

WRITING WITH PAUL

Janet Beavin Bavelas
University of Victoria

Although *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) was a turning point in both our careers, it began in an almost offhand way with a conversation between Paul Watzlawick and Don Jackson in about 1964. Paul and I had been meeting with Don, trying to figure out Don's amazing clinical intuitions. Don was a well-known psychiatrist, the founder and Director of the Mental Research Institute, where we were working. During one of these meetings, he and Paul began to discuss a different topic, which was the possibility of a book that brought together some of the rich flow of ideas that the Palo Alto Group was producing and publishing. In a little over 10 years since the seminal double-bind paper (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956), a selection of their reprinted publications had already filled two volumes (Jackson, 1968a, 1968b). We began to take the idea of a book seriously, and soon Paul and I were meeting regularly to talk about a book. He was a research associate and psychotherapist with a PhD and I was Don's research assistant and staff writer, with an undergraduate degree in psychology.

As most of us know, there is a big distance between saying "we should write a book about that" and deciding more specifically what "that" is, much less actually writing it. In this case, there was such a wide range of topics to choose from. The ideas that were potentially available from our prolific group went in many directions: family therapy, the beginnings of brief therapy, and the possibility of a different approach to communication than the dominant information-transmission model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). No single book could cover it all.

However, Paul and I shared an intense interest in an alternative theory of communication, which was the direction we chose to pursue. Within the topic of communication, our interests were both overlapping and complementary in a fortunate way. He was, and remained, brilliant and articulate about theory and abstraction. For example, a well-read multivolume historical collection of work in mathematics was always on his desk at the time (and its influence is obvious in *Pragmatics*). But he was also an insightful observer, able to notice key examples of phenomena in therapy sessions, in everyday life, and even in movies and plays. (We once talked about writing a book on relationships as portrayed in the wonderful "foreign films" that were coming to North America in the 1960s; I am glad we did *Pragmatics* instead.) My interests were always more academic than clinical, but, like Paul, I was especially captivated by observation, by closely analysing actual interactions and building theory from them. It seemed perfectly natural—though in retrospect highly presumptuous—that we should set out to write a book proposing a new theory of communication, illustrated with examples from anywhere and everywhere. So we decided on an ambitious plan that corresponded to the eventual chapters of *Pragmatics*.

It is important to emphasize that, as the citations in the book show, the ideas we chose to cover were not just our own but usually drawn from the work of many others in the group. In organizing and synthesizing them, we inevitably focused on what interested us, often changing them as we sought to bring them together into a coherent version of our own. Integration is always a transforming and creative act. The guiding principle was one that Paul and I still talked about in our last conversation, 40 years later, with as much intellectual passion as before: the necessity to see beyond and outside individuals and to focus on their interactions, that is, on communicative rather than mental phenomena.

Address correspondence to Janet Beavin Bavelas, PhD, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, PO Box 3050 STN CSC, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada V8W 3P5; E-mail: bavelas@uvic.ca

It is worth noting how different Paul and I were in every superficial way including age, culture, background, education, and personal style. I admit to using those differences to tease or annoy him, and we often played off my brash New World youth against his mature old-world dignity. (When his eloquent disapproving looks were not enough, he could always counter my irreverence by stooping to puns, because I dislike them.) But we shared the same intellectual vision and, equally, were not embarrassed to pursue it with a passionate commitment, a combination that was a formative and lasting experience for me.

So the book was not just a matter of reporting on an existing set of ideas. We were at the same time weaving them into a broader, though avowedly tentative, theory as we went along. To create such a theory is, at first, to see it out of the corner of one's eye and then to work towards articulating it. It is often impossible to share this process with another person, but in that special bubble in time, we did. Later, Paul and I each told other people that this was the best writing partnership we ever had. Fortunately, besides similar theoretical and observational bents, we had surprisingly similar writing styles and a matching obsessiveness about the details. We edited everything the other one wrote, and there are many passages throughout *Pragmatics* that, literally, both of us wrote.

However, here is more or less how we divided up the work (with Paul writing his parts in the rapid two-fingered typing style that, as far as I know, continued to produce his many other books): Paul was the main author of Chapter 1 (The frame of reference). Together we wrote Chapter 2 (Some tentative axioms of communication). Paul was the main author of Chapter 3 (Pathological communication). I wrote Chapter 4 (The organization of human interaction) and its companion, Chapter 5 (A communicational approach to the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*—Paul had urged me to see the play when it was in San Francisco). Paul, who was a psychotherapist, which I was not and never have been, wrote Chapters 6, 7, and the Epilogue (Paradoxical communication, Paradox in psychotherapy, and Existentialism and the theory of human communication), with only collaborative editing from me.

We finished the manuscript by 1965 or early 1966, but it was held up until 1967 at Norton by epic battles with an overzealous copy editor. Paul had a not entirely facetious belief that this person was devoted to psychoanalysis and wanted to rewrite the book. I can still recall working through a manuscript that was doubled in size by hundreds of post-it notes (which served for editorial comments in those pre-electronic days), as it went back and forth to New York in a grim war of words. John Weakland was entirely more welcoming and published a preview article in a special issue on communication (Watzlawick & Beavin, 1967).

Besides the gift of a creative partnership, there is another equally deep debt that I owe Paul, namely, my coauthorship of the book. I was just enjoying what we were doing and expected to remain the background as with other work for Don. But as he and I began the actual writing, Paul apparently felt that my apprenticeship was over. On his own, he suggested to Don that I should be added as coauthor, and Don easily agreed to make it Watzlawick, Jackson, and Beavin. This simply had not occurred to Don; he was on to other things and had long since left us to it. As the book progressed further, Paul went back to Don, this time proposing that I should be second author, and again he agreed. So it is due to Paul, a conservative old-world male if there ever was one, that I received full credit for my contribution to *Pragmatics*.

We wrote with dedication and enthusiasm but with no fantasies of great success. Karl Pribram, who had written an important theoretical book a few years earlier (Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960), assured us that only libraries buy such books, which then go out of print. But to be in libraries was enough for us. Yet somehow, and I think this was Don's doing, the Behavioral Science Book Club bought *Pragmatics* as one of their selections, and it began to be known and to sell. In 1966, I entered graduate school, and the early royalties from the Book Club purchase, plus increasing sales, helped to finance my PhD. Thanks to Paul's travels and multilingual lecturing, the translations started soon after: German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian,

French, Portuguese, Japanese, and, just a few months ago, Greek. The book is often credited with launching a new field, but I am more touched when individuals come up to tell me that it helped them see new things.

Years ago, Paul and I decided to veto the idea of a paperback version, on the assumption that the book should just fade gracefully from the scene. But it is still selling, mainly in translation. I will continue to smile when the semiannual royalty check arrives, defying our modest expectations, but more wistfully now.

Once I started graduate school, Paul and I worked together less, as we followed our shared theme in different directions. Over our careers, Paul became more and more the theoretician, and I have been fortunate to continue to explore many of the early ideas with basic research in the lab (e.g., Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990; Bavelas, 2007). The mutual respect and mostly unspoken memory of the time we wrote together remained. In 1970, I emigrated to Canada and an academic career, but we almost always shared a meal when I was in Palo Alto or when a professional occasion took us to the same city. One treasured ritual was my sending him a Christmas card that had a photo of one or more of my pets on it. Paul loved animals, especially cats, but he admired my generations of Newfoundland dogs as well. He usually phoned on Christmas Day, in his uniquely formal and fond way, to thank me and to say how he admired the photo.

One Christmas a few years ago, he told me with a drollness that implicitly forbade any emotional reaction that he was now in the hands of "Dr. Parkinson and Dr. Alzheimer." As soon as the term break permitted, I flew down to see him. We met in his office at the Mental Research Institute, which had a bookcase full of the books he had authored and their translations. Those books represented exactly what he had wanted to do with his life, and I was so glad he had been extraordinarily successful. Our subsequent careers had taken our shared vision in different directions, often changing the details but never the central theme. So we talked candidly but briefly about his condition and soon fell into talking about seeing behavior as communication in a social context. We were two old comrades in whom this intellectual passion was still central, and with each other there was, as ever, no embarrassment about our commitment.

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