

DECEPTION AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Çek Cumhuriyetinde Bir İletişim Şekli Olarak Aldatma

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ABSTRACT

Deception is a wide-spread form of communication and according to foreign researches, more than 90 % of people admit to lie at least sometimes, with the number of lies varying between 1 a day to 1 or 2 in every 10 minute-long conversation. As those results come mostly from the USA studies, we addressed deception in the Czech Republic and compared our results with those from American studies. We used an on-line questionnaire to collect data from 112 respondents. An SPSS analysis showed that 100 % of respondents lied at least sometimes with men admitting more lies than women. Similar to foreign researches respondents most frequently lie about their relationships, incomes and work or education successes. Men would more probably lie to protect a close person, women lie more often to gain advantages from others, which contradicts foreign results. Lying to children is easier for 75 % of respondents and lying to strangers is easier to 97 % of them.

Keywords: deception, lie, communication, lying, the Czech Republic, intercultural differences

ÖZET

Aldatma yaygın bir iletişim şeklidir ve yabancı araştırmacılara göre insanların yüzde 90'ından daha fazlası bazen yalan söylediğini kabul eder. Yalan sayısı günde 1 kez veya 10 dakikalık bir sohbette 1 ila 2 kez olduğu belirtilir. Sonuçlar çoğunlukla ABD'de yapılan çalışmalardan alındığı için, biz bu çalışmada Çek Cumhuriyeti'nde "aldatma" konusunu değerlendirdik ve bulgularımızı Amerika'daki çalışmalar ile kıyasladık. 112 kişiden bilgi almak üzere online bir anket kullandık. Bir SPSS analizi, yanıt verenlerin yüzde 100 yalan söylediğini ve erkeklerin kadınlara oranla yalan söylemeye daha yatkın olduğunu gösterdi.

Yabancı araştırmacıların bulgularına göre benzer olarak, katılımcıların aksine, bu çalışmada erkeklerin yakın bir arkadaşını korumak için kadınlarinsa başkalarından faydalanmak için yalan söylediği gözlemlendi. Katılımcıların yüzde 75'ine göre çocuklara, yüzde 97'sine göre ise yabancılara yalan söylemenin daha kolay olduğu saptandı.

Anahtar Sözcükler: aldatma, yalan, iletişim, yalan söyleme, Çek Cumhuriyeti, Kültürlerarası farklılıklar.

1. Introduction

„I do not recommend lying, except for special circumstances. Lying protects us all, nothing important would be possible without it. Lying is kind. The world could not exist without lying; and the world, where lying would not be rejected, would be also unthinkable. Unfortunately, lying let us feel omnipotent. Lying leads to a dreadful solitude.“

Hanif Kureishi, *Intimacy*

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It was the American sociologist Goffman who – describing the theory of social interactions - said that we all are just players in a theater game. We put various masks on our faces in order to play a diversity of characters and in order to cast a desired impression on others. By playing with illusions we might say that we are somehow deceiving others, because we are not showing our real self, but one from a variety of selves, which corresponds the best with the current situation. Deceit has become a part of our daily existence and it has become a regular way of communication between each other, even though people only unwillingly admit they lie. Deception, its role in society and in the interpersonal communication and relationships and the question of its morality are subjects of interest among psychologists, philosophers, economists or even fiction writers.

The literary view on deception described Kafka in his novel *Trial*. He said lying was a universal principle and lies and concealment were the foundation stones of most contemporary societies. Similarly Beckett and Eco thought of lies as a type of a contemporary agenda, a general semiotic structure. Defoe described fictional literature in general as a type of deception and writers as the masters of lying.

Moral aspects of deception have been a subject of an intensive debate among Western philosophers for many centuries. From the philosophical point of view deception is often a matter of an immoral character and the situational and dynamical aspects are completely omitted (Nyberg, 1993). This extremistic opinion was taught for example by Kant (1949), who said that we had to tell the potential murderer where to find his victim, because the crime itself would not outweigh the immorality of lying. On the contrary, Bentham or Mill believed in the utilitarian perspective, which emphasized the importance of context information on the evaluation of the moral consequences of lying (Fu, Xu, Cameron, Heyman, & Lee, 2007). Sometimes deception can be desirable and supported according to those philosophers.

The studies on deception have a long tradition also among economists. The economical theory of lying is based on the concept of “homo economicus”, i.e. a selfish person uninterested in other people’s good (Gneezy, 2005). Such a person lies, whenever it is beneficial for them, regardless on the impact of their lies on others.

Finally the psychological point of view analyzes deception from many aspects like the frequency of lying, age and gender differences among liars, relationship between the liar and the deceived person, or types of lies and their functions. Lying as a psychological concept takes into account interpersonal relationships and social interactions in general and it does not anticipate any moral conclusions. Lying is described as a social activity which serves as a connection among people and which cannot be simply described as wrong or right. It stresses the importance of the situation in which deception occurs, of other involved persons and of liar’s intentions.

Whereas the topic of the characteristics of deceptive behavior has already attracted a lot of interest in the foreign countries, experts in the Czech Republic generally pay only marginal attention to deception, mostly in relation to moral development and communicative and manipulative strategies. The research question is whether deceptive behavior in the Czech Republic manifests in the same way as was described in foreign countries, especially in the USA.

2. The frequency of lying

Lying makes a big part of our everyday communication. Not only do we lie to others in order to gain something, but lies are also used for our entertainment in theater plays or in books. Some lies are accepted by both the sender and the receiver, some are unwanted. Both of them are more frequent than we admit.

The documented frequency of lying ranges between one or two lies a day and two lies told every ten minutes (Hancock, Thom-Santelli, & Ritchie, 2004). Respondents in Hancock’s research (2004) admitted to lie in 14% of e-mails, 27% of face-to-face interactions and in 37% of phone calls. Boon and McLeod (2001) add that under certain circumstances people consider lying justifiable and even though we are longing for honesty in our relationships, we lie about our income, successes, education, age or sexual relationships almost on a daily basis.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

		Frequency	Percent
Age	15-25	57	50,9
	26-35	29	25,9
	36-45	10	8,9
	46-55	12	10,7
	56 and more	4	3,6
	Total	112	100,0

Similar researches are missing either in our country or in other middle European countries. The question is whether there are possible differences among particular countries in the middle Europe.

3. Lying in relationships

Not only is the frequency of lying very high, it is also independent on the person we speak to or the media we use for our communication purposes.

According to Lewis and Saarni (1993) we lie more often to our intimate partners and family relatives. On the contrary DePaulo and Kashy (1998) consider lies to strangers the most frequent. The frequency of lying might depend on the type of attachment we maintain in social relationships. Insecure attachment is related to lies to strangers, whilst avoidant attachment leads to lying to intimate partners (Ennis, Vrij, & Chance, 2008).

Ability to lie to intimate partners develops with the development of relationship. We have enough time to find out the best way of talking and behaving in order to deceive the other. People often believe their partners would never lie to them. It might be possible, but they also may have become victims of the ostrich effect described by Vrij (2008). It is an attempt to maintain relationships and avoid endangering factors by ignoring even the most obvious lies, because it is more pleasant to hear a lie.

4. Gender aspects of lying

It has been questioned whether there are differences between men and women when it comes to lying. Contrary popular believes, women do not lie more often, yet there are some differences.

Women say other-oriented lies in order to prevent hurting others' feelings and to avoid excessive criticism, men say more self-oriented lies to present themselves as more capable or educated (DePaulo et al., 1996). However, this might depend on the cultural background and be specific for the US population as exchange students from Middle European countries are often surprised by this information.

Whitty (2002) drew attention to the relation between gender, age and the frequency of lying in the internet communication – men older than thirty years lied as often as adolescent men, women lied less often after they had reached thirty years of age. This might be related to reasons why people join various dating websites. Older women tend to use them to find serious relationships and therefore they may be more truthful in order to cast a genuine impression.

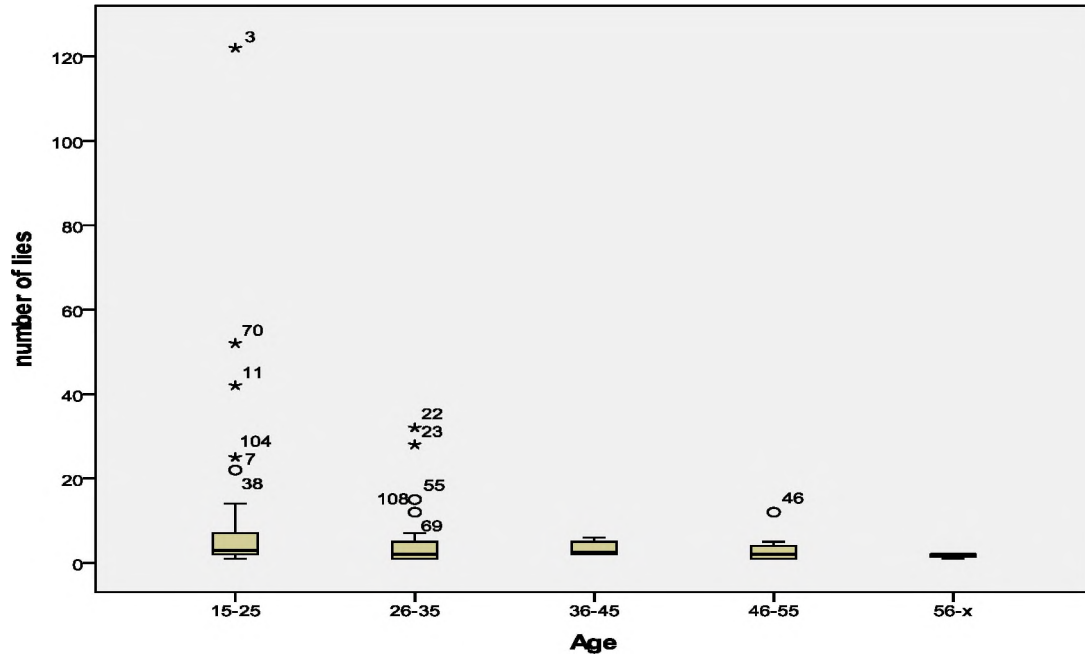
Gender differences in deception can be partially explained by different parental attitudes to children (Vrij, 2008). Girls are praised for showing their emotions and they learn to reveal less signs of lying in their faces and thus become better in faking unfeeling emotion and ideas. Boys are led to hide and neutralize negative emotions and they become more capable of pretending neutral feelings about something they do not like and of looking indifferent to touching information.

5. Developmental aspect of lying

It may be surprising that even very small children are able to deceive others and they use lies in their everyday communication with almost the same frequency and same success as adults.

Developmental aspect of deception has gained a lot of significance in relation to moral development, theory of mind and attachment theory.

Figure 1: Estimated number of lies for 5 age groups of respondents



The ability to lie appears no later than at the age of two (Reddy, 2007). Children at this age are able to deceive others by concealing information, especially more difficult falsifications appear later. Lies of pre-school children are mostly given away by their verbal behavior. Preserving the consistency between primary lie and its repetitions is more difficult for children younger than seven years of age (Talwar, Gordon, & Lee, 2007). At this age parents become often afraid that lying of their children might be accompanied with delinquent forms of behavior. Two important informations are that lying is a common form of communicating and that it is a sign of maturing of a certain brain areas. In this aspect lying – to some extent - is not a sign of delinquency.

Children learn to lie by imitating their parents' behavior. To save other people's feelings and retain good social relationships, children are led to say prosocial lies in complimentary situations. Their adequate use appears between the fourth and fifth year of age (Talwar, Murphy, & Lee, 2007)..

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8. Intercultural aspects of lying

Lying is a widespread phenomenon and this applies worldwide, although there are differences in lying among various cultures.

Cultural differences in lying are related to cultural specificity of moral judgements. Research has not provided clearly interpreted results yet and the existing researches were aimed almost exclusively at Eastern society. Fu et al. (2007) compared the concepts of lying among Chinese and Canadian children. Chinese children preferred saying a lie to help the group even if it hurts the individual, whilst Canadian children preferred helping an individual, resulting in a negative influence on the group. In adult population, Chinese students do not consider it a lie, when they conceal their own good deeds, whilst Canadian students consider it lying Fu et al., 2001).

Different concepts of lying in Canada and China reflect two dimensions of societies (Aune, & Waters, 1994). In collectivistic societies people are more willing to lie if their lie is related to group or family matters. Inhabitants of individualistic societies lie more often to protect their own privacy or feelings of close relatives.

The importance of lying also depends on the culture, for example for people in Ecuador lying is significantly more negative than for the USA inhabitants (Mealy, Stephan, & Urrutia (2007).

9. Typological and functional aspects of lying

Deception exists in various forms, according to the function which the lie should serve. Some lies are more serious than others and their consequences also greatly differ.

One of the possible typologies is dividing lies by their relevance (Vrij, 2008). Social lies are told on a daily basis in order to present ourselves or our close ones in a better light or to pleasure others. Serious lies occur in the interrogation of crime suspects/victims/witnesses.

Another typology divides lies by the amount of modifications made in a truthful information (Granhag, & Vrij, 2005). Falsifications are complete lies that are an absolute opposite of truth, distortions are small deflections from truth and concealments appear, when we say we do not remember or know something.

Typical motives for lying are avoiding punishment or protecting someone against punishment, gaining a reward or admiration, getting out of an unpleasant or embarrassing situation and keeping a secret (Gudjonsson, 1994). According to the 'duping delight' concept some people lie even when it is not beneficial – they experience a pleasure in deceiving others and in not being caught (Vrij, 2008).

DePaulo et al. (1996) studied diary recordings of university students and found out that motives for lying could be categorized into three dimensions: lying for the good of oneself or others, lying for gaining benefits or avoiding costs and lying from material or psychological reasons.

10. Method

Materials

We designed an online survey with one or multiple response and open-ended questions. Items were chosen after analysis of foreign literature and research and covered various aspects of deception as described above.

Participants

In the research 112 Czech respondents (79 women, 33 men) chosen with the snowball technique participated. They were divided into 5 age groups: 15 – 25 years, 26 – 35 years, 36 – 45 years, 46 – 55 years, 56 and more years.

11. Conclusion

Among the respondents 100 % of them admit to lie, 90 % of them tell 1 – 12 lies a day. The distribution of the number of lies told in one day ($M = 2$; $SE = 12,25$) ranged between 1 – 112. For 100 % of participants, honesty – contrary to the sense of humor, tolerance or similar hobbies - is highly important for maintaining relationships. For 74 % of them lying is never justifiable.

The SPSS analysis confirmed a significant relationship between gender and the number of lies, $t(110) = 1,66$, $p = .106$, but not between age and the number of lies, Chi-square = .690; $df = 4$; $p = .601$. A certain, yet insignificant trend appeared showing that older respondents were less willing to admit they lied. It seems that older women are less willing to admit they lie than men in general.

Men would lie more often than women to protect a close person, $F(1,100) = 6,405$, $p < .05$, but otherwise women tend to say more self-oriented lies to promote themselves. Women would lie significantly more often for „Acquiring a reward“, $F(110,1) = 9,243$, $p < .01$ and „Gaining admiration from others“, $F(110,1) = 4,293$, $p < .05$. Participants did not distinguish between prosocial and other lies, when they evaluated their relevance.

For 97 % of respondents it is easier to deceive strangers than friends and/or intimate partners. The effect of acquaintance is evident here. Contrary to foreign researches, for 75 % of respondents lying to children is easier than lying to adults.

It seems there are some differences between lying behavior in the Czech Republic and deception as it has been described in foreign research, especially in case of gender differences. Because of a small population sample those results need further investigation, but it is obvious they might be beneficial for fields as intercultural psychology, family and partner counselling or forensic science.

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