Bald-faced lies as acts of verbal aggression

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Several philosophy of language scholars have recently argued that the intention to deceive is not part of a well-defined concept of lying. So-called bald-faced lies, i.e., asserting what is false while speaker and hearer both understand that the speaker does not believe what s/he asserts are provided as evidence. In contrast to these proposals, it is pointed out in this article that lying is necessarily connected to an intention to deceive. Consequently, it is argued that so-called bald-faced lies are not proper lies but acts of verbal aggression. Since bald-faced lies attack the face of the addressee and the viability of the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1989a), they are analyzed as insults. Thus, the traditional idea that lying is connected to the intention to deceive is upheld.

Keywords: aggression, asserting, bald-faced lie, implicature, insulting, lying

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the so-called bald-faced lies. What is a bald-faced lie? Using an episode from the Emmy-awarded American TV series Mad Men as an example, bald-faced lies may be illustrated with the following scenario. Suppose Betty Draper asks her husband Don Draper, who is coming home in the morning, where he was the previous night. He responds that he has spent the night in his office, because he had a meeting late in the evening. However, this is not true since he spent the night with his recent love interest Dr. Faye Miller. As a matter of fact, Betty Draper believes that Don’s answer is not true (because he gave the same answer on another occasion when he was also caught in the act of lying), and that Don knows that she knows this. Moreover, Don Draper believes that Betty believes that his answer is not true, so we are clearly dealing with a case of a so-called bald-faced lie.

But is a bald-faced lie a lie at all? Recently, it has been argued that bald-faced lies are genuine lies which, however, lack the intent to deceive on the part of the speaker. Bald-faced lies were taken as proof of the assumption that lying does not necessarily...
include an attempt to deceive. In this paper, I will argue that the so-called bald-faced lie is not a lie at all because the hearer knows that the utterance of the speaker is intentionally untrue, and the speaker knows that the hearer knows this.

So what is it? My answer is that bald-faced lies constitute acts of verbal aggression. Bald-faced lies offensively show that the speaker is telling an untruth, thus acting untruthfully and dishonestly, and thereby blatantly opting out of the Cooperative Principle. In my view, this amounts to being aggressive to a high degree because it shows open disrespect for the hearer. The specific act involved is an insult, albeit of a special kind.

This article is organized as follows. In Section 2, I will sketch the traditional analysis of lying that includes an intentional deception of the hearer. In Section 3, I will delve into recent attempts at arguing that a proper definition of lying does not require an intentional deception on the part of the hearer. Proponents of this view are Carson (2010), Sorensen (2007, 2010), and Fallis (2009, 2011). The typical scenarios intended to show that lying without any intention to deceive is possible include not only so-called bald-faced lies, but also ‘knowledge-lies’. Furthermore, I will deal with ‘selfless assertions’. In Section 4, it will be demonstrated that bald-faced lies cannot be lies according to standard definitions of lying. Hence, in Section 5, it will be argued that so-called bald-faced lies are acts of verbal aggression, i.e., a special kind of insult. In addition, the repercussions of this new assumption on a universal taxonomy of insults will be discussed.

2. Lying and the intention to deceive

Most researchers assume that lying involves the intention of the speaker to deceive the addressee. This is the classic approach going at least back to Augustine (cf. Mahon 2008). That lying is deceiving, i.e., leading the addressee into a false belief, might be directly written into one’s favorite definition of lying, but it does not need to.

If you write it directly into the definition of lying, you will end up with something along the following lines:

(1) **Definition of lying including the intent to deceive** (adapted from Stokke 2013a, 348)

S lies to H if and only if there is a proposition p such that

(a) S says that p to H, and

(b) S believes that p is false, and

(c) by saying that p to H, S intends to deceive H into believing that p.
Recently, it has been argued by Carson (2010) that condition (c) is superfluous because lying does not necessarily involve an intention to deceive on the part of the speaker. (Below, we will go into the scenarios that are intended to prove the point.)

I do not think that lying is disconnected from the intention to deceive, albeit I assume that it does not need to be written directly into a proper definition of lying. This is because I conceive lying as an insincere act of assertion. The result of this insincerity is the intent to deceive.

Should the intention to deceive be part of the felicity conditions of the speech act of lying? This does not seem a promising move since the liar is insincere by definition; hence we would need an “insincerity” condition which is an implausible construct, as Searle (1969) has already pointed out with respect to insincere promising. Rather, the deceptive intention of the liar should be captured as an act of insincere assertion in an analysis of lying. Lies do not constitute a separate type of speech act like promises, commands, or questions; they are always assertions. Insincerity is an attitude of the speaker which accompanies many acts without giving rise to a separate illocutionary point.

In Meibauer (2005), I proposed a definition of assertion along the following lines. Let us assume that an assertion is always made by a speaker S at time t, and that it has a certain propositional content p:

(2) **Assertion**

S asserted at t that p if and only if

(a) S uttered at t the declarative sentence σ meaning p,
(b) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S presented p as true,
(c) by uttering the declarative sentence σ, S M-intended that an addressee H to whom S uttered p actively believes that p.

Condition (2a) is important in that it relates the speech act of assertion to syntax and semantics. In most analyses and examples given, it is simply presupposed that assertions are connected to declarative sentences. Of course, other sentence types may be used for lying too, e.g., interrogative sentences containing untruthful presuppositions or implicatures. But these facts should be carefully modelled in a theoretical framework that contains these notions, and allows for the explanation of non-literality and indirectness. A connection to semantics is also needed because declarative sentences typically contain propositions that may be contextually evaluated as true or false.

The qualification of “presenting something as true” in (2b) has the advantage of leaving it open what epistemic state the speaker is in, be it belief or knowledge. Moreover, it is compatible with insincere asserting since in this case the speaker does not believe that p, although they represent p as if they believed that it was true.
Condition (2c) refers to the Gricean notion of a M(eaning)-intention which is an intention that is necessary for the speaker’s attempt to produce a certain belief in the addressee by their very utterance (Grice 1989b). What is important here is that the analysis of lying is embedded in a more general theory of communication.

With definition (2) in mind, we may go on to define lying as in (3):

(3) Lying
S lied at t, if and only if
(a) S asserted at t that p,
(b) S actively believed at t that not p.

It follows from (2) and (3) that the liar is deceiving their addressee. They are not truthful with regard to their beliefs, and they want the addressee to be duped about p.¹

3. Bald-faced lies: Lying without the intention to deceive?

Several authors assume that the so-called bald-faced lies are counterexamples to the idea that lying involves an intention to deceive. We will review the approaches by Carson (2010), Sorensen (2007), and Fallis (2009). Recently, Lackey (2013) has argued against the “unhappy divorce” of lying and deceit/deception, yet she takes it for granted that bald-faced lies are lies. While I side with her in that I think that lies are deceiving (cf. Meibauer 2011, 2014), I still argue that bald-faced lies are not lies. Note that Kenyon (2003) holds a similar view with respect to what he calls “cynical assertion”. This position is dismissed by Lackey (2013, 238, Fn. 7) largely for intuitive reasons.²

Before going into more detail, I would like to point out that the typical methodology used here is arguing by thought experiments, i.e., presenting stories that are intended to illustrate or prove a certain point. This is a classical and respectable approach, yet it has its limits, as Meibauer (2012) and Kertész and Kiefer

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¹ One of the anonymous reviewers of this article wondered whether the addressee’s recognition of the fact that the speaker “believes that not p” is essential for an act of lying. This is definitely not the case. Lies can be detected by recognition of the liar’s untruthfulness, but they nevertheless constitute lies because of the speaker’s intention to deceive.

² More precisely: (i) “bald-faced lies are called lies in our ordinary talk”, (ii) “corresponding actions support this talk”, i.e., “we would charge one with perjury for offering a bald-faced lie on the stand, we would regard someone as a liar who repeatedly made such assertions and so on”. I would not count the case of the witness as a prototypical bald-faced lie. Carson (2010) presents this case as a case of a liar without the intention to deceive. For a critique of Lackey (2013) see Fallis (2013).
(2013) have pointed out. It goes without saying that further questionnaire surveys, experiments, and naturalistic studies of authentic bald-faced lies are necessary to complete our picture of the phenomenon under discussion.

3.1 Carson (2010): The witness

Let us shortly compare our definition of lying in (3) to Carston’s (2010) recent proposal. Through a series of redefinitions on the basis of prototypical lying scenarios, Carson finally ends up with the following definition of lying:

\[
\text{(4) Lying (Carson 2010, 37) }
\]

A person S tells a lie to another person S1 if:
(i) S makes a false statement X to S1,
(ii) S believes that X is false or probably false (or, alternatively, S does not believe that X is true), and
(iii) S intends to warrant the truth of X to S1.

Definition (4) is intended to implement the following two basic tenets of Carson’s approach: (i) lying does not require that the liar intends to deceive others, and (ii) lying requires making a statement that one warrants to be true (Carson 2010, 15). According to Carson, one warrants the truth of a statement if “one promises or guarantees, either explicitly or implicitly, that what one says is true” (Carson 2010, 26).

Requirement (ii) is connected with the basic assumption that lying is essentially a breach of trust. Most speech act theoreticians would wholeheartedly agree with this conviction. But warranting the truth of p is, of course, built into standard definitions of assertion (or statement, the difference often being neglected), be it in the style of Searle (1969) (Constitutive Rule: “Counts as an undertaking to the effect that p represents an actual state of affairs”) or as in (1b) above. Therefore, “warranting the truth” follows from a reasonable taxonomy of speech acts. As for (i), I agree that deception should not directly be written into definitions of lying; the deception follows from the liar’s lack of truthfulness. But is it correct that lying does not require that the liar intends to deceive others?

To support his claim, Carson (2010, 20–23) comes up with three examples in which a person can lie without intending to deceive anyone. All of these are not really convincing to me. Let us focus on the first example which goes like this:

3. Note that the reference to “promising” in the explanation of “warranting the truth” is mistaken. It is impossible to utter the statement It is raining in London and then add This is a promise. Promising is a speech act in which sincerity is important (cf. Searle 1969), and this is what Carson has in mind.

4. A variant of one of his other examples is discussed by Lackey (2013), see (13) below.
(5) **The witness** (Carson 2010, 20)
Suppose that I witness a crime and clearly see that a particular individual committed the crime. Later, the same person is accused of the crime and, as a witness in court, I am asked whether or not I saw the defendant commit the crime. I make the false statement that I did not see the defendant commit the crime, for fear of being harmed or killed by him. However, I do not intend that my false statements deceive anyone. (I hope that no one believes my testimony and that he is convicted in spite of it.)

Carson (2010, 20) goes on to comment: “Deceiving the jury is not a means to preserving my life. Giving false testimony is necessary to save my life, but deceiving others is not; the deception is merely an unintended ‘side effect’. I do not intend to deceive the jury in this case, but it seems clear that my false testimony would constitute a lie.”

However, I assume that the witness has deceived the jury because the witness asserts that he has a certain belief which he actually has not. Hinting at the possible fact that the witness does not actually hold that belief in fact and that he only pretends to have this belief, is, according to my linguistic approach, not a “side effect”, and may be analyzed as a conversational implicature. This conversational implicature can only be derived if there is some contextual clue or background that gives rise to the suspicion that the witness cannot tell the truth.

According to Lackey’s taxonomy (Lackey 2013, 237–239) that contains a distinction between (a) bald-faced lies, (b) knowledge lies, and (c) coercion-lies, this type of example is a so-called coercion-lie. So let us turn to Sorensen (2007, 2010) who introduced the bald-faced lie into the discussion. (Note that Lackey 2013 features the case of the cheating student found by Carson 2010 as a prototypical case of a bald-faced lie.)

3.2 Sorensen (2007, 2010): Bald-faced lie and knowledge-lie

As his introductory example, Sorensen (2007, 251) presents a short dialogue between the official guide Takhlef and the Norwegian reporter Asne Seierstad which takes place in Iraq under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein:

(6) **Seierstad’s interview, I**

Takhlef: Everything [President Saddam Hussein] did in the past was good and everything he will do in the future is good.
Seierstad: How can you be so sure about that?
Takhlef: I know it as a result of my belief in the party and his leadership.

Takhlef’s utterances, Sorensen (2007, 252) points out, are “not merely pretending to assert that Saddam’s leadership is perfect” since “he wants to be on the record”
and “defends the proposition by words and deeds”. Yet his utterances are bald-faced lies because it is mutually known (or so assumes Seierstad) in the context that Takhlef does not believe the propositions of his utterances in (6).

In order to account for cases like (6), Sorensen (2007) proposes a substitute for the concept of the intent to deceive, namely a distinction between narrow and wide plausibility. Assuming that “lying is just asserting what one does not believe” (Sorensen 2007, 266), he distinguishes between assertions with narrow plausibility, in which “someone who only had access to the assertion might believe it” and wide plausibility, understood as “credibility relative to one’s total evidence” (Sorensen 2007, 267). Bald-faced lies are then a case of narrow plausibility, as in the assertions of a lawyer defending a guilty client in which neither the lawyer nor the jury are supposed to believe in the truth of these assertions.

However, the point with the lawyer’s assertions is that they describe possible or fictitious worlds (in which evidence shows the innocence of their client) in order to force the jury to provide evidence for something the client is supposed to have done. Therefore Sorensen (2007, 255) is mistaken when he argues that “when the lawyer does not believe the conclusions he is lying”. The point is that one need not believe the content of fictitious scenarios; all that is expected in rational discourse is a certain plausibility of these scenarios.

Similarly, Takhlef’s utterances are not bald-faced lies, but assertions, since his propositions may be presented with narrow plausibility and are not, as Sorensen (2007) rightly observes, self-defeating: It is contradictory to say Everyone Saddam did is good but I don’t believe it or the like. Hence, Seierstad may be wondering to which extent her guide is truthful.

I conclude, then, that Takhlef’s utterances are either a case of assertion with narrow plausibility, a case of self-deception, or a case of a cynical assertion (Sorensen 2007, 260–261, drawing on Kenyon 2003). Here, the speaker is said to be “manifestly insincere”. I take it that his manifest insincerity triggers a conversational implicature. For instance, Takhlef wants Seierstad to understand that he is under pressure to assert that Saddam Hussein is a good leader, but in reality he does not believe this and may even be someone who opposes Saddam’s dictatorship.

Carson (2010) defends his view that asserting amounts to warranting the truth of p against Sorensen. Both agree that the intent to deceive is not a necessary precondition for lying. However, warranting the truth is also in the scope of Sorensen’s approach to bald-faced lies since he defines lying simply as asserting what is false. Carson (2010) takes up Sorensen’s example of an exchange in an Iraqi hospital reported by Seierstad. The exchange occurs in a civilian hospital in which she sees a ward with wounded soldiers, which shows that the military hospitals are already overcrowded:
(7) **Seierstad’s interview, II**

Seierstad: How many soldiers have you admitted today?
Doctor: There are no soldiers here.
Seierstad: But they are wearing uniforms?
Doctor: I see no uniforms. You must go now, do you hear?

I concur with Carson (2010, 35) who argues that “the doctor still warrants the truth of what he says since he invites Seierstad to trust and rely on the truth of what he says and guarantees the truth of what he says.” If what he says is evidentially false, I would like to add that he infringes the maxim of Quality, thus inviting the pragmatic inference that he is not entitled to admit the over-crowdedness of the hospital.

In addition to bald-faced lies, Sorensen (2010) introduces the so-called knowledge-lies as cases in which no intention to deceive is at play. He presents the following scenario as an example of a knowledge-lie:

(8) **Knowledge-lie** (Sorensen 2010, 608)

In *Spartacus* (Universal Pictures, 1960), the victorious Roman general, Marcus Licinius Crassus, asks the recaptured slaves to identify Spartacus in exchange for leniency. Spartacus […] rises to spare his comrades crucifixion. However, the slave on his right, Antoninus, springs to his feet and declares, ‘I am Spartacus!’ Then the slave on Spartacus’ left also stands and declares ‘I am Spartacus!’; then another slave, and another until the whole army of slaves is on their feet shouting, ‘I am Spartacus!’

Sorensen (2010, 608) comments that “with the exception of Antoninus, none intend to deceive Crassus about who they are”. Instead, “the slaves are preventing Crassus from *learning* who Spartacus is”.

However, I do not take it for granted that the series of outbursts *I am Spartacus* constitutes a series of lies. From the point of view of the Roman general Crassus, the slaves (except Antoninus) cannot give serious answers to his question which presupposes that there is exactly one person called Spartacus in the audience. Hence, their answers violate the maxim of Quality because it cannot be true that every slave is Spartacus. Moreover, it is not clear how the series of answers can be relevant to his question aiming at the identification of Spartacus; thus, the maxim of Relation is infringed. Furthermore, the answers do not accord to the maxim of Manner since such iterative assertions of the slaves are quite obscure. Hence, it is natural for Crassus to assume that he shall be deceived insofar as the true answer is concealed. After all, it is clear that in his audience, including Spartacus, Antoninus and the rest, only one person can be Spartacus. The information that the audience wants to conceal the true answer to Crassus’s question is a conversational implicature. As a matter of fact, the audience conveys that it definitely does not want to
give the true answer to Crassus’ question aiming at the identification of Spartacus. As we have seen, the exploitation of maxims clearly points in this direction.

Staffel (2011, 301) replies to Sorensen’s approach. She ventures that “Sorensen’s thesis that knowledge-lies don’t involve deception only occurs when someone is brought to flat-out believe a false proposition”; this, she argues, is an “implausibly narrow” conception of deception, “because it overlooks the possibility of deceiving someone by merely making them more confident in a falsehood”. Typical knowledge-lies are deceptive by the criterion of making someone more confident in a falsehood: “For in asserting the false proposition q, the liar will prevent the addressee from knowing that ¬q by providing evidence for q that will raise the addressee’s credence in q, thereby deceiving her” (Staffel 2011, 301). Though I follow Staffel’s argument, I’m not quite convinced of its strength; in the case of Spartacus, it is plausible that the Roman general may be becoming sceptical right after the second slave (after Antoninus) utters his false assertion.

3.3 Fallis (2009): Checking quality

Fallis (2009) develops a Gricean approach to lying, and provides the following definition:

\[(9) \text{Lying (Fallis 2009, 34)}\]
A lies to B if and only if
(1) A states that p to B,
(2) A believes that p is false and
(3) A believes that she makes this statement in a context where the following norm of conversation is in effect: Do not make statements that you believe to be false.

Fallis (2009) also assumes that bald-faced lies are lies. He couches his analysis into the framework of Grice (1989a), seeing lying as a violation of the maxim of Quality. Fallis assumes that the liar knows that the maxim of Quality is to be observed. Thus, bald-faced lies are genuine lies in his analysis.

A note on the relation between speech-act theory and Gricean implicature theory is in order: The maxim of Quality is obviously related to the Sincerity Condition in Searle’s framework. As long as it remains the case that Gricean implicature theory is not able to provide speech-act definitions, and the maxim of Quality is useful in the analysis of implicatures, there may be need for a double analysis that comprises sincerity as well as quality.

5. This definition is adapted to the format of the other definitions in order to make them easily comparable.
In Arico and Fallis (2013), 216 students were asked whether they considered a certain utterance, conceived of by the authors as a bald-faced lie, as a genuine lie. After presenting the respective vignette, students were asked whether the person in the story had lied, and they had the opportunity to mark the degree of lying in a 7-point Likert scale. The story in question goes like this:

(10) **Charlie the gambler** (Arico and Fallis 2013, 32–33)

Charlie has a gambling addiction, so he often sneaks away from work to bet on horses. He has just come home after spending another thousand dollars at the racetrack. As he enters the house, his wife Natalie says to him, “I tried calling you at work today, but no one could find you. You didn’t skip out of work to go gambling again, did you?” Charlie knows that this wife doesn’t approve and will likely leave him if she finds out he’s been betting again. Before Charlie can say anything, Natalie reaches into his coat pockets and pulls out betting tickets from that afternoon’s races. Despite the evidence, Charlie responds, “No, Honey, I wasn’t gambling.”

The result was that 93.98% of the students opted for 7 points on the Likert scale (= “Definitely a lie”). In their discussion, the authors concede “that some participants might have interpreted the cases as involving attempted deception”, but “it is unlikely that the vast majority of participants interpreted them that way” (pp. 20–21).

However, it is possible that the participants interpreted Charlie’s utterance as a downright lie because he flatly denied having been at the races. Thus, it is not clear to the participants that Charlie knew that Natalie knew that his statement was false, and Natalie knew that Charlie knew this. To deny something, even when evidence speaks against it, is a clear-cut lie in which the speaker takes their remotest chance at deceiving the hearer. In contrast, in bald-faced lies it must be mutually crystal-clear that p is not true.

### 3.4 Lackey (2013): Deceit, deception and selfless assertion

Lackey (2013) provides an analysis of bald-faced lies (as well as coercion-lies and knowledge-lies) that considers them as lies, yet argues against the idea put forth by Carson, Sorensen and Fallis that bald-faced lies constitute evidence against the intention to deceive involved in lying. Her proposal is rendered in (11):

(11) **Lying** (Lackey 2013, 236–237)

A lies to B if and only if
(i) A states that p to B,
(ii) A believes that p is false

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6. Page numbers refer to the preprint version.
(iii) A intends to be deceptive to B in stating that p.

The innovation comes with condition (iii) in which “being deceptive” is introduced. The trick is to draw a distinction between deceit and deception:

(12) Deceit versus deception (Lackey 2013, 241)
(a) Deceit: A deceives B with respect to whether p if and only if A aims to bring about a false belief in B regarding whether p.
(b) Deception: A is deceptive to B with respect to whether p if A aims to conceal information from B regarding whether p.

While the definition of deceit in (12a) relates to the traditional idea of deception, the definition of deception in (12b) focuses on the concealment of information as another strategy to be deceptive. (Note that this move implies that normal lies also have to do with deception in this sense, otherwise condition (11iii) would be ad hoc.)

The case Lackey (2013) considers as a prototypical bald-faced lie is the following (recall that it is modelled after one of Carson’s 2010 scenarios):

(13) Cheating student (Lackey’s version, see Lackey 2013, 238)
[...] suppose that a student is caught flagrantly cheating on an exam for the fourth time this term, all of the conclusive evidence for which is passed on to the Dean of Academic Affairs. Both the student and the Dean know that he cheated on the exam, and they each know that the other knows this, but the student is also aware of the fact that the Dean punishes students for academic dishonesty only when there is a confession. Given this, when the student is called to the Dean’s office, he states, ‘I did not cheat on the exam’.

Applying condition (12b), Lackey argues that “concealment is the central aim of the student’s statement” (Lackey 2013, 242). Hence “the student does not deceive the Dean, but he does intend to be deceptive to him” (Lackey 2013, 242). Fallis (2013), in his reply to Lackey (2013), discusses the case of the cheating student at length and tries to show that Lackey’s definition is too narrow as well as too broad. I think that it is useful to accept that there can be deception by omission, as Chisholm and Feehan (1977) put it, but this requires specific contexts, e.g., an interrogation. Thus, I would argue that the distinction between deceit and deception is not necessary, and that the “bringing about of a false belief in someone” (with the intention to deceive) is sufficient.7

7. As one of the anonymous reviewers observed, someone who conceals something may be in a conflict between observing the maxim of Quality and the maxim of Quantity. At least the concealer could argue when charged with deception that this was the reason for the make-up of their specific utterance.
As additional evidence, Lackey adds “that non-deception accounts of lying count as lies classic cases of what I have elsewhere called selfless assertions” (Lackey 2013, 237). Here, I would like to point out that I agree with the criticism against Lackey’s concept of selfless assertions, although I side with Lackey against non-deceptive accounts.

Lackey (2008, 48; 2013, 243) presents the following case of a so-called selfless assertion:

(14) **Creationist teacher** (Lackey 2008, 48)

Stella is a devoutly Christian fourth-grade teacher, and her religious beliefs are grounded in a deep faith that she has had since she was a very young child. Part of this faith includes a belief in creationism and, accordingly, a belief in the falsity of evolutionary theory. Despite this, she fully recognizes that there is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence against both of these beliefs. Indeed, she readily admits that she is not basing her own commitment to creationism on evidence at all but, rather, on the personal faith that she has in an all-powerful Creator. Because of this, Stella does not think that religion is something that she should impose on those around her, and this is especially true with respect to her fourth-grade students. Instead, she regards her duty as a teacher to involve presenting material that is best supported by the available evidence, which clearly includes the truth of evolutionary theory. As a result, after consulting reliable sources in the library and developing reliable lecture notes, Stella asserts to her students, “Modern-day *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus,*” while presenting her biology lesson today. Though Stella herself neither believes nor knows this proposition, she never shares her own personal faith-based view with her students, and so they form the corresponding true belief solely on the basis of her reliable testimony.

By providing this case, Lackey (2008) aims at a special relation between reliability and knowledge: “What CREATIONIST TEACHER reveals is that an unreliable believer may nonetheless be a reliable testifier, and so may reliably convey knowledge (justified/warranted belief) to a hearer despite the fact that she fails to possess it herself” (Lackey 2008, 49). Because Stella presents something as true that she does not believe in, it seems that she simply lied. Lackey, however, dubs Stella’s behavior as a case of “selfless assertion”.

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8. This statement alludes to Fallis (2009, 52, Fn. 74); see Lackey (2013, 245, Fn. 22).
There are several possibilities to do justice to Stella’s “selflessness” or renunciation. First, it could be a case of self-deception. Stella has conflicting states of mind. In her private, religious world, she believes in an almighty creator of the world, while in her professional, social world, she believes that *Homo sapiens* developed from *Homo erectus*. Both contents are in conflict with each other, but Stella is not aware of this conflict and switches smoothly between the two worlds and beliefs.

Second, and preferred by me, one could see Stella’s utterance as a lie with respect to her own system of belief. This does not exclude that it is a prosocial lie; after all, she observes the majority’s opinion and does not want to isolate herself by being openly against it. She does not want to impose her private, religious feelings upon others because group harmony is also a value esteemed by her. She aims at stabilizing her class; if she were sincere, this certainly would lead to destabilizing her group of students. Of course, she is totally convinced that her religious beliefs are the right and only ones, but she is not deaf to the majority’s opinion and acts as if she acknowledges it.

Third, her utterance could be bullshit (cf. Frankfurt 2005, Meibauer 2013). Stella shows a certain unconcern or lacking interest for the truth and she does not want the students to become aware of this. Consequently, she presents the evolutionist evidence with far more certainty than would be apt with respect to her belief in an almighty creator. Thus, we could have a scenario here in which someone speaks the truth (if the evolutionists are right), yet is bullshitting with respect to her own true belief.

Fourth, Stella could entertain the idea that she merely quotes the target utterance *Modern-day Homo sapiens evolved from Homo erectus*, so that she would not personally be committed to the truth of her utterance. However, since she does not mark her utterance as a quotation she deceives her audience with respect to her true commitment.

4. **Bald-faced lies are no lies**

Contrary to the aforementioned philosophers (Carson, Sorensen, Fallis, Lackey), I will argue that bald-faced lies are not lies. The reason is that the intention to deceive is lacking. Thus, these philosophers conclude that lying is not connected

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9. I agree with the observation of one reviewer that these possibilities could also apply to Takhleif in (6).

10. This possibility has been pointed out to me by Ingo Reich, pers. comm.

11. To whom Stokke (2013a, b) may be added.
with an intention to deceive. In contrast, I argue that the so-called bald-faced lies are not genuine lies because an intention to deceive on the part of the speaker is lacking.

Let us come back to our initial example, here presented as (15):

(15) Don betrays Betty

Betty Draper asks her husband Don Draper, who is coming home in the morning, where he was last night. He responds: “I have spent the night in the office, because I had a meeting late in the evening.” However, this is not true, since he spent the night with his recent love interest Dr. Faye Miller. As a matter of fact, Betty Draper believes that Don’s answer is not true (because he gave the same answer on another occasion when he was also caught in the act of lying), and that Don knows this. Moreover, Don Draper believes that Betty knows that his answer is not true.

Now recall the definition of lying in (3). Clearly, Don Draper actively believed at t that not p. However, he did not really assert p since this requires, according to the definition of assertion in (2), that the speaker (i) presents p as true, and (ii) wants the addressee to actively believe that p. Yet, Don Draper does not really present p as true in the context since he lets shine through that p is false. He would not feel committed to the truth of p, and he would not be ready to provide further evidence. Consequently, he does not want Betty to believe that he is right. Since in our story, there is a mutual understanding of the fact that Don uttered something that is false, his utterance cannot count as a lie. Therefore, I would argue that such cases of bald-faced lies are not proper lies.

In another interpretation of the scenario in (15), Don’s response could be attributed the status of a mere attempt at lying. Admittedly, in this case we would have an intention to deceive; but then the utterance would not be a case of a so-called bald-faced lie.

It appears important to consider to which degree the speaker lets shine through that they are insincere. While Don is blatantly insincere, the witness Tony in (5) (let us assume that “I” refers to Tony) is not. Tony cannot utter in front of the jury:

12. Note that Don Draper is a notorious liar, albeit not necessarily a bad character, as Terjesen (2010) points out.

13. An anonymous reviewer argued that the mutual belief of the interlocutors that p is untrue does not make the utterance less of a lie; according to her/him, “it simply makes it a lie whose untrue meaning is shared by both interlocutors”. I would object that mere “sharing” an untrue meaning does not suffice for the status of a lie. What is needed is the intention to deceive, and this is lacking (at least in the scenario that I constructed). Therefore, Don’s utterance must constitute another speech act.
(16) *I do not see the murderer. This is a lie, since it is evident for all of us that the man over there is the murderer. Therefore, my lie is not deceptive at all.

So Tony is lying and he is deceiving the jury and the whole audience. What might be the case, however, is that implicatures are triggered (presupposing relevant background knowledge) by the fact that Tony only falsely asserts what he does because he fears the mafiosi’s revenge. The very fact that there may be other contexts in which implicatures such as these do not arise shows that Tony’s utterance has to count as a lie, including the attempt to deceive the jury.

Similarly, the cheating student is a liar. Like in (16), he cannot say something along the following lines:

(17) *I did not cheat on the exam. We mutually know that this is a lie, but I don’t want to deceive you.

I take it that utterances such as (17) do not make any sense. If an utterance is an assertion, the utterer is committed to its truth.

The case of Don Draper and the cases Sorensen developed are different from the case of the witness (Tony) and the case of the cheating student. If the utterances of Draper and the Iraqi officers are not lies, they should constitute a distinct kind of speech act, and we have to ask which one.

5. Bald-faced lies are acts of verbal aggression

I propose to analyze bald-faced lies as acts of verbal aggression. Let us clarify what verbal aggression is, before we consider the question of which particular act might be relevant.

According to Bonacchi (2012, 4), “verbal aggression” refers to a language-related form of hostile behavior:

(18) Verbal aggression
Acts of verbal aggression are forms of language behavior (verbal forms or accompanying nonverbal behavior) with hostile intention towards the addressee, or forms that could be interpreted as such. [Translation form German, JM]

The hostile or offensive intention of the speaker is connected to the illocutionary force of their utterance. The respective force aims at attacking the addressee, to reduce their self-esteem, to destroy their social image or face, and restrict their action potential (Bonacchi 2012, 4).
If one assumes that verbal aggression is connected to types of speech acts, it may be asked what types of speech acts show the characteristics just sketched. Havryliv (2009) proposes the following taxonomy of acts of verbal aggression:

(19) Aggressive speech acts

- Slander
- Curse
- Oath
- Threat
- Aggressive command

Here are some examples: Slanders are utterances like *Asshole!* (‘Arschloch!’) or *Idiot!* There are also abusive constructions like *You idiot!* (cf. d’Avis and Meibauer 2013). Curses are utterances like *Bloody hell!* (‘Ach du Scheiße! ’) or *Damn!* (‘Verdammt noch mal!’). Oaths are utterances like *Go to hell!* (‘Der Teufel soll dich holen!’). Threats are utterances like *I’ll kill you!* (‘Ich bring dich um!’), and aggressive commands are utterances like *Go fuck yourself!* (‘Fick dich ins Knie!’ , lit. ‘Fuck you in the knee!’) or *Piss off!* (‘Verpiss dich!’).14

While the above-mentioned types of speech acts certainly count as “aggressive”, one important type of speech act is lacking. This is the insult (‘Beleidigung’). Most of the acts mentioned in (19) may be used as insults, but there are exceptions. A curse like *Bloody hell!* is not an insult, yet it may appear — at least in some contexts — to be aggressive. Hence, we cannot equal verbal aggression and insults across the board.

Surprisingly, there is not much genuine speech-act theoretical work on insults, so I stick to the recent works of Neu (2008), Culpeper (2011), and Mateo and Yus (2013).15 The force of insults becomes crystal-clear when offensive words or constructions are considered. According to Allan and Burridge (2006, 79),

insults are normally intended to wound the addressee or bring a third party into disrespect or both. They are thus intrinsically dysphemistic, and so typically taboo and subject to censorship. Insults typically pick on and debase a person’s physical appearance, physical ability, character, behaviour, beliefs and/or familial and social relations.

Culpeper (2011, 143) presents a list of British offensive words that are rank-ordered:

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14. Allan and Burridge (2006:76), draw a distinction between profane oaths and profane swearing; historically, “the noun oath ‘an act of swearing’ is the nominal counterpart of the verb swear.” Acts of swearing may be subsumed under the labels of curse or cussing.

15. See also Hilgendorf (2008) from a juridical point of view.
British offensive words ranked from high offensiveness to low offensiveness
cunt, motherfucker, fuck, wanker, nigger, bastard, prick, bollocks, arsehole,
paki, shag, whore, twat, piss off, spastic, slag, shit, dickhead, pissed off, arse,
bugger, balls, jew, sodding, Jesus Christ, crap, bloody, god

Among the offensive words, ethnic slur-terms like *paki* (referring to Pakistanis),
*nigger* (referring to black Americans), or *kraut* (referring to Germans), etc. have
been widely discussed (cf. Croom 2011, Langton, Haslanger and Anderson 2012).
These words are designed for insulting; they regularly express a derogatory atti-
tude towards their referents. Note that not only words are markers of insults. There
appear to exist certain constructions that are consistently used for insulting, for
example, *Yo momma* or the *Du/Sie*-X-construction in German, e.g., *Du Idiot!, Du
Student!* (cf. Neu 2008, 166; d’Avis and Meibauer 2013).

In the most prototypical insulting scenario, the speaker insults the hearer and
the hearer feels insulted. Feeling insulted could then be seen as a perlocutionary
effect of insulting. Yet there are situations in which the speaker has the intention
to insult the hearer, but the hearer does not feel insulted at all. Moreover, we can
imagine situations in which the speaker does not have the intention to insult the
hearer, but nevertheless the hearer feels insulted. How can we explain these asym-
metric situations? The idea is that feeling (more or less) insulted has to do with
disappointment of expectations:

Feeling insulted (Neu 2008, 31)
Perhaps the most adequate general characterization of feeling insulted is
that it is a kind of pain caused by disappointed expectations of attention and
respect. The relevant expectations (…) are normative rather than predictive,
involving as they do considerations about how we *should* be thought of and
treated; and the disappointment is a matter of shock rather than simple
surprise.

Thus, the addressee’s expectation to be treated with attention and respect is dis-
appointed. This amounts to an attack on their face. Hence insulting someone is
prototypically impolite behavior. This is compatible with the occurrence of playful,

Recently, Mateo and Yus (2013, 86) have proposed a universal taxonomy of
insulting on the basis of the following parameters: “(a) the conventional or innova-
tive nature of the insult; (b) the underlying intentionality (to offend, to praise or
to establish/maintain social bonding), (c) the in/correct interpretation of the in-
sult, and (d) the addressee’s reaction or lack thereof.” Combining these parameters
yields a pragmatic taxonomy of insults with 24 different cases (Mateo and Yus
2013, 98). These cases are illustrated by telling examples. As for (a), it is important
to draw our attention to the fact that there is a large scale of insulting utterances, ranging from the most conventional offensive words to complex and indirect insults presupposing a lot of background knowledge, e.g., in famous dialogues like the one in which George Bernard Shaw writes to Winston Churchill “I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play, bring a friend … if you have one”, the latter replying “Cannot possibly attend the first night, will attend second … if there is one” (cited in Neu 2008, v). Concerning (b), it is certainly true, as also pointed out by Neu (2008), that insulting can go together with play, ritual, humour, teasing, etc. (cf. Labov 1972). However, since offence is the basic intention, I would like to view the function of praising as a kind of insincere insulting or as indirect insulting. With respect to (c) we can agree that there can occur a mismatch between the speaker’s intention to insult and the hearer’s feeling of being insulted, the prototypical situation being the case when there is a 1:1 relation. Even when this latter situation happens, the hearer is not forced to react to the insult. A lack of reaction can of course have to do with the absence of feeling insulted or a simple misunderstanding.

While the promising approach of Mateo and Yus (2013) combines the relevant pragmatic parameters, a definition of insulting in speech-act theoretical terms is missing. To be in line with speech-act definitions pursued in this paper, I propose the following felicity conditions for insulting:16

16. It goes without saying that a definition of speech-act types by giving felicity conditions is not the only method of explaining the illocutionary concept of insulting; yet it is well established and fits to the definitions of asserting and lying which more or less echo the Austinian and Searlean approaches.

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Let us briefly comment on this attempt at defining insulting: The propositional content rule says that there is no particular restriction on the content of an insult; however, it is useful to distinguish between expressive meaning and propositional meaning, as is standard in recent semantic approaches to expressive meaning (for instance, Potts 2007). The first preparatory rule captures the fact that it is possible
to insult without having any particular reasons for performing the insult. The effect of being insulted is not exclusively dependent on the words chosen, so it is not obvious that the addressee will feel insulted, hence the second preparatory rule. Yet, we assume that the speaker intends to insult the hearer, as the sincerity rule demands. This is reflected in the constitutive rule.

Coming back to our scenario of Don Draper and his wife Betty in (15), we see that the elements of the above characterization are there: Betty feels deeply disappointed. The sting is not that Don betrays her because she already knows this. The sting is that she does not get the attention and respect that she deserves in her status as Don’s spouse. The general expectation that is violated by Don is, so I would like to argue, the expectation that he — as a rational and cooperative speaker — behaves in accordance with the Cooperative Principle and the maxim of Quality (Grice 1989a, 26–27). While these are not norms in themselves, the expectation that they are obeyed is normative in character, see Neu’s definition in (21).

Grice (1989a) develops a taxonomy of how a speaker relates to the operation of the Cooperative Principle and the maxims. He writes that “a participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfil a maxim in various ways”, among them:

(23) **Ways of not fulfilling the maxims** (Grice 1989a, 30)

a. Violation of a maxim
b. Opting out from the operation both of the maxim and the Cooperative Principle
c. Clash of maxims
d. Flouting/exploiting a maxim

While in lying, we have a case of “violation of a maxim”, namely the maxim of Quality, in the so-called bald-faced lies we have the case of “Opting out from the operation both of the maxim and the Cooperative principle”. In this case, the speaker “may say, indicate or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires” (Grice 1989a, 30). This is exactly the case with a bald-faced liar. In the same vein, Mooney (2004, 911) argues “that the clash generates implicature because the addressee will know, and indeed the speaker intends to reveal in some way, that s/he is opting out of a maxim” (see also Klungervik Greenall 2002). That a speaker is opting out and simultaneously showing that they are doing so, signals a huge disrespect for the hearer. It is a breach of trust, and, therefore, it attains the category of an attack on the hearer’s face.

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17. One of the anonymous reviewer noted that Betty may feel disappointed but not insulted. I side with Neu (2008) in assuming that insulting always has to do with disappointment. Moreover, I assume, in line with (22), that the speaker may wish that Betty feels insulted. However, even if Don does not explicitly wish that Betty is insulted, his utterance can nevertheless have this effect.
That some scholars count bald-faced lies as genuine lies (instead of analyzing them as insults, as I do) may have to do with the fact that lies and insults share a certain property, namely breach of trust. This connection is very well analyzed in the following quote from Williams referring to lies in general:

(24) **Lying as insulting** (Williams 2002, 119)

In allowing himself to accept the other’s belief as his own, and taking it that he has been given the truth through the speaker’s assertion, he will feel that he has come as close to the real thing as anyone in his situation could do. When he realizes that he has been betrayed, there is a complete reversal: the speaker’s will was entirely out of the picture, but now the picture is nothing but a product of that will. The victim recognizes the bare-faced lie as a pure and direct exercise of power over him, with nothing at all to be said for it from his point of view, and this is an archetypical cause of resentment: not just disappointment and rage, but humiliation and the recognition that in the most literal sense he has been made a fool of.

As I have shown, the victim of a bald-faced lie may still be more upset since a lack of respect for the hearer is overtly demonstrated.

Let us elaborate on our scenario with respect to the parameters of Mateo and Yus (2013) and the definition of insulting in (22). First of all, the utterance of Don Draper is neither a conventional nor an innovative way of insulting someone. It is simply a false utterance that is mutually known as false. Second, this utterance is offensive for Betty, but it need not necessarily be connected to an offensive intention. Third, Betty could derive an offensive intention on the spot and reply accordingly, but she could also be so upset as to resign and not answer at all (parameter (d)). She could even be unaware of the insulting effect of her husband’s disrespect for social norms.

Note in addition that bald-faced lies, like other speech acts, may be connected with conversational implicatures. This is what Mooney (2004, 912) calls a “social implication” due to the opting out of the operation of the Cooperative Principle and the maxim of Quality. In the case of Don Draper, there might arise implicatures of the kind “Stop asking me questions! Leave me alone! There is no sense in talking about these things in the grey of dawn!”, etc. Hence, bald-faced lies, viewed as insults, are means to stop rational discourse immediately.

Throughout the analysis we took the perspective of poor Betty. However, we can also think of the bald-faced liar as an actor who tries to maintain their face. Indeed, Don Draper cannot stand the repeated situation that he has to explain something he is ashamed of, since betraying his spouse is something he despises.

18. This has been pointed out to me by Franz d’Avis, pers. comm.
And also the Iraqi officer would prefer a situation in which he could speak frankly, but he is somehow forced into bald-faced lying under the circumstances. Therefore, it can be concluded that a possible motive for bald-faced lying may be the attempt to maintain one’s own face.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, a number of approaches in the philosophy of language according to which lying is not necessarily an intention to deceive have been reviewed. So-called bald-faced lies have been presented as decisive evidence against deceptive accounts of lying. Contrary to these non-deceptive approaches, I have argued that lying is connected to the intention to deceive, i.e., leading the hearer into a false belief. This follows from the claim that lying is a case of insincere assertion, and it is insincerity (or the violation of the maxim of Quality) that is deceptive. Bald-faced lies are not counted as lies because, by definition, it is mutually known by the participants that what the speaker says is false. To overtly demonstrate that one is opting out from the operation of the Cooperative Principle and the maxims amounts to carrying out a severe attack on the addressee’s face and can thus be interpreted as highly impolite. Therefore, I have proposed that bald-faced lies should be considered special kinds of insults.

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