

**TEXTLINGUISTIC TOOLS FOR DECIPHERING THE
TÉLÉDIALOGUE
MR. MANI BY A. B. YEHOSHUA**

Adina Abadi

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The paper deals with the textlinguistic devices that enable a reader to complete a dialogue in which the words of one speaker are omitted, whereas in a standard dialogue the words of both speakers are given. Reading such a dialogue is like listening to somebody talking on the telephone, and trying to reconstruct the utterances of the speaker on the other side of the line. Following the term “télédialogisme” coined by Schuerewegen,¹ I refer to this unique genre as a télédialogue.

A classic example of a télédialogue is Jean Cocteau’s masterpiece *La Voix Humaine*, the premiere of which was held in 1930.² In this play, a woman talks to her beloved on the telephone, and her voice alone is heard. The play presents realistic traits of a telephone communication, such as dialing, getting a wrong number, and being cut off by an operator. The incomplete utterances of the woman and their content prove beyond a doubt that the speaker whose words we do not hear is indeed present and participating in the conversation.

The novel of conversations *Mr. Mani* by the Hebrew writer Abraham B. Yehoshua belongs to this genre.³ However, unlike *La Voix Humaine*, the conversations in Yehoshua’s book are held face to face. Still, only one speaker is heard. The similarity to a telephone conversation is alluded to by the role that the telephone plays in the plot of the first conversation. Moreover, each of the five conversations of which the novel is composed takes place after a temporary separation, when one of the speakers arrives from a distance. This turns the conversations into intense ones, similar in nature to long-distance telephone calls, as Schuerewegen has noted.⁴

¹ Franc Schuerewegen, “Télédialogisme: Bakhtine contre Jakobson,” *Poétique* 81(1990): 105-114.

² Jean Cocteau, “La Voix Humaine,” *Oeuvres Complètes* 7 (1948): 55–77. Genève: Marguerat (Premiere in 1930).

³ Avraham B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1990); A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (trans. from Hebrew by Hillel Halkin; London: Phoenix, 1992).

⁴ F. Schuerewegen, “Télédialogisme,” p. 110.

The words of a single speaker, whether uttered on the telephone or face-to-face, do not create a coherent dialogue.⁵ In order to understand this novel, the reader has to complete the dialogues, to supply either the stimulus or the response in each adjacent pair (replique) of utterances. Therefore, the reading process is not linear and continuous but rather combines progressive and regressive moves.⁶

In my research of *Mr. Mani*, I have posited several questions: What are the cohesive and other linguistic tools that enable the reconstruction of the unheard utterances? Are the reconstructed sections ambiguous or unambiguous, and which devices lead to each kind? Do the “half” conversations reflect natural and full ones? In other words, are we reading “half” conversations of two speakers or disguised monologues? And most important, is the presence of the unheard speaker real? And if so, is the unheard speaker an active character who interacts with the heard speaker, or does he serve as a literary device for shaping the novel’s dialogic structure?

Henceforth, I will reconstruct sections of the missing utterances, using the tools of discourse analysis and conversational analysis. However, the analysis will be limited to the first two of the novel’s five conversations.

2. THE FIRST CONVERSATION

The first conversation is held between a mother and her daughter in an Israeli Kibbutz in late 1982. The daughter Hagar is the “heard speaker,” whereas Ya’el the mother is the “unheard speaker.” Since most of Hagar’s utterances are responses—replies to questions, apologies to accusations, etc.,—the reader has to recover the stimuli from the responses. Let us read a few utterances of Hagar that open the télédialogue and peruse my reconstructed utterances of Ya’el, written in square brackets:

- A. 1. [I was so **worried** about you. Why did you **disappear**?]
But even if I **disappeared**, Mother, I didn’t **disappear**
 for very long. You needn’t have **worried**...

⁵ Willis Edmondson, *Spoken Discourse: A model for Analysis* (London: Longman, 1981), p. 16; see also Adina Abadi, “Coherence/Incoherence in Stories by S. Y. Agnon” in *Organization in Discourse*, vol. 14 of *Anglicana Turkuensia* (ed. B. Wårvik, S-K. Tanskanen, and R. Hiltunen; Turku: University of Turku, 1995), pp. 131–137.

⁶ Maria Langleben, “M. Bachtin’s Notions of Time and Textanalysis,” *Russian Literature and History* 26 (1989): 178–179.

2. [Why didn't you **phone**?]
But I did **phone** you mother. I most certainly did,
on **Wednesday evening** from **Jerusalem**...
3. [On **Wednesday** you were still in **Jerusalem**?]
Of course. I was still in **Jerusalem Wednesday evening**.
Yesterday too...
4. [**Yesterday too**?]
Yesterday too, mother. And this morning too.
But I left you **a message**...
5. [I **didn't** get **any message**.]
How could you **not** have gotten **it**?
6. [Maybe your **message** got lost.]
Oh, God, Mother, don't tell me that another
message of mine got lost!
7. [With whom did you leave the **message**?]
How should I know... whoever picked up the phone.⁷

Hagar's short utterances, whose terminal punctuation is usually three dots (in *Mar Mani* in Hebrew) reveal that she is being cut off by her mother, and that the conversation is intense and rapid. The reconstruction of the utterances of Ya'el—the unheard speaker—was done mainly by repetition of words uttered by Hagar—the heard speaker (the repeated words are emphasized in bold letters for the reader's convenience). Usually the repeated words appear once in a following utterance, but sometimes they appear twice, also in a previous utterance, for example, the phrase “Wednesday evening” in 2) and 3); “yesterday too” in 3) and 4). A new topic of conversation “a message” is introduced in utterance 4), maintained in 6), and referred to in 5) and 7).

In addition to lexical repetition,⁸ syntactic-semantic connectives enable the reconstruction of the unheard speaker's utterances. The adversative conjunction “but,” which appears at the very beginning of the conversation,

⁷ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, pp. 8–9 (bold added).

⁸ Compare Adina Abadi, *Discourse Syntax of Contemporary Hebrew* (in Heb.; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988), pp. 17–19.

serves to repel Ya'el's admonishment of her daughter for disappearing and to mitigate it by the utterance "I didn't disappear for very long" (1). A positive answer to a question following the adversative connective "But I did phone" enables the unambiguous reconstruction of a question phrased with a negative particle "Why didn't you phone?" (2). The repetition of "but" in Hagar's utterances reveals the argumentative nature of the conversation.⁹ An expression of validity "of course" reveals a question with doubt "On Wednesday you were still in Jerusalem?" (3). The question word "how" and the negative particle "no" leads to a reconstruction of a question that includes a negative particle "I didn't get any message" (5). Below are more examples in which the argumentative character of the conversation is revealed mainly by negative particles.

B. 8. ... **But** the first thing tomorrow morning, Mother, I have to get back to Tel Aviv and to my books, or else it's another F for sure. You'll have to find me someone who is driving there, and if you **can't** think of anyone, think again...

9. [Let's find someone **in the dining hall**.]

All right...

10. [So let's go there now.]

No, wait a minute. Take it easy. I didn't mean this second...

11. [It is getting late, let's go!]

But what's the rush? I feel so cold inside. Let me warm up a little first...

12. [There is hot water for a shower.]

It will take more than just hot water...

13. [Why don't you take a shower now so we're not late for the Sabbath meal.]

Don't be annoyed at me, Mother, but for my part I can skip the Sabbath meal in **the dining hall**...

⁹ A. Abadi, *Discourse Syntax*, pp. 48–49.

14. [But you must be hungry.]
I'm **not at all** hungry. Whatever you have in the fridge will be fine...
15. [There is almost nothing in the fridge.]
That's okay. Whatever you have. I'm really **not** hungry.
16. [But I am hungry.]
If you're so starving that you must go, then go. I'm staying here. I'm sorry, Mother, but I'm just **not up to sitting in the dining hall** and smiling at everyone all evening.¹⁰

Not all the reconstructions of the utterances in B are done successively. Only after Hagar's mention of the "dining hall" in 13 can we reconstruct regressively Yael's suggestion to go there in 9. Like in section A, the adversative conjunction "but" opens utterances 8 and 11. However, the negative particle is more prominent in the examples in section B than in section A, as it occurs in more utterances (6 out of 9) and appears at the very opening of two utterances (10 and 13). Needless to say, that the reconstruction of the unheard speaker's utterances before the negative particle is unambiguous, since it enables a change from the negative mode into a positive one. The argumentative nature of conversation B, that is marked by the above formal elements, stems from the contrasting "political" views of mother and daughter about privacy in a community founded on ideology of togetherness and the scope of an individual's participation in the communal life of the Kibbutz.

However, a few conversations that are based on agreement were found in this conversation. These do not pertain to views but rather to objective facts, as we can see in the section below:

- C. 17. [You mean Augusta Victoria?]
Yes, exactly, Augusta Victoria, how did you know? I can see you know your way around there... but it's not a church like everyone thinks it is, it's a hospital...
18. [The hospital is the lower tower, the squat one.]
Right, right. The lower tower, the squat one, with those dark walls, not the tall, thin one...¹¹

¹⁰ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, pp. 10–11.

The positive particle “yes” followed by the adverb “exactly” in 17 and the words of confirmation “right, right” in 18 enable an unambiguous reconstruction of the utterances of Ya’el—the unheard speaker.

To sum up the first conversation, from which only a few examples were brought, we might conclude that a positive answer enables an unambiguous reconstruction of the question; whereas a negative reply opening with words or expressions of negation, such as “not,” “never,” “nobody,” “impossible,” “you are mistaken,” yields the reconstruction of statements or accusations with varying degrees of precision, depending on the amount of lexical repetition and the scope of negation. The large number of negative answers, serving as corrections of statements or self-justification reveal the argumentative nature of the conversation between mother and daughter.

The reconstruction of an unheard utterance is usually assisted by reference to the following utterance or to a previous one as well. However, at times reconstruction is possible only after reading several utterances, and not necessarily in succession, for example, 9 and 16. Expressions which serve meta-conversational roles such as continuing to hold the floor or resisting interruption, for example, “wait a minute... listen,” “one moment,” “wait...have a little patience,” “no, listen... I beg you,” emphasize the natural flow of the conversation. Remarks alluding to the unheard speaker’s behavior, such as “don’t be angry again,” “don’t be so serious,” “why are you so tense?” “it is a good thing that you are laughing a little” verify the presence of the unheard speaker beyond any doubt.

3. THE SECOND CONVERSATION

The second conversation in *Mr. Mani* is held between Egon Bruner, the son of the German Admiral Werner Sauchon, and Andrea, the admiral’s wife, whom Egon calls Grandmother. The conversation takes place at Heraklion, Crete, in late July 1944, where Egon is serving in a German occupation garrison. Andrea Sauchon has come to Crete in order to deliver Egon’s transfer orders to Germany to participate in the last battle. Egon is the heard speaker, whereas Andrea is the unheard speaker. Andrea is critical of Egon for having remained in Crete in a rear-line unit instead of moving on with his brigade and engaging in combat. She suspects Egon of desertion under fire, and does not accept his claim that he was cut off from his unit after losing his eyeglasses. Consequently this conversation has the traits of a

¹¹ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, p. 58.

cross-examination in a trial, where Egon is obliged to justify his deeds. Egon employs several prevalent courtroom strategies in his self-defence: a) He requests an opportunity to explain his position before being judged; b) he takes an oath; c) he denies the charges; d) he utilizes rational arguments; e) he protests against being judged harshly. Some of these strategies are manifested in the following example:

- D. 19. [...] And so I thought that perhaps here, **on this island** of all places, the **rationale** that my grandmother was looking for might be found, which is a thought that I've been gnawing away at for the last years...
20. [Is this the true reason for your staying **on this island**?]
I swear.
21. [Why did you **vanish** from your unit?]
But **what makes you say I vanished?** I never did... how did I?
22. [Then how can you explain not being with your unit?]
But I was simply cut off. I had **lost my glasses**... and I misread the battle, because I confused south with north...
23. [It is hard to believe that the **loss of your glasses** was the cause.]
How can you say such a thing, Grandmother? You, who pushed for the transfer of a **nearsighted person like me** to a unit of tigers and wolves...
24. [**Didn't you desert** your unit?]
Not at all! **If I really had deserted**, I would have been court-martialed and shot at once... It's unimaginable that **you should judge me more harshly than** the general staff of the 7th Paratrooper Division.¹²

The reconstruction of the utterances of the unheard speaker in D is more difficult than those in A because here we are confronted with open questions, except the “yes/no” question in number 24. The reconstruction of utterance 21 is the easiest, since the heard speaker quotes the unheard speaker saying: “what makes you say?” In number 23 the reconstruction is based on

¹² A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, pp. 95–96.

a lexical repetition of the utterance of the heard speaker in 22, “lost my glasses,” and also on his utterance in 23: “a nearsighted person like me.”

A few utterances in this conversation are reconstructed by the Hebrew syntactic structure “*lo... ella*,” that is translated into: “not... but (rather).” (*Ella* is translated to *sino* in Spanish and *Sondern* in German.) Unfortunately the translator did not always translate literally the syntactic structure of *lo... ella...* that appears in a single sentence in Hebrew, but rather has split the structure into two separate sentences. Therefore we have added the original Hebrew utterances of the heard speaker, in number 28 below:

- E. 25. [...] take these binoculars and focus them as is best for you on that broad valley down there... yes, there, on that little woods and **the hill** behind it... exactly...
26. [All I see is **a village**.]
To the right of **that village**, Grandmother, where **the hill** grows slightly darker...
27. [I can see that part of **the hill**.]
Perfect.
28. [**The hill** is covered with **rocks**.]
Not rocks, but rather **an archaeological site**.
*lo sela'im, ela atar atikot...*¹³
29. [Now I see **an archeological site**.]
Exactly, exactly. That's **ancient** Knosos you are **looking** at, Grandmother, Knosos in all its glory...
30. [**I don't remember** such a place.]
How **can you not remember**? The legendary labyrinth... the palace of King Minos... *Then did Zeus first father of Minos, Protector of Crete...*
31. [Whom are you quoting?]
Homer.

¹³ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, pp. 94; A. B. Yehoshua, *Mar Mani*, p. 100.

32. [**From** where are you quoting?]
From the **books** you sent me. And thanks again for going to the trouble.
33. [Did you really **read them**?]
 Of course, I **read them**. [...]
34. [Is this **why** you **decided** to stay in **this place**?]
 Which was **why**, Grandmother, in the spirit of the sixth commandment, I **decided** right then and there that **this** was the **place** I was going **to fight** and die **for...**
35. [So you were going to **fight for those ruins**?]
 No, **not to fight for those ruins**, Grandmother, **but** for what might be resurrected from them, for the new man we talked and thought about so much on those long winter evenings back in '39 when I was studying for my German history exams.¹⁴

Fortunately, the translation of *lo...ella...* to “not...but” in 35 is literal. This syntactic structure is utilized by the author in order to signal a statement by the unheard speaker which is rejected by the heard speaker and replaced by another. It, therefore, enables an unambiguous restoration of the unheard speaker’s rejected utterance. This structure, that appears in additional places in the novel, lends a continuous thematic flow to the conversation, that is, theme (the given), rheme (the new), and so on repeatedly.

The reconstruction of the unheard speaker in the utterances in group E is based not only on lexical repetition but also on semantic fields, such as the field that includes the noun “books” and the verb “read.” Acquaintance with extra-linguistic means, such as Homer’s epics, also assists in deciphering the above télédialogue.

Obviously, utterances 25–29 are spoken during a tour, which is part of a literary plot, whose essence is Egon and Andrea’s ascent to a summit of a steep hill. This plot runs parallel to the conversation and substantiates it. Andrea’s recoil from the difficult climb soon after her arrival in the island parallels her reluctance to listen patiently to Egon’s story, as we can see in the following example:

¹⁴ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, pp. 93–95.

F. 36. Don't rush me, Grandmother. Please, I beg you, give me time, let me tell the story in my own way and at my own speed, and above all, trust me to guide you through it.... Tomorrow we'll say good-bye, who knows for how long, who knows if not forever—and believe me, Grandmother, you're getting the shortest and quickest possible version I can give you, I even have it outlined here on my palm, station by station...so please, be patient with me, because now that we are starting up the trail again you'll see that the direction I took that night...was from my point of view a deep penetration.¹⁵

In a few places, the parallel courses converge; for example, the reader has difficulty ascertaining whether Egon's frequent repetition of the words "soon...soon..." refers to a nearby rest stop on the way or to a turning point in the conversation. The two courses merge when Egon expresses harsh criticism of Nazi Germany while climbing a very steep section of the hill. At this point, Andrea wishes to slow down and even to descend the hill, but she is confronted by Egon, who comments ironically that her reluctance to continue the climb is defeatism. The reaching of the summit corresponds to the peaking of tension between them. There Andrea reveals that she is carrying Egon's transfer orders to the front to participate in the final battle, which she intends to deliver to his commander. Motivated by the instinct to survive, Egon struggles to thwart the frightening scheme of his domineering grandmother. So he snatches the document from her hand, tears it up, renounces his family name and his share in the family estate and protests her verdict. These actions prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the presence of the unheard speaker in this conversation is real. Moreover, in a few sections, the heard speaker testifies that he is listening to the utterances of the unheard speaker. For example:

G. I hear you [Grandmother].
 Fine. I hear you
 Fine, go ahead.
 I'm listening.
 Yes...
 Yes...
 Yes...

¹⁵ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, p. 92.

Yes...
 Can I say something now?
 Hold on there...
 All right.
 I hear you.¹⁶

4. SUMMARY

In answer to the questions raised in the introductory remarks, positive answers to yes/no questions and repetition of the lexical items in them enable an unambiguous restoration of the unheard speaker's utterances (see 2, 3, 4, 6, 17, 18). On the other hand, open questions may be phrased differently than I have reconstructed them (for example, 34). Repetition of the unheard speaker's utterance (for example, "what makes you say" in 21; "how can you say such a thing" in 23) naturally enables an unambiguous restoration of his/her words. The syntactic structure *lo...ella...* (not...but rather...) facilitates the recovery of the rejected statement of the unheard speaker (see 28, 35).

In the entire novel, there is a development from restoration by successive utterances to restoration by non-successive ones; from retrieving utterances by thematic progression to filling in gaps by acquaintance with the universe of discourse. There is also a movement from unambiguous retrieval of the unheard utterances to ambiguous retrieval; from restoration by cohesive devices to building a coherent dialogue through implications.

The presence of the unheard speaker in the two conversations, that excerpts of which were brought here, is real and each fulfills the role of an active character who interacts with the heard speaker. In other words, we are reading "half" conversations of two speakers. In the third and fourth conversations, with which we have not dealt with here, the unheard speaker is less active than in the first two conversations.

In the third conversation, the unheard speaker is Colonel Michael Woodhouse depicted as a presiding judge at military trials in Palestine in 1918. He mainly listens to the testimony of Lieutenant Ivor Horowitz, a military advocate, about Yosef Mani who was detained on suspicion of espionage. Woodhouse is focused on Horowitz's Jewish name, and naturally questions him from time to time about Mani. However, the unheard speaker's main "act" is at the end of the conversation, when he agrees to re-

¹⁶ A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani*, p. 124.

lease Yosef Mani from a trial (which might have ended with a death sentence), and instead banishes him to Crete or any other Greek island.

In the fourth conversation, Sholom Shapiro, the unheard speaker, is even less active than the unheard speaker in the previous conversation. Yet he has impact on the reader because of his sorrowful reaction to the tragic fate of Dr. Moshe Mani, told by Efrayim his son. His concern about his son's incestuous desire to Linka his sister is also conveyed to the reader.

In the last conversation in the novel, the unheard speaker, Rabbi Shabbetai Haddaya, is ill and unable to speak. Moreover, it is not clear whether he can hear the utterances of Avraham Mani, the heard speaker. Therefore, this conversation may not be analyzed as a dialogue, but rather as a disguised or internal monologue.