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LINGUISTIC PORTRAYAL OF GASLIGHTING IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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The paper explores the intricate interplay between language and manipulation, focusing on the linguistic and extralinguistic manifestations of gaslighting in interpersonal communication. Gaslighting is viewed as a form of manipulative communication that involves deliberate denial or distortion of reality, making the victims doubt their own actions, perception, memory and sanity. The victim's ongoing confusion leads to a sense of powerlessness and a diminished self-esteem. Using a qualitative-quantitative linguistic method, the paper dissects the portrayal of gaslighting dynamics in the short psychological film *Your Reality*, which is based on real-life experiences. Through comprehensive psycholinguistic analysis, an attempt is made to illustrate how specific manipulative tactics are intentionally employed to achieve gaslighter's abusive objectives. Examining the subtle, yet powerful verbal and non-verbal manipulative tactics employed in the film, the research aims to elucidate gaslighting dynamics in interpersonal communication and empower readers with valuable insights into recognizing and addressing early signs of such deceitful behavior in real-life situation. Thus, this knowledge is crucial for fostering awareness, establishing boundaries to prevent gaslighting attempts and promoting healthy communication.

Keywords: *manipulation, gaslighting, psycholinguistic analysis, verbal manipulative tactics, non-verbal manipulative tactics, psychological abuse, interpersonal communication.*

Introduction

Manipulative communication has been present in human interaction since ancient times, involving various tactics and strategies to influence or control the behavior and thinking of others for personal gain. It often entails attempts to shape the decisions, actions or perceptions of others to serve the manipulator's interest, frequently at the expense of the person being manipulated. (Nielsen, 2015; Campbell, 2019; Smith, 2019; Cialdini, 2007; Covert, 2020).

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Manipulative communication can take many different forms, and its effectiveness often relies on the manipulator's ability to covertly affect the target. Gaslighting is one of the forms of manipulative communication used in various speech situations. The act of gaslighting is defined in the Encyclopedia Britannica as "an elaborate and insidious technique of deception and psychological manipulation, usually practiced by a single deceiver, or 'gaslighter,' on a single victim over an extended period. Its effect is to gradually undermine the victim's confidence in his own ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, or reality from appearance, thereby rendering him pathologically dependent on the gaslighter in his thinking or feelings" ("Gaslighting", n.d.).

Scholars in the field of Social Psychology define gaslighting as psychological manipulation in which one person attempts to instill doubt in another's reality, perception, or memory. The goal is to create confusion, self-doubt, undermine self-esteem, gain control and distort the reality (Stern, 2007; Griffith, 2020; Covert, 2020; Campbell, 2019; Morrison, 2022). According to Bryans (2021), "Gaslighting is a type of manipulation that seeks to sow seeds of doubt in a targeted individual or group, hoping to make targets question their own memory, perception, and sanity. This is often done by switching back and forth between two realities in an attempt to confuse the mind" (Bryans, 2021, p. 5). It is worth noting that manipulation is fairly common in modern society and almost anyone is capable of employing it to an extent, whereas gaslighting is a rarer form of communication. As different from manipulation, it goes beyond misleading and involves abusive behavior with the intent to control and question the victim's self-value and well-being.

Our analysis of gaslighting dynamics in interpersonal relationships is conducted with respect to the multi-award winning short psychological film *Your Reality* which is based on real-life narrative. Employing a qualitative-quantitative linguistic method, the article explores linguistic and extralinguistic aspects of the realization of gaslighting. The aim of the study is to unveil the verbal and non-verbal manipulative tactics employed by the protagonist of the film to achieve his gaslighting objectives, making his spouse doubt her perception of reality, lose confidence, become dependent on him.

Origins of gaslighting

The term *gaslighting* emerged in the 1960s and has gained prominence in recent years. It comes from the 1938 British play *Gas light*, written by Patrick Hamilton, later adapted into the American film *Gaslight* in 1944, starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman. The play depicts a reality in which the husband manipulates his wife into believing she is mistaken about events and occurrences. Through subtle

manipulative tactics, he attempts to make her think she is insane, remembering things incorrectly and imagining things that are actually happening. The husband's deceptive tactics include convincing her wife that she imagined the gaslight flickering. In reality, he secretly removed and shacked the lightbulbs to create the illusion of flickering lights, aiming to instill doubt in her sanity which will facilitate his plan to get her aunt's jewels ("Gaslighting", n.d.).

One of the scholars who brought the concept of gaslighting to the public's attention is Yale psychoanalyst Stern who described the dynamics of the "gaslight effect" in interpersonal communication, highlighting its devastating impact on the "gaslightee" engaged in the "gaslight tango" (Stern, 2007).

Overview of the film *Your Reality*

The film *Your Reality* (Anders, 2021) revolves around a successful young woman, Alicia, who experiences increasing uncertainty and insecurity after moving in with her spouse and in the end loses everything. This classic portrayal of gaslighting conveys a powerful message about toxic relationships and dangers of gaslighting. The film was written, produced and acted in by British filmmaker and actress Tatjana Anders. Introducing the film, Anders states, "I'm making "Your Reality", because a few of my friends have been gaslighted in the past and I've seen first-hand how emotionally destructive it can be and how difficult it is to move on, once your trust in people has been broken" (Anders, 2021). She claims that the film's primary objective is to raise awareness of the society about gaslighting as an abusive form of manipulation that many people endure nowadays. She aims to highlight the harmful and destructive consequences it can have on its victims and help potential victims recognize the signs of gaslighting in its early stages.

Depicting the main character's experiences, the film aims to shed light on the signs and effects of gaslighting, empowering viewers to detect gaslighting in real-life situations. Alicia, played by Anders, is a cheerful and successful marketing executive. After an accidental meeting with a charming photographer Mark, she falls in love and moves in with him, unaware of the manipulative journey that lies ahead. Alicia soon experiences increasing turmoil, job loss and depression. Signs seem to point to her mental instability until her best friend, Sophie overhears their argument, revealing a Pandora's box of gaslighting (Anders, 2021). The analysis of Mark's behavior reveals his abusive personality traits, characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance, a need for excessive attention and a lack of empathy, particularly for Alicia. Psychologists state that people with these traits perceive themselves as superior, ignoring others' feelings and needs, which has toxic effect on their relationships and others' mental and physical health (Campbell and Miller, 2011; Morrison, 2022).

Analysis of gaslighting strategy in the film

The paper explores the characters' interpersonal communication in the scenes of the film, focusing on Mark's manipulative tactics from both psychological and linguistic perspectives. The opening scene introduces Alicia, an attractive and young marketing executive, and Mark, a good-looking and supportive young man. The scene is set in a bustling, modern city that reflects Alicia's fast-paced and busy life. Initially, Alicia is portrayed as confident and competent in both career and personal life. We gain an insight into her influential status through a brief phone call with a colleague at the beginning of the film, where she gives instructions with a confident tone.

Alicia: Don't worry about it! I'll get the coffees, just make sure to get those printouts in time for meeting! All right bye! Um... two cappuccinos, one latte and one green tea!

Barista: Two cappuccinos, one latte and one green tea... That'll be 12:50.

Alicia: (searching for money in her bag) Damn it...um can I pay you back later? I work literally across the street. Your colleague Sam knows me really well ...

Barista: No, I'm afraid our company policy doesn't allow that.

Alicia: Please, the meeting starts in five minute and my assistant...

Barista: I'm sorry mam, I can't help you. Could you please move to the side? You're blocking the other customers.

Mark: You know what? It's okay! It's on me.

Alicia: Oh, you shouldn't have. Thank you so much.

Mark: That's fine, it's my pleasure. I'm Mark, by the way.

Alicia: Alicia! Let me get your bank details, so I can pay you back.

Mark: Or how about... you just text me later?

Alicia: Sure. Thank you.

Barista: Two cappuccinos, one latte and one green tea.

Alicia: Thank you! Bye, Mark!

When ordering coffee for herself and colleagues hurriedly, Alicia faces a problem, realizing she has left her wallet behind. Despite attempts to persuade the barista to let her pay later, mentioning her work and the upcoming meeting, the

barista remains indifferent and rejects Alicia's offer. Alicia's attempts to make an ethical appeal on the barista, emphasizing her credibility and trustworthiness as a responsible customer, implying loyalty to the coffee shop by mentioning her good relationship with another staff member, are all in vain. This arouses Alicia's anxiety and adds tension to the scene. Mark, who was drinking coffee there, intervenes, offering to pay for Alicia's order. Mark's act of kindness portrays him as a hero, rescuing her in an uncomfortable situation. This generous act creates a sense of indebtedness in Alicia and Mark seizes the opportunity to establish a connection with her.

It is important to note that anxiety caused by a stranger's indifference is a subjective perception. Anxiety is generally perceived as vulnerability, making individuals with such traits more susceptible to manipulation (Campbell 2019; Griffith 2020). For someone who is even-tempered, this situation would not cause anxiety. Whereas for a highly anxious person like Alicia, it is exaggerated. Her growing anxiety is evident through her nervous movements, a worried tone, and concerned looks. Noticing it, Mark does not miss the opportunity to demonstrate generosity, lay the ground for the relationship development and exploit it for his malicious intentions. So, the opening scene reveals the core traits of the protagonists. It becomes clear that Mark acts as a professional manipulator identifying Alicia as a potential victim for his manipulative intent.

The next scene depicts a hearty conversation between Alicia and her close friend Sophie. Filled with laughter and shared memories, they discuss various aspects of their lives which indicates their close friendship.

Sophie: I don't know how you managed to turn that one around! We were so screwed...(laughing) Oh, tell me about it!

Alicia: But the look of Frank's face when we got the deal!

Sophie: So good... Anyway... uh...tell me about coffee boy!

Alicia: Oh, yeah, he asked me out on the date.

Sophie: How exciting! Where is he taking you?

Alicia: Apparently, I have to try his signature lobster risotto.

Sophie: A hot guy who can cook!

Alicia: I know right? And he's a rather talented photographer! I checked out his website. Might even book him for our next campaign.

Sophie: Okay, can you please stop working for five seconds?

Alicia: I know... it's been too long. My mom is constantly on my case about marriage and kids. She says I'm never gonna get a guy, cause nobody likes a selfish girl.

Sophie: That's ridiculous, okay? You are the least selfish person I know!

Alicia: Thanks, Soph!

In the scene they cheerfully celebrate Alicia's recent professional achievement, attributing it to her competence and dedication. Sophie highlights Alicia's focus on work and professional growth, portraying her as hardworking and ambitious. The informal and casual conversation, marked by positive emotions and the use of colloquial and humorous expressions like *coffee boy*, *hot guy*, *turn round*, *get the deal*, *we were so screwed*, and emotional exclamations like *so good*, *how exciting*, *that's ridiculous*, indicates their close friendship. Alicia openly expresses her excitement about the upcoming date with Mark, which shows her initial positive impression. She does not hide her admiration for Mark, sharing with her details about his talent and professional accomplishments which highlights a high level of trust and openness in their relationship.

It is vital to note that Mark has already engaged in manipulative communication employing the manipulative tactic of **foot-in-the-door** passing on to a bigger and more demanding request. After portraying himself as generous and supportive, building rapport through texting, gaining her attention and interest, he successfully asks Alicia out. By planning their meeting, he aims to exert a more significant influence and take control of the situation.

This scene reveals the source of Alicia's anxiety, related to pressure from her mom about marriage and children. She states how her mother perceives her as *a selfish girl* incapable of finding a good man. Alicia's saddened facial expression vividly conveys the negative emotional impact of her mother's critical comments, causing psychological stress. Systematic reinforcement of such criticism has negatively affected her self-esteem, triggering feelings of insecurity. Alicia questions her actions, but Sophie supports her, dismissing the idea that she is selfish. So, it is crucial to realize that this enrooted insecurity makes a person vulnerable to abuse.

The next scene depicts their first date, a significant moment in the story that sets the foundation for their relationship. It offers an opportunity to explore their character traits and foresee the dynamics of their relationship.

Mark: Wow! You look incredible!

Alicia: Thank you!

Mark: Come on in! So, I was going to complain about you being late but I think with you looking this good I can find a way to forgive you.

Alicia: What do you mean late? I thought I was at 8 pm.

- Mark: *Nope, last time we spoke we agreed on 7:30.*
- Alicia: *Really?*
- Mark: *Yep! And I finished my risotto on the dot, so it might be a little cold now.*
- Alicia: *Gosh, I'm sorry. I must have misunderstood. You know with work and everything...*
- Mark: *That's alright. What's important now is that you're here... Wine?*
- Alicia: *Yes, please. It smells amazing, by the way.*
- Mark: *Thanks, wait till you taste it!*
- Alicia: *(looking at photos on the wall) Is that your work?*
- Mark: *Yeah, I did an exhibition at the V&A museum last year, and when it finished, I just kept it going at my house.*
- Alicia: *You are really talented!*
- Mark: *So, people seem to say... shall we? (pouring wine into her glass) There you go!*
- Alicia: *Thank you.*
- Mark: *Oh, so... uh ... how did that meeting go in the end?*
- Alicia: *Which meeting?*
- Mark: *The one I know about. The one I helped with the coffees.*
- Alicia: *oh, right! Yeah... um... it went great! They loved our pitch and the coffees were a nice touch, so we got the deal.*
- Mark: *Congrats! Great I could help!*
- Alicia: *You know what? Working in marketing, I'm just so fascinated with human psychology and it's funny to see how smallest things make the biggest difference.*
- Mark: *I feel the same way. It's like in photography, it's the little things... they are the only things that matter!*
- Alicia: *Um... (Smiling with glittering eyes)*

Mark's cozy and dimly lit house creates a romantic setting for their first date and the quiet atmosphere encourages warm and open interaction. Exchanged compliments, Mark's subtle complaint about Alicia being late and his easy forgiveness, Alicia's polite apology contributes to the positive and comfortable atmosphere. Alicia's interest in Mark's work, compliment on his talent, and shared discussion on psychology indicate her willingness to foster the relationship. It appears a common date with subtle flirting, compliments, positive body language

like enchanting eye contact, smiles, laughter and playfulness. Emotional nuances of Alicia's glittering eyes, soft gaze and pleasant smiles reveal her admiration and deep feelings for Mark.

However, with deeper examination, Mark's subtle manipulative behavior becomes evident. He employs the **love bombing** tactic by complimenting Alicia on her good looks to appear loving and attentive, creating a positive impression from the start. Mark uses his charm and flattery to make Alicia feel special and build rapport with her. When he insists that Alicia was late, he employs the tactic of **passive-aggressiveness**, subtly undermining her confidence and causing self-doubt. By expressing disappointment through seemingly innocent remarks about the coldness of the meal, Mark uses **guilt inducement** tactic, making her feel responsible for any inconvenience. Then Mark uses the **deflection tactic**, quickly changing the topic and diverting attention away from any discomfort. Offering wine, he aims to maintain a positive atmosphere and restore her positive feeling about the evening. In response to Alicia's complement on his talent, Mark tries to appear modest. Saying that *people seem to say so* he deflects praise onto others and implies that he is not arrogant and self-centered. However, Mark covertly accepts her compliment, showing agreement with others' assessment. Mark discusses his photography exhibition at the V&A museum, subtly highlighting his professional accomplishments, aiming to establish authority and impress Alicia. This reflects his use of manipulative tactic of **humblebrag**, covertly highlighting positive qualities and subtly promoting his achievements while trying to appear modest.

Afterwards, Mark employs the manipulative tactic of **reciprocity**, reminding Alicia about his assistance in the coffee shop, aiming to create a sense of obligation and indebtedness in Alicia. He subtly suggests that she owes her something in return, which should be reciprocated when needed. When congratulating Alicia on her successful meeting, he reinforces the idea that he contributed positively and highlights his supportive image. At the end, Mark employs the manipulative tactic of **mirroring**, reflecting Alicia's emotions, values, and interest to establish a stronger emotional connection and gain her trust. Agreeing with Alicia's interest in human psychology and relating it to photography, he aligns himself with her. By expressing shared feelings and values, Mark creates a sense of similarity, suggesting that they share a deep connection and understanding.

Thus, in just one evening, Mark effectively employs a bundle of manipulative tactics, aiming to gain rapport, foster trust and make Alicia more receptive to his influence. Subsequent scenes reveal a gradual progression in Mark's gaslighting behavior. Judging by Alicia's responses, it becomes evident that his manipulation is working.

In the next scene, we observe the depth of Alicia's affection for Mark as she moves into his place. This quick transition, from the first date to moving in, reflects the rapid pace at which toxic relationships often develop.

Mark: Wow! Did you manage to get even more boxes? Who would have thought you'd have so much stuff?

Alicia: I know right? Well, you should have thought twice before asking me to move in with you. Hope you're not having second thoughts!

Mark: So, I was thinking...as soon as you finish unpacking, let's go out and celebrate!

Alicia: Oh, my friend Hannah from New York is in town and I haven't seen her in two years, so we're going out for dinner tonight...

Mark: Really? Today was supposed to be a special day for us!

Alicia: Are you upset? I thought I mentioned it last week and...

Mark: I was really looking forward to taking you out tonight...

Alicia: You know what? Let me cancel on Hannah... you and I will go out and celebrate.

Mark: No, it's okay. Go have fun!

Alicia: Hey! Mark, I'm really sorry. The last thing I want to do is hurt your feelings! You know what? I have an idea how I can make it up to you! (hugging and kissing him)

In this scene Alicia excitedly unpacks her things, revealing her eagerness to take their relationship to a more serious level. However, Mark does not show enthusiasm in helping Alicia which indicates his insincere and disguised attitude towards their relationship. During their conversation Mark employs several manipulative tactics to control Alicia's emotions and actions. Mark suggests celebrating their special day together, despite Alicia's prior plans with a friend. Expressing disappointment with the expression *today was supposed to be special for us*, he creates emotional pressure on Alicia to prioritize their relationship over her existing social connections, subtly isolating Alicia from her friends. Mark's response is a vivid example of the **guilt-tripping** tactic, making Alicia feel regret and responsibility for his disappointment. Under this covert emotional influence, Alicia offers to cancel her plans with her friend and celebrate the day with him. Apologizing sincerely with *I'm really sorry, the last thing I want to do is hurt your*

feelings, she expresses a willingness to mitigate tension and compromise for the sake of their positive relationship. Throughout their interactions, Alicia is constantly induced to undermine her decisions, apologize and seek approval from Mark which is a characteristic aspect of gaslighting.

In the subsequent scenes Alicia sinks into Mark's manipulation, growing increasingly anxious and vulnerable to Mark's manipulative attempts. In the next scene we see Alicia extremely cautious with her words and actions, aiming to avoid additional troubles and conflicts.

Alicia: I'm so jealous. You know what? I really need to take some time off as well!

Sophie: Well, you should ask Mark to take you on vacation. How's that going anyway?

Alicia: Oh, it's going great (picking up a glass off the table to ensure a cup mat is underneath).

Sophie: That's awesome!

Alicia: Yeah, I'm very happy! It's just sometimes we get into these silly arguments.

Sophie: Like what?

Alicia: Well, he got really angry the other day, when he found that his favorite watch was broken. I don't know, I must have knocked it down while cleaning or something.

Sophie: It's weird... can you fix it?

Alicia: I think so. It was just the wristband that was broken anyway, but he got so upset, he wouldn't talk to me for like two hours ...

Sophie: That's a bit of an overreaction.

Alicia: I guess... maybe it was my fault for insisting that I didn't break it. He said he was more upset about that, than the actual watch.

Sophie: Still, that's no reason to give you the silent treatment.

Alicia: I think he's just stressed about work.

During the conversation with Sophie, Alicia initially portrays a positive image of her relationship with Mark, stating that *it's going great*. However, she later admits that they *sometimes get into silly arguments*, mentioning an incident where *Mark got really angry and upset* over his broken watch and *didn't talk to her for two hours* and questions her role in the incident. Sophie describes Mark's response as *overreaction*, but Alicia attempts to express understanding and justifies Mark's anger as *work stress*. Mark uses the tactic of **silent treatment**, inducing Alicia to

feel guilty and responsible for his disappointment. Meanwhile, Mark engages in the tactic of **distorting the reality** and **sowing seeds of doubt** in Alicia, making her question her own actions and judgments. It leads to a sense of insecurity, heightening her anxiety and strengthening Mark's control.

Alicia's non-verbal cues, her sad and concerned looks and jittery movements, particularly the gesture of *picking up a glass off the table to ensure a cup mat is underneath*, reveals her tension, nervousness and increased attention to details because of fear of causing additional problems. She strives to maintain harmony in their relationship, heavily depending on Mark's validation and consistently seeking approval from him.

Mark: Hay! How's work?

Alicia: Not great! I didn't get the project.

Mark: Oh, that's a shame.

Alicia: That's the second account I lost this month. I really don't know what's happening with me lately.

Mark: Well, I've got some good news that just might cheer you up! I booked that huge Fendi account! So, I'll be shooting in Paris next month.

Alicia: That's awesome!

Mark: Yeah, and that's not all. I've also been invited to this huge celebrity party tonight and you're coming with me.

Alicia: I don't know... I'm not really in the mood. I'd rather just stay here and start working on the next project. It's in two weeks' time and I'm...

Mark: Honey, honey, listen... If I keep getting jobs like this, you won't have to worry about work at all anymore. Plus, it's Friday and you really need to switch off. So, come on! Go get ready and we'll head out!

In this scene Mark begins the conversation by expressing sympathy for Alicia's concerns about her work challenges and setbacks, then quickly shifting the focus to his own success. Mark seems to cheer her up and distract her attention from her difficulties. However, highlighting his *huge success* and offering a seemingly better future, Mark employs the tactic of **future faking**. Meanwhile, he makes her feel disheartened and demotivated, using the **invalidation** tactic, downplaying the significance of her feelings and concerns, undermining her self-worth and the validity of her emotions. With the claim *if I keep getting jobs like this, you won't have to worry about work at all anymore* Mark attempts to create

dependence and control, implying that Alicia's well-being is mainly conditioned by his success. Afterwards, Mark suggests attending a party, stressing its glamour and importance. When Alicia expresses a preference to *stay at home and work on her next project*, Mark insists on it, again downplaying her emotions and priorities. This restriction of freedom and control over her actions and decisions intensifies Alicia's feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and frustration.

Mark: I really do love you in that dress. Oh, by the way, try to take it easy on the alcohol tonight. I've noticed you've been drinking a lot more lately.

Alicia: I'm not drinking that much, am I?

Mark: Well, there's going to be some important people at this party tonight. I just want to make sure things go well.

Alicia: Sure, I'll do my best!

This scene highlights the increasing dynamics in their toxic relationship. Mark starts the conversation by complimenting Alicia on her appearance, initially creating a seemingly positive atmosphere. This expression of love would sound sincere, if he didn't shift the focus on her overuse of alcohol. Pretending to be concerned about Alicia's well-being and positive public image in front of *important people*, Mark highlights her bad habit, exploiting the tactic of **concern trolling**. Though Alicia tried to disagree, asserting *she doesn't drink that much*, Mark exaggerates the issue and instructs her to moderate the alcohol consumption, regardless the fact that Mark himself consistently offered Alicia wine in the early stage of their relationship. So, Mark distorts the reality, aiming to make Alicia doubt her own thoughts and memory. Mark attaches Alicia's behavior to the success of the party, placing responsibility on her for the outcome of the event. It reinforces his dominance, making Alicia more dependent on his opinion. Alicia responds by assuring that *she'll do her best* which indicates that she feels obliged to meet his expectations, prioritize his preferences, avoiding negative consequences.

Alicia: Hey! You okay? Did I do something wrong? Mark? Just tell me, why are you upset?

Mark: You're unbelievable!

Alicia: Why? What happened?

Mark: You embarrassed me in front of everyone! It was a high-profile party! You knew how important it was for

me and all you could do was get smashed and flirt with every guy you saw!

Alicia: *Oh, no, I didn't.*

Mark: *I'm not blind, Alicia! You know everyone was laughing at you and how desperate you were for attention. It's pathetic!*

Alicia: *I'm sorry Mark. I... I can't even remember drinking that much...*

Mark: *Exactly! You can't even remember how much you drank! I'm sorry but this is the last time I ever take you to a party!*

In this scene Mark skillfully erodes Alicia's self-confidence, falsely accusing her of *embarrassing* and *unbelievable* actions, getting drunk and flirting with every guy at the party, painting a negative picture of her behavior. Mark employs the essential gaslighting tactic of **fabricating events, distorting the reality** and **invalidating her memory**. Despite Alicia's denial and confusion, Mark persists in providing false information, blaming her for his disappointment and unpleasant experience at the party, using the tactic of **false accusations and blame shifting** to make her feel guilty and responsible for his dissatisfaction. Feeling confused and ashamed, Alicia apologizes to avoid further conflict, even though she cannot remember drinking excessively. Mark's final statement, declaring *this is the last time he'll take her to a party*, is a subtle form of punishment. Using **emotional blackmail** tactic, he threatens to limit her social interactions. Instilling fear and guilt, he aims to reinforce his dominance and create a sense of dependence. Employing **derogatory language** about Alicia's behavior, such as *pathetic, desperate, embarrass, unbelievable, flirt, get smashed*, further damages her self-esteem and the generalizing statement *everyone was laughing at you*, intensifies her feelings of insecurity and doubt. So, Mark, as a skilled manipulator, gains control over Alicia's mental well-being, actions, and social interactions distorting the reality, instilling self-doubt, confusion, and emotional distress.

Alicia: *I just don't get it. I mean, I did talk to people... maybe I was flirting without realizing it. What is happening with me, Sophie? I'm so confused!*

Sophie: *Maybe you should speak to a therapist? Mark says that you've been acting strange for a few weeks now...*

Alicia: *You talked to Mark?*

Sophie: *Yeah, he called me asking for advice. He was very sweet; he just... he's just concerned for you... Alicia?*

- Alicia: *Yeah, of course...*
 Sophie: *Are you okay?*
 Alicia: *Yeah, I'm fine... I'm fine. I have to go...*
 Sophie: *Wait...*

In this scene Mark intensifies his gaslighting strategy involving Alicia's close friend Sophie in this toxic relationship. In the conversation Alicia expresses confusion about her own behavior, seeking understanding and support from Sophie, which is a clear sign of doubt in her actions and perception of reality. Sophie suggests that Alicia *speaks to a therapist*, which sounds like a constructive and supportive response. However, it becomes apparent that this advice is influenced by Mark's manipulation. Sophie's words describing Mark as *very sweet* and *concerned* indicate that Mark has talked to Sophie, expressing concern for Alicia's well-being, framing himself as a caring and deeply concerned spouse. This is a well-planned gaslighting tactic of **triangulation** that aims to distort Sophie's perception of Alicia's well-being, attempting to get her support for his abusive objectives. Hearing this, Alicia abruptly ends the conversation, declaring *she is fine* and *that she has to go*, which indicates concern for her own well-being. This abrupt ending may also suggest a sense of rejection and isolation. Mark's successful manipulation of Sophie, who is the one Alicia typically relies on for support and advice, devastated her even more, leaving her alone, confused, depressed, rejected.

- Alicia: *Have you seen my hard drive? My presentation is on it.*
 Mark: *I think I saw it on the desk.*
 Alicia: *Oh, got it! Thank you! Ok, I'm off! Wish me luck!*
 Mark: *Good luck!*
 Alicia: *(leaving, then returning and shouting) Can you help me? ... I'm sorry! I'm sorry... Oh, got it.*
 Mark: *See, I knew you'd figure it out.*
 Alicia: *Okay, I'm off... Are you gonna be home tonight?*
 Mark: *Yeah, I should be.*
 Alicia: *Cool, okay... I'll see you tonight!*

Alicia's growing anxiety and nervousness become apparent in this scene which seems to depict an everyday interaction. However, Alicia's nervous, behavior running to and fro, losing her hard drive, then her keys, speaking quickly, then abruptly shouting, are signs of her escalated anxiety and carelessness. Her dependence on Mark is also apparent, as she constantly seeks his assistance. Mark appears supportive and encouraging as he wishes her *good luck*, assuring *she'd figure it out*, caring and loving, as he promises *to see her tonight*. However, with

this supportive and positive response, Mark deliberately tries to paint a picture of a loving relationship. This tactic of **masking** serves to conceal his true intentions, to divert Alicia and her social circle from his gaslighting intentions, leaving them no chance to think that Alicia is experiencing toxic manipulation.

In the next scene Alicia enters a dimly-lit room like a shadow, where the atmosphere is gloomy, filled with unspoken but noticeable tension. A melancholic song about *emptiness rising up inside, heavy rocks pushing down pride, the same old wounds dripping back and forth*, intensifies the tension, echoing Alicia's inner conflict and depression. The sense of profound emptiness is depicted in Alicia's emotionless gaze. Once confident and successful, Alicia is now burdened with doubts and uncertainties about her recent ongoing misfortunes. Pouring wine into the glass, she dials Mark's number, but her calls are unanswered, highlighting the increasing emotional distance between them. She dials Sophie's number, but she doesn't answer either.

Alicia: Where have you been?

Mark: I was just out with some friends... Why? Something happened? Have you been drinking again?

Alicia: Why are you ignoring my phone calls? I called and texted you like a hundred times... you don't give a shit about whether I'm worried or sick.

Mark: Honey! How many times have I told you to lay off the alcohol?

Alicia: My presentation... it was a disaster!

Mark: So, what? It's just a presentation!

Alicia: They fired me, Mark!

Mark: Oh, no! That's a terrible news! I'm so sorry, hon! You know what you should do? You should get some rest and go to bed. We can just talk through it in the morning.

(Alicia stands up and breaks the glass incidentally).

Mark: (In the next morning) You don't remember, do you honey? Have you been taking those pills that Dr. Rogers prescribed? Alicia, you need to keep taking those pills! You are not well and it's getting worse.

As Mark enters the room, Alicia expresses her concern about his *ignoring her calls*, emphasizing the need for his emotional support. But Mark shifts the focus to her alcohol consumption, downplaying her feelings. When Alicia expresses distress over her presentation, labelling it as *a disaster*, and her job loss, Mark pretends

caring for her and advises her to *get some rest and go to bed*. However, he actually minimizes her concerns and trivializes her emotional struggle. Mark's gaslighting reaches its peak when he explicitly doubts Alicia's memory and well-being, placing blame on her forgetfulness of taking prescribed pills.

In the closing scene Sophie discovers a recorded voicemail from their conversation the night before. Apparently, Alicia has dialed her number and when Mark entered the room, she didn't hang up.

Alicia: Where have you been?

Mark: Jesus! Have you been drinking again?

Alicia: Why are you ignoring my phone calls? I called and texted you like a hundred times... but you don't give a shit about

Mark: Oh, stop it, Alicia! Just look at yourself! You are so pathetic!

Alicia: They fired me, Mark!

Mark: To be honest, I don't blame them! You are useless, any sign of trouble and it's straight to the bottle! You are just an alcoholic!

Alicia: No, I'm not!

Mark: I'm just being honest, but you could never handle honesty, could you? You don't mean it... you don't mean that, you don't...

Alicia: (shouting) I don't think I deserved that job to begin with...

Mark: (grabbing her glass and dropping it down) Now... look what you have done! You ruined my floor!

Alicia: I don't care about your flour!

Mark: Clean it! Now! Useless!

The stark contrast between the recorded voicemail and the manipulated conversation becomes apparent. The voicemail becomes the crucial evidence that reveals the true nature of their toxic relationship. In reality, when Alicia needed support and felt devastated because of her constant setbacks, Mark not only lacks empathy, but also blames and humiliates her with derogatory language like *useless*, *pathetic*, *alcoholic* and erodes her self-esteem, *you could never handle honesty*, *look what you have done*, *you ruined my flour*, *just look at yourself*, *it's straight to the bottle*. Upon hearing this, Sophie gains insights into Alicia's struggles and realizes the depth of the emotional abuse she endures. The voicemail becomes a vital proof for uncovering Alicia's gaslit reality. If not for this proof, no one from Alicia's social circle would have ever realized that she is a victim of gaslighting.

There are several reasons that no one noticed the signs of Mark's gaslighting. First, he successfully isolated Alicia from her friends, constantly influencing her behavior. Second, he intensified gaslighting dynamics gradually. Third, he created a positive public image, portraying himself as a concerned and loving spouse. Lastly, the slow progression made it difficult for Alicia herself and her social circle to discern gaslighting.

In conclusion, after revealing Alicia's abusive reality, we may wonder whether all the previous scenes reflected the true reality or if they depicted Mark's skillfully crafted reality. In retrospect, we realize that the affectionate public image Mark portrayed was part of his gaslighting strategy to shadow people's perception and conceal his harmful and abusive behaviors. The stark contrast between the fake reality and the true abusive reality serves as a clear reminder that gaslighters skillfully craft illusions with the aim of deceiving people. It emphasizes the crucial role of seeking external support from reliable people, gaining awareness, setting boundaries and keeping distance from manipulators in order to break free from the web of gaslighting.

Conclusion

The results of the study allow us to conclude that gaslighting is a form of manipulative communication that induces people to doubt their reality. It deliberately causes confusion, powerlessness and self-doubt, leading to devastating consequences. Victims systematically receive false information aimed at distorting their perception of reality and eroding sanity. Gaslightees lose confidence, become dependent and doubtful about their judgments and memory.

Our study of the film *Your Reality* has shown that gaslighting involves a series of manipulative tactics. Mark, as a skillful manipulator, gaslighted his spouse, Alicia, deriving distorted contentment from the act and seeking emotional and physical control. He presented one face to Alicia, another to the society, leaving them no chance to detect his malicious intentions. In the film, gaslighting occurred in cycles. At times, Mark did not actively exploit manipulative tactics, portraying himself as caring and loving. During these positive phases everything seemed normal, making Alicia doubt if her concerns were valid or if she was imagining and exaggerating problems in their relationship. Thus, these dynamics made it challenging for her to easily recognize signs of gaslighting.

Our analysis of Mark's behavior and his interaction with Alicia has revealed the following character traits contributing to the gaslighting dynamics:

- Lack of empathy: he consistently shows a lack of understanding for Alicia's and others' feelings and needs;
- Deception: he is skilled at presenting false information and distorting the truth;

- Arrogance: he looks down on Alicia, belittling her opinions and needs;
- Conceit: he demonstrates egotistic, boastful and pretentious attitude, seeking control;
- Deceptive charm: he uses his charismatic appearance to create a positive public image to gain trust;
- Lack of accountability: he avoids taking responsibility, denies his actions, shifting blame onto Alicia;
- Ambitious: he exploits others to achieve his goals, inducing them to comply with his desires.

To sum up, we can claim that due to these characteristic traits Mark employed various manipulative tactics for his gaslighting intention. These tactics include foot-in-the-door, love bombing, passive-aggressiveness, deflection, humblebrag, reciprocity, mirroring, guilt-tripping, silent treatment, future faking, concern trolling, fabricating, invalidating, false accusations, blame shifting, emotional blackmail, triangulation, masking, sowing seeds of doubt, distorting the reality. Employing derogatory language, emotionally colored words and expressions, deliberate gestures and facial expressions, Mark intensified the gaslighting effect.

Recognizing such manipulative tactics, seeking support and establishing clear boundaries are crucial for breaking free from the web of gaslighting and fostering genuine and healthy relationships built on mutual respect.

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Sources of Data

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ԳԱԶԼԱՅԹԻՆԳԻ ԼԵԶՎԱԿԱՆ ԴՐՄԵՎՈՐՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ ՄԻԶԱՆԶՆԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐՈՒՄ

Միրանուշ Ղալթախյան

Հոդվածի նպատակն է՝ ուսումնասիրել գազլայթինգի լեզվական դրսևորումները միջանձնային հարաբերություններում: Հոգելեզվաբանական քննության են ենթարկվել «Քո իրականությունը» կարճ հոգեբանական ֆիլմի գլխավոր հերոսներից մեկի կողմից կիրառվող մտաշահարկային մարտավարությունները, որոնք միտված են գազլայթինգի ենթարկելու գույքը կերտելուն: Փաստական նյութի քննությամբ պարզ է դառնում, որ տարբեր լեզվական և արտալեզվական միջոցների կիրառմամբ նա հաջողությամբ մոլորեցնում, իրականությունից կտրում է գույքը կերտելուն: Իջեցնելով նրա ինքնագնահատականը, արժեզրկելով հույզերն ու զգացողությունները՝ նա միտումնավոր կերպով աղճատում է իրականությունը՝ կասկածի տակ դնելով գույքը կերտելու հիշողությունը:

Բանալի բառեր՝ *մտաշահարկում, գազլայթինգ, հոգելեզվաբանական վերլուծություն, միջանձնային հաղորդակցում, խոսքային մտաշահարկային մարտավարություններ, ոչ խոսքային մտաշահարկային մարտավարություններ, հոգեբանական ճնշում:*