. the true and the false. In every possible contextual use and according to a semantic interpretation, every elementary utterance of a natural language expresses an illocutionary act which is or is not accomplished with success, and is or is not satisfied in this context and according to this interpretation" (Vanderveken 1988: 48, our translation).

Thus, an exchange spreads out from the relationships between the properties of speech acts by condensing several parallel levels of functioning. The first level of functioning is a sequential level. This is the level of functioning of speech turns (see Ghiglione and Trognon 1993; Larrue and Trognon 1993; Trognon 1994). The second level of functioning is a conversational level. This is the level at which the linear and hierarchical relationships (Ghiglione and Trognon 1993; Trognon 1995) between the properties of those speech acts that are in the heart of "conversational grammar" play a part (Trognon 1991; Trognon and Brassac 1992). Insofar as speech acts are forces applied to propositional contents they can be analyzed according to these two dimensions. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between an illocutionary aspect (what one does while saying what one says) and a cognitive, or propositional, or logical aspect (it is the representation that is conveyed by the saying). This aspect is particularly crucial in the study we shall now present.

1.3. The Exercise of interunderstanding in the interlocution

The conversational mechanism of interunderstanding of an action or of an illocution is a structure that is made up of three successive elements. By misuse of the language and insofar as it is not confusing, we shall write this structure: (T1 T2 T3), where T1 is the first stage, T2 the second stage and T3 the third stage of an interaction and we shall identify speech turn and content of speech turn. In fact, this structure is a complex one, and can be divided into two substructures: (T1 T2) and [(T1 T2) T3].

(T1 T2) corresponds to the conversational interval during which an interpretation of T1 is enacted by S2, the second speaker, in that T2 materially achieved a S2-interpretation of T1. This structure is in the center of the mechanism because the interpretation takes place within it and is experienced in a form that is materially available to the interactants (Trognon 1991; Ghiglione and Trognon 1993).

At least two scenarios can then happen. In the first scenario the state of affairs achieved in T2 corresponds to the representation of the state of affairs to which the force of the illocution of T1 was applied. The speaker of T1 can then consider that he/she has been understood by the speaker of T2. One cannot be absolutely sure of it though, for the satisfaction of a speech act in conversation can never be proven. Therefore, in an absolutely rigorous way, S1 can only consider that he/she has been understood until more information
is available, e.g. by default (Trognon and Brassac 1992). Besides, if S1 was asking S2, S1 would not be much further forward, for in the case of a positive answer he/she would not be able to know whether S1 wanted to dispel his/her fear, or whether at the time of T2 he/she really intended to satisfy T1 (Livet 1994).

In the second scenario the T2 state of affairs does not correspond to the intentionality that the speaker of T1 assigned (or assigns) to the illocution he/she intended (or intends) to achieve at that very moment. There are two possibilities then. Either it is his/her turn to take responsibility for the "project" that his/her interlocutor attributed to him/her during the preceding speech turn. And thus conversation is taking place as though S1 had initially had the intention, or the corresponding aim to accomplish the illocution (Trognon and Brassac 1992). Or the speaker of T1 somehow underlines the discrepancy that exists between his/her interpretation and that of his/her interlocutor during the preceding speech turn. He/she then "reformulates" his/her initial action while restarting the conversational "machinery" of interunderstanding.

S1 cannot prove that his/her interlocutor understands him/her when T2 "corresponds" to the propositional content he/she assigned to his/her illocution at the time of T1. But he/she can refute this idea when T2 does not correspond to it. As Livet writes in a recent work (1994: p. 45, our translation): "This semi-impossibility has positive virtues. For it becomes unreasonable to ask one to prove that he/she has such and such an informative intention, that he/she really follows such and such a rule (...) when there is no (...) refutation. The impossibility of this demonstration becomes the best possible substitute for the certainty of having been understood".

2. What takes place in the induction by hand levitation?

In order to empirically show to which extent conversational pragmatics may allow us to have a better insight into certain communicational events that take place during a hypnosis session, as well as certain objects of "ordinary" communication we shall now focus on an interlocutory structure that is typical of hypnosis.

A hypnosis session (a transaction according to our terminology) is usually made up of two phases (two types of structures according to our terminology): Induction and hypnotic trance. Induction consists in leading the subject into a hypnotic state. We shall examine this structure by analyzing two sequences of induction by hand levitation. The first one is the standard type of sequence such as is taught in Weitzenhoffer and Hilgard (1963). The second sequence comes from Erickson’s transcription of the induction of a trance (1959).

The method of this analysis will consist in "applying" the preceding theory of interunderstanding in conversation to both sequences in order to point out their similarities and differences, and beyond that, what characterizes induction.

2.1. Standard type of achievement of induction by hand levitation

Here is first a classic method of induction by hand levitation (Weitzenhoffer and Hilgard 1963), with its instructions literally reproduced; (...) indicating a discourse which is
Please place your hands on your lap, well-separated, palms down. Are you right-handed or left-handed? I want you first of all to look at your right hand (left hand, whichever is dominant) and notice the various sensations you may have in it. I would like you to keep watching your hand and to be interested in seeing what sort of experiences you may have. There are many sensations in your body that you normally do not notice because you are not paying attention to them; but when you concentrate as you are now doing, on some part of your body, such as your right hand, you then become aware of many different things which were there all along. (...) And as you continue to pay close attention to your hand and the sensations in it, perhaps you begin to experience a sort of tingling, or perhaps you feel a warmth in your hand...

(...) I will be very interested in finding out what sort of sensations you may have in your hand and you can be interested too in finding out. Most people sooner or later experience a feeling of lightness in their hand... as if it were a feather ready to float up and away... I wonder if you will have this sensation... that your hand is getting lighter and lighter... more and more light... and perhaps you have noticed a sort of feeling of tenseness... Very soon your hand is going to move... it is going to rise...

If hand has not yet started to rise:

Even now the tendency to move and rise up in the air is growing.... the pressure between your hand and your lap is decreasing... getting less and less....

whether or not the hand has begun to rise, continue:

Your hand is rising, lifting, lifting up in the air.... That’s right, it is lifting, up... up... I am going to count to twenty, and this will help your hand to rise...

(...) As it moves you will become deeply hypnotized... Your hand is moving slowly toward your face, but at such a rate that it will not touch your face before I reach the count of twenty. (Return to interrupted count.)

Continue:

One.... your hand is lifting up... more and more up... Two.... Rising even more.... Three.... still higher... lifting, lifting, lifting.... While your hand rises and continues to rise you continue to go deeper and deeper into the hypnotic state.... Four.... five.... (...) and you keep on going deeper and deeper into hypnosis, and by the time I reach twenty you will be very much hypnotized... deeply hypnotized... Nine.... ten.... (...) twelve....

If hand has not moved or has moved very little, continue with a. below, (...)

a. If hand movement is unsatisfactory:

Occasionally a hypnotized person hallucinates the hand movement. The following suggestion is used to test this possibility, before going on to and aided movement.

Keeping your right hand (left hand, whichever was supposed to rise) where it now is, touch it with your left (right) hand.... That’s good.... Now return your left (right, non rising) hand to your lap where it was...

If the left (right) hand touches the “hallucinated hand” (i.e., a raised hand when none is raised, or one much higher than the actually raised hand is), record the hand levitation as successful. If hand has been touched normally, say:

That’s fine... Now I am going to help your hand to up by lifting it up a little...

Grasp the subject’s hand gently by the wrist and lift the hand upward slowly. Then slip the other hand beneath it so as to lift gently from below, releasing the original hold on the wrist. Resume counting, and proceed as if the hand were rising without aid. Go on with b.

(...) If satisfactory hand levitation to face has taken place (also applies to forced movement), continue with:

And now your hand can slowly come back to your lap...

Continue:

You will remain deeply hypnotized until I tell you otherwise. You will be able to speak, open your eyes, and move while remaining deeply hypnotized, if I should ask you to do this. Whatever you do or experience, you
The illocutions related to levitation are introduced in the context of an account of the sensations the subject feels in his/her hand. These illocutions (*Very soon your hand is going to move... it is going to rise...*) have several properties. First, they are inserted in a speech depicting the subject’s sensations. Second, instead of depicting a psychological state that would apply to an "object" they only depict that object. Third, the movement of the object only is reproduced in the assertion (by using the progressive form). Fourth, these illocutions literally are assertions: they depict states of affairs, e.g. the rise of the hand. Non literally they are requests. The hypnotist asks that the hand of the hypnotized person rises. More precisely, as the assertions related to the hand-rise are inserted in assertions related to the sensations felt by the subject, he asks the subject to feel the rise. This interpretation will be confirmed later on. Indeed, as the hand movement has not been satisfactory the success of the test that consists in touching the hallucinated hand (the left hand touches the right hand where it would be if it had risen) "is equivalent to" the satisfaction of the request to raise the hand. Fifth, the assertions related to the rise of the hand are progressively associated with assertions regarding the subject’s going into the hypnotic state (*While your hand rises and continues to rise you continue to go deeper and deeper into the hypnotic state (...) and you keep on going deeper and deeper into hypnosis*).

Although the text appears in the form of a monologue (a dialogical monologue according to Roulet and al. 1985) it obviously conveys an interaction in which the subject’s reactions to the hypnotist’s requests are indicated in the underlined notes. Thus, the progress of the interaction can be seen as a series of manoeuvres whose aim is to bring the subject to lift his/her hand, or at least to bring him/her to feel this rise when the simple statement of the request is not enough to obtain that effect. It can go as far as having the hypnotist do it for the subject when the test of the hallucination of the hand movement fails. This gives the following model (H is the hypnotist, S the subject, Ti the different states of interaction):

(...)

H1 (=T1) : (...) Very soon your hand is going to move ...
          it is going to rise...
S1 (=T2) : If hand has not yet started to rise
H2 (=T3) : Even now the tendency to move and rise up in the
          air is growing ... (....)
(...)
Sj (=T2): If satisfactory hand levitation to face has taken place
         (also applies to forced movement), continue with

This can be analyzed in the following way, according the the theory presented in section 1.3.:

(...)

H1 (=T1) : Indirect request to lift up the hand
S1 (=T2) : Unsatisfaction of the request
H2 (=T3) : Reformulation of the request (implying a negative
How can we know that the third time of the interaction constitutes a negative evaluation of the subject’s activity at T2? We know it because when T2 is an unsatisfaction, then T3 consists in a complex illocution made up of an assertion of the hand rise and/or of an illocution depicting the hypnotist’s contribution to this activity. *(Your hand is rising, lifting, lifting up in the air... (...) I am going to count to twenty, and this will help your hand to rise; That's fine... Now I am going to help your hand go up by lifting it up a little).*

### 2.2. An Ericksonian induction by hand levitation

The sequence that we are going to examine now was published in the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnotherapy* (Erickson 1959). It consists in the recording of the induction of a trance that was realized by Erickson in 1957 during a seminar he was conducting in Phoenix, Arizona. Erickson, Haley and Weakland listened to the recording and spoke about it the following day. This discussion was also recorded. Therefore, the materials that are available are almost complete. On the one hand they consist in what was recorded. On the other hand they consist in the observers’ analysis of it. Above all, they consist in the analysis realized by the observer who had an active part in the situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Induction</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tr>
<td>E: I think, Sue, it's time for you to go into a trance</td>
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<tr>
<td>S: O. K. (...)</td>
<td>(...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: And slowly go deeper and deeper. [Long pause] As you go deeper and deeper asleep you can free your hands, separate them. And let them slightly, slowly, gradually begin to lift involuntarily. Lifting just a little.</td>
<td>W: We can comment here on that. You say lifting just a little. I'm not sure whether you see a very, very minimal lifting or what, but I noticed that you certainly take - I'm not sure whether you took no response as a response, or the tiniest response and said, 'it's lifting'. There were a number of times there when you said it when I couldn't quite detect whether anything was happening or not. E: There was one thing that happened. Put your hand on your thigh, take a deep breath. What happened to your hand? W: It lifts! E: You time the inspiration. And they haven't got an opportunity to deny it... Later on I thought I would emphasize that, by taking every other inspiration to say 'lifting'. H: Every other one? E: Yes W: There's a little more going on than meets the eye! H: I hadn't noticed the inspirations in this at all. E: Nobody notices inspiration and expiration. They're used to that.</td>
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<td>E: The elbow is lifting. the hand is lifting -lifting more and more. [The hand has lifted slightly. Long pause.] Now I want you to go deeper and deeper asleep. And to signify that you will, I want your head to nod forward slowly.</td>
<td>H: It certainly nodded slowly. W: By saying 'slowly' or 'just a little' or something like that, when the subject is only responding minimally anyway... E: You are accepting their minimal performance, and it's good. W: And you're avoiding asking for something more than you're likely to get at the moment. E: You're content with what you're receiving, and they know it. And since you are content, they must be responding. It's fallacious, I know. And you'd rather they'd keep on being slower and slower. 'Just a little bit more'. How small is a little? But it is more.</td>
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</table>
What fundamentally distinguishes the processes of the Ericksonian induction from those of classic induction? There essentially are two elements. One is related to the semantics of inductive illocutions. The other is related to the interlocutory function of the illocutions situated in third position in the process. The other properties remain more or less similar. The central inductive illocution may be syntactically represented in two ways: as comprising inserted statements, or as comprising concatenated statements. Respectively:

[you can free your hands, separate them (And let them slightly, slowly, gradually begin to lift involuntary) (lifting just a little)]

or:

[(you can free your hands, separate them) (And let them slightly, slowly, gradually begin to lift involuntary) (lifting just a little)]

As regards the force of the complex speech act accomplished by Erickson the subject is indirectly allowed (You can free your hand) to let the hand rise take place, or there is a series of successive speech acts: A permission, then a request, then a request to raise the hand. As regards the propositional content of that speech act one may observe that it contains a presuppositional statement which precisely is the proposition according to which the hand involuntarily rises. Technically a presupposition (Ducrot 1972; Levinson 1983) is a proposition that is implied by the assertion and by the negative of the statement that carries it. For instance, There exists a King of France is a presupposition of The King of France is wise because this last statement as well as its negative involve the presupposition. The application of this definition to the statement you can let them rise involuntarily shows that the proposition "they are rising involuntarily" is presupposed, since its negative you cannot let them rise involuntarily (to prevent them from rising/help them) involves the same proposition.

Unlike what we have just seen the illocutions in third position do not have statements that indicate that the behaviour of lifting up one’s hand did not take place. These illocutions only have assertions that literally describe the behaviour that is then taking place. These illocutions can still be interpreted as requests, of course, but the most probable hypothesis is to interpret them as assertions for two reasons. First, Erickson has presupposed the reality of the behaviour of lifting up the hand. Second, this presupposition relies on a real fact, e.g. the fact of slightly lifting up the hand while breathing in. This is in fact what he himself explains.

There should thus be no reason to consider that the request to experience with the rise of the hand has not been satisfied. As Erickson explains a little further:

E: You're content with what you're receiving, and they know it. And since you
are content, they must be responding.

(...)

E : A lapse of time demonstrates that it has moved forward [fallacious but subjectively convincing]

2.3. Two types of induction

In specialized literature "classic" induction is often opposed to "indirect" induction. The latter would be typical of the Ericksonian practice of hypnosis. On looking in detail at the analyses that have just been proposed what can be said of this distinction?

2.3.1. Common characteristics of "classic" induction and of the Ericksonian induction

What distinguishes the two inductions does not seem to be the "content" of the experience that is aimed at in the interaction. In both cases what is aimed at is the subject’s relation (or better: His/her presence) to a movement of his/her body that is taking place within himself/herself but not as the realization of a subjective intention. This experience is difficult to depict. As far as I know it has never been depicted, technically at least. Indeed, Roustang underlines this aspect very well when he writes: "To be absorbed in the rhythm of my respiration does not only distract me from any action in the world but it also produces the assimilation of will and consciousness into a spontaneous vital activity" (1994: 61, our translation). In a more general way "each time that, with the greatest perfection of preciseness, one happens to think what one thinks, to feel what one feels, to experience what one experiences, one enters the life of the world and participates in its power" (ibid.: 34, our translation). "One should think, feel, experience nothing else but the present. In other words one should get lost, become absorbed in the present reality. One should abolish any distance between an “I” or “me” that thinks, feels, experiences and what is thought, felt, experienced" (ibid.: 35, our translation).

An idea of the pursued aim during the induction phase can however be given by relating this phase to the analyses Searle (1985) has devoted to voluntary acts, and in particular to the voluntary act of lifting up the arm. Searle distinguishes two types of intentions. First, there are the intentions that are formed prior to action. These are also called pre-action intentions. Their form is something like I am going to do X. Second, there are the intentions that take place during the action, also called intentions in action: I am doing X. Unlike the first intentions the second ones are not formed prior to action. So it goes for instance with the act of changing gears while the car is moving. This manifestly is an intentional act but this act has not been consciously planned before its realization. The common property of these two types of intentions is that they are causally self-referential. In this sense the intentional content of the act of lifting up one’s arm is that I accomplish the act of lifting up my arm in order to fulfil this intention. "An experience that is conscious of the act includes the consciousness of the conditions of satisfaction of the experiment" (1985: 16, our translation). More precisely, "an act such as lifting up one’s arm for instance has two components: a mental component and a physical component. The mental component both represents and causes the physical component. And since the form of causality is that of an intentional causality the mental causes the physical by representing
it" (ibidem, 235, our translation).

(i.a. = intention in action)

[i.a. (this i.a. causes: my arm to rise)] CAUSE: MY ARM IS RISING

Condition of satisfaction

Mental component                     What is happening in the world

"There exists an intention-in-action whose condition of satisfaction is that this same intention-in-action is the cause of the fact that my arm is rising; and the totality of this mental process is indeed the cause of the fact that, in the physical world, my arm is rising" (Searle 1991: 236, our translation). In the induction by hand levitation what seems to be expected from the subject is not that he/she voluntarily lifts up his/her hand (in order to satisfy the hypnotist’s request to do it) but that he/she feels that his/her hand is rising in a way that is somehow independent of him/her. In other words what the hypnotist is aiming at is not an act (the act of lifting up one’s arm) but a contemplation (the perception of the event of the arm that is rising). This can be obtained by separating the mental component from the physical component of the behaviour of lifting up one’s arm. Therefore, the fact that the hypnotist sometimes comes to the point of lifting up the subject’s arm is not very important. The movement of the hand no longer is the fulfilment of an intention (it is not an act any more), it is a presentation, and what is aimed at is to replace an experience of action (where the movement fulfils the conditions of satisfaction of an intention) with a perception (where the movement appears to the perceiving subject). Again, as Roustang writes (1994: 120, our translation): "There, it is the aim as already realized that retroactively generates the movements of the mind and of the body that are necessary to get there." It is true, then, that this experiment, which is related to the effects obtained when practising yoga, can be described (as Roustang did it) by two features that apparently look contradictory: Detachment (intentional causality, that which is at stake in the act of lifting up one’s arm) and a greater participation in the world.

2.3.2. The characteristics that distinguish "classic" induction from the Ericksonian induction

Above all, what seems to oppose the two inductions is the way in which the subject is suggested to experience an "involuntary" behaviour. This can formally be seen (1) in the propositional content of the speech acts that are achieved in both cases, (2) in the sequentialization that is implemented in the two situations, (3) these two formal properties are not independent of each other. Indeed, in the Ericksonian sequence the third time ratifies the second one insofar as the latter necessarily satisfies the request (as this request is "asking for" something that has already taken place). In the case of "classic" induction the experiment is imposed on the subject. The hypnotist intervenes more and more actively as the subject is not satisfying the hypnotist’s suggestions. In the case of the Ericksonian induction, on the other hand, what is reproduced is an experience that already is the subject’s experience. It is true that the hand slightly rises while the subject is breathing in.
It is therefore relevant to presuppose the unintentional rise of the hand. The discursive property -- the fact of being a presupposition -- of the proposition that expresses the experience shows that it is a real experience. If the unintentional rise of the hand is the content of a request that request is obviously satisfied. Therefore, the hypnotist’s ratification is interactionally appropriate. If the "classic" way of doing presents some kind of fight, Erickson’s way of doing, on the other hand, proposes an interaction that is "won beforehand." Hence, this feeling of manipulation that criticism sometimes likes underlining. But if there is manipulation it is clearly not in the sense that the hypnotist would impose on the subject "things that do not have anything to do with" him/her. It is instead in the sense that what is imposed on the subject is what belongs to him/her, e.g. the involuntary movements of his/her own body. Thus, the Ericksonian hypnotist functions more as a mediator than as a manipulator. This is a feature that Roustang had also well perceived: "The awakener exists only if he/she sends the awakened back to his/her own intention, and if the procedure to which the awakened submits contributes to the realization of this intention" (1994: 59, our translation). Thus, the opposition between the two modes of accomplishment of induction by hand levitation really is an opposition between imposing an experience on a subject, and circumventing the resistances.

3. Conclusion

Our conclusions do not rely on enough data to be generalized. They can only be used as working hypotheses that need to be tested on a more extended corpus. But the fact that conversational pragmatics allows one to depict practices, to depict them in such a way that this depiction "corresponds" to, converges on, or at least does not contradict the apprehension that experts of the field -who verbalize their practices a little like it is done in Work Psychology with the techniques of verbalization (see Trognon & Retornaz 1989)- have of the phenomena that were submitted to depiction. The fact that conversational pragmatics enables one to introduce relevant distinctions (and even to formalize them), and thus to meet with some of the phenomenal properties that are emphasized by the theoreticians of hypnosis, like this mixture of detachment and of hypervigilance that Roustang regards as characteristic of the "paradoxical watching" which hypnosis consists of, all that clearly shows to which extent the application of pragmatics to therapeutic practices, and in particular to hypnosis may be productive.

A lot can be learned from the application of conversational pragmatics to psychotherapy. On a theoretical level conversational pragmatics enables one to point out general properties of psychotherapeutic practices. It seems for instance that the fact of providing a framework where an unintentionalization of the subjective experience can take place is a quite typical property of psychotherapies. In hypnosis one will rather strive to suspend intentional action. In psychoanalysis one will rather strive to suspend the intention to communicate which, by the way, is a special case of intentional action. Thus, beyond the traditional (and defensive) dispute between suggestion and transference it could indeed very well be "that hypnotherapy [may] be to other therapies what genetic medicine is to epigenetic medicine" (Roustang 1994: 13, our translation). Still on a theoretical level, conversational pragmatics also enables one to point out and theorize in a non ad hoc way
the interactional devices that were implemented during the course of a psychotherapy. The consequence of this is a rational explanation of their effects. On a practical level the availability of a knowledge that explains both the "normal" and the "professionalized" practices of the use of language is a guarantee of communicability, of transmissibility, and thus of a possibility to form practitioners without lapsing into some kind of esotericism.

On the other hand pragmatics has a lot to learn from the study of psychotherapies. As these are borderline experiments of the use of language they point out dimensions of it that usually are not accessible.

References


