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## **Integrating Relevance Theory and Critical Realism for the Analysis of Manipulation**

Despite the difficulty of ascertaining the manipulative intent of text producers, early pragmatic and discourse approaches (de Saussure, 2005) only focused on text producers to explore the mechanisms behind alleged manipulative texts. Recently, however, scholars have suggested a focus shift from the intention of the text producers to the effects on the text receivers (Maillat & Oswald, 2009; Oswald, 2014) and others have attempted to pursue this line of enquiry empirically (Castaldi, 2022). This paper follows this ‘addressee-oriented’ view of investigating manipulation and argues that aspects from Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) can be drawn upon in order to explore manipulation and ideology formation.

The paper begins by proposing a more nuanced understanding of RT’s *contextual effect* and, by integrating a Critical Realist epistemology, argues that manipulation can occur at three different levels of representation and interpretation of ‘reality’: the *real*, the *basic social reality* and the *constructed discursive reality*. After introducing and explaining the ontology of these three levels of reality, these are mapped out against a more nuanced taxonomy of *contextual effect*, which is derived by differentiating between *evidential effects* and *ideological effects*. The former pertains to the domain of ‘knowledge’, while the latter to the domain of ‘opinions’.

In the second part, examples from an on-going project on the representation of Ukrainian Displaced People on UK television are used to exemplify the methodological framework proposed. Evidence is provided to show how “a set of constraints limiting the processes of contextual selection” (Maillat & Oswald, 2009: 361) can be applied at all the three levels of reality introduced in the first part of the paper and to show how these rely on cultural constructs that, from the perspective of a British audience, create proximity with the Ukrainian Displaced People and distance with Russia.

### **References**

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## **Bio-note**

Dr Jacopo Castaldi is a Lecturer in the Centre for Language and Linguistics at Canterbury Christ Church University. His main research interests are Critical Discourse Studies, Multimodality, mass-mediated communication, and the semiotic and cognitive aspects of manipulation, with a focus on the interactive experiences of audiences and on meaning interpretation. His first monograph, titled *Multimodality, Ideology and Manipulation: BBC Travel Documentaries and the Illusion of Empire* will be published in the Routledge Studies in Multimodality.