

# Not hearing things – Hearer/listener categories in polylogues

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## 1. Introduction

The canonical *dyadic* model (Saussure 1974 [1916]; Shannon and Weaver 1949; Jakobson 1960), the bedrock of many pragmatic and cognitive frameworks of communication, assumes that meanings are produced by the *sender* (speaker or writer) and interpreted by the *receiver* (hearer or reader). However, as evidenced by any empirical conversational data, human communication tends to be based not on *dialogues* but on *polylogues*, i.e. conversations held by more than two interlocutors, which the dyadic model fails to capture. Several authors have observed the need to distinguish more *participant* (speaker and/or hearer) roles (Hymes 1972, 1974; Goffman 1981a [1976], 1981c [1979], 1981d; Bell 1984, 1991; Levinson 1988; Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1987, 1992; Clark 1996).

The primary goal of the paper is to advance a new classification of *hearer* categories in multi-party conversations, contesting several tenets underlying the existing proposals. The model propounded in the paper is valid primarily for fictional conversational situations in film discourse, represented by a chosen sitcom. This type of mediated discourse is chosen due to its interpretative availability to the viewer, for whose benefit (both understanding and pleasure) it is construed. It should be noted that real-life discourse and fictional discourse may display differences in conversational topics and interlocutors' intentions, which are, however, of secondary importance here. More significantly, certain

tendencies peculiar to sitcom polylogues can be observed, given that hearer role assignment may sometimes be geared towards humorous effects. Nonetheless, with a reservation that some of the interactions described in the paper might be highly unlikely in authentic interpersonal encounters, it is hypothesised that the categorisation of hearer roles will be the same also in real-life polylogues. To reformulate, the underpinning assumption is that at the *inter-character level* (Dynel 2010), hearers display roles reminiscent of those recurrent in real-life conversations.

The theoretical discussion is exemplified with extracts of polylogues derived from “Friends”, a famous American sitcom, which was shot and originally aired for ten seasons between 1994 and 2004. Its sketchy plot revolves around the lives of six characters: Monica, Rachel, Phoebe, Ross, Chandler and Joey. The choice of this sitcom as the source of examples is not justified by any particular reason, while the taxonomy of hearers/listeners is argued to be widely applicable across multifarious types of polylogues. Particular instances illustrating postulated theses represent a diversity of interactional situations, whose list by no means exhaustive. It is only the categorisation of hearers that is posited as a closed set, which exhibits the whole gamut of realisations in particular contexts.

## **2. Hearer roles in conversations: Literature survey**

Questioning the dyadic model, a number of researchers evolve their classifications of participants, which will be succinctly presented. Bearing in mind the word limit, only the most fundamental issues will be addressed.

Hymes (1972) is one of the first to have pinpointed the problem of the dyadic model and expands it, postulating beside the *speaker/sender*, the *addressor* and the *hearer/receiver/audience*, yet failing to enlarge on the terms or to account for illegitimate listeners.

The first full-fledged classification inclusive of unratified hearers, albeit not presented in an organised manner, is credited to Goffman (1981a [1976], 1981c

[1979], 1981d). It should be highlighted at the outset that Goffman never elaborated a complete model, but entertained a number of loosely linked ideas. Goffman proposed a *production format* and a *participation network* (1981d: 226), in reference to speakers and hearers respectively. Within the latter, there are a few *listeners* (Goffman 1981a [1976], 1981c [1979]), *hearers* (Goffman 1981c [1979], 1981d) or *recipients* (1981a [1976], 1981c [1979]) of talk. Goffman (1981c [1979]) also refers to the listening party as the *participant*. This category embraces the speaker as well, which gives rise to ambiguity in Goffman's use of the term "participant" in reference to either the speaker and hearer or solely the hearer.

Goffman (1981d) divides hearers into *ratified/official* and *unratified/non-official* groups. The ratified type is fully entitled to listen to the speaker, contrary to the non-official one, i.e. the bystander. Within the ratified types, Goffman (1981c [1979]) differentiates between the "addressed recipient", i.e. "the one to whom the speaker addresses his visual attention and to who, incidentally, he expects to turn over his speaking role" (1981c [1979]: 133) and the rest of the "official hearers" who are not addressed (Goffman 1981a [1976]: 9, 1981c [1979]: 133).

Bystanders are normally constrained by etiquette, and expected not to listen and even to "maximally encourage the fiction that they aren't present" (Goffman 1981c [1979]: 132). When they do listen, unratified hearers are dichotomised into two types, depending on their (lack of) intention to listen to the talk, viz. "inadvertent" hearer, i.e. *overhearer*, and "engineered" follower of talk, i.e. *eavesdropper* (Goffman 1981a [1976]: 9, 1981c [1979]: 132). What Goffman appears to suggest is that a bystander may listen to a conversation by chance "without much effort or intent" (1981c [1979]: 132) or may "surreptitiously exploit the accessibility" (1981c [1979]: 132), respectively. This criterion appears to be elusive, as discussed later in the present article. In the light of Goffman's claim that "those who *overhear*, whether or not their unratified participation is inadvertent and whether or not it has been encouraged" (Goffman 1981a [1976]: 9), one more criterion for the overhearer vs. eavesdropper subdivision can be distinguished, depending on whether the interactants aim to be overheard. The encouraged type will be here relabelled as a ratified participant.

Extending Goffman's postulates, Bell (1984, 1991) advocates a *person and role* framework, in which he delineates *audience roles/participants/parties* (Bell 1991: 91). Bell thus distinguishes the *addressee* (the hearer known, ratified and addressed), the *auditor* (known and ratified but not addressed), the *overhearer* (a non-ratified hearer of whom the speaker is cognisant) and the *eavesdropper* (a non-ratified hearer whose presence is not known, let alone ratified, who listens in on the speaker intentionally or by chance). What emerges as a distinctive feature of this model is that Bell discriminates between overhearers and eavesdroppers along the parameter of the speaker's awareness of and, obliviousness to, their presence, respectively. As regards overhearers, Bell draws a distinction between *unacquainted* overhearers (e.g. strangers on a bus) and *acquainted* overhearers, "for whom the speaker may specifically design an utterance" (Bell 1984: 177). However, overhearers who are unfamiliar to speakers may as well have an utterance designed. Whether or not familiar to the speaker, overhearers who are meant to listen to an interaction are here viewed as ratified hearers, notably third parties, not overhearers.

Levinson (1988) subdivides the two main dyadic roles into the *source* (origin of message) or the *speaker* (utterer), and the *target* (destination of message) or the *addressee* (proximate destination), depending on whether they are "*participants* in an utterance event", on the assumption that the source and the target may not be (Levinson 1988: 170). In Levinson's (1988: 174) view, participants are those sharing the *channel link(age)*, "or ability to receive the message" contingent on a number of conditions, the most fundamental of which are being within audible range and sharing the communicative code. On the other hand, Levinson simultaneously argues that "being a PARTICIPANT has something to do with what Goffman calls a 'ratified role'" (Levinson 1988: 174), and hence a participant is "a party with a ratified channel-link to other parties" (Levinson 1988: 170). This leads to a contradiction or, at least, to a dubious status of Goffman's unrated participants, who do share the channel-link, but, who are not ratified. Ultimately, separating the two criteria, Levinson (1988: 171-174) propounds a systematised categorisation of sets of roles, depending on binary properties, whose results are tabulated below.

	address	recipient	participant	channel-link
Participant reception roles				
interlocutor	+	+	+	+
indirect target	-	+	+	+
intermediary	+	-	+	+
audience	-	-	+	+
Non-participant reception roles				
overhearer	-	-	-	+
targeted overhearer	-	+	-	+
ultimate destination	-	+	-	-

#### Levinson's (1988: 172-173) reception roles

A party who displays the four features is dubbed *interlocutor* (usually called simply the addressee). Levinson (1988) introduces also the role of the *indirect target*, who is a recipient and a (channel-linked) participant. Another individual who is addressed and, consequently, participates in the utterance event, yet is not the recipient, is called the *intermediary*. The *audience* is a participant who is neither the addressee nor the recipient. Among non-participants, Levinson (1988) distinguishes the *overhearer*, who is only channel-linked, the *targeted overhearer*, who is channel-linked and who is the recipient, and the *ultimate destination*, who is absent from the exchange but is the recipient of the message.

The classification appears to suffer from the vagueness of “recipientship”, understood as “who a message is for”. A vexing question is who determines whether an utterance is significant to an individual, on the production or reception end. It should be noted that this significance need not be solely of informational value, as Levinson (1988: 179) concedes mentioning the “attitudinal” aspect. The problem of recipientship engenders a blurred borderline between the intermediary and the interlocutor, as well as between the audience and the indirect target. Most significantly, the concept of “targeted overhearer” appears to be doubt-provoking. If an overhearer is actually a recipient type, it

might be feasible to reconceptualise the category as a (ratified) participant, whereby an overlap would occur with the indirect target, and thus the audience, the boundary between them being fuzzy.

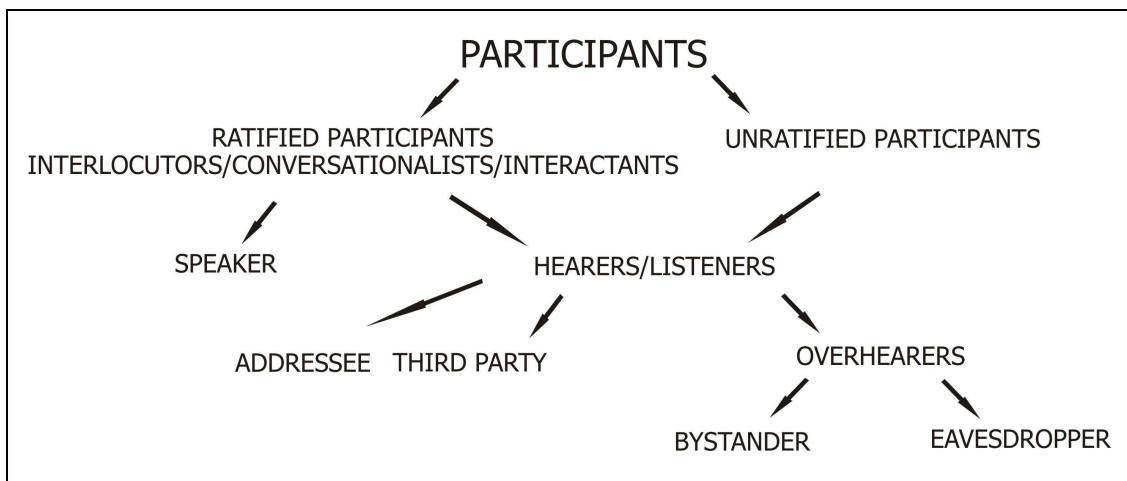
Finally, using Goffman's framework as the bedrock, Clark and co-workers (Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1987, 1992; Clark 1996) propose their own classification of hearer roles. The authors champion differentiation between *participants*, dichotomised into *addressees* and *side participants*, and *nonparticipants*, i.e. *overhearers*, comprising *bystanders* and *eavesdroppers* (Clark and Schaefer 1992). The latter two are later presented as opposite poles of a continuum of overhearer types (Clark 1996). The former are present and capable of listening to conversationalists, who are aware of their presence and capacity to overhear, while the latter listen to interchanges, unbeknown to interlocutors. This division mirrors Bell's between overhearers and eavesdroppers. However, Clark and Schaefer (1992) note that here are also several other situations, e.g. interlocutors may not be aware of bystanders' presence, or may realise that they are listened to by eavesdroppers. Overhearers are viewed as nonparticipants (Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1992). This may not be a fully substantiated claim, since overhearers who listen (which is viewed as a sine qua non for their being labelled as overhearers) to a conversation do participate in the interaction, even if illegitimately or passively. Goffman's bifurcation into ratified vs. non-ratified participants appears to resolve this problem.

### **3. Hearer roles in conversations: A new categorisation**

As understood here, the *participant* is any individual who partakes in a *conversation/interaction*, whether or not legitimately (with the speaker's legitimisation) and whether or not actively contributing to it. A *nonparticipant* is, therefore, someone absent or someone physically present but unable to hear the talk or garner any meanings conveyed non-verbally. Participants are divided into *unratified participants* and *ratified participants*, used synonymously with *interlocutors*, *conversationalists* or *interactants*, who embrace the *speaker* and *ratified hearers/listeners*. The speaker is a participant whose *turn* is in progress

(Goodwin 1981), i.e. who is producing an *utterance*, a stream of speech of varied length terminated by a pause and/or another interactant's verbal contribution. Participant roles are constantly negotiated between interlocutors, according to regular *turn-taking* procedures (e.g. Argyle 1969; Yngve 1970; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Sacks et al. 1974/1978; Schenkein 1978; Duncan 1974; Allen and Guy 1974; Levinson 1983; Goodwin 1981). Also, one role may be performed by a number of individuals simultaneously, which is here indicated by the epithet "*collective*".

Based on the main division of participants, hearers are dichotomised into ratified and unratified types. The former conflate the *addressee* and another interactant, for lack of a better term, called the *third party*. Levinson's (1988) concept of "target" is avoided here, given its use in humour research, i.e. the butt of aggressive humour, while the term "recipient" or "audience", both recurrent in literature, is reserved for yet another participant discussed in the context of media discourse (Dynel 2010, forth). Unratified hearers, also referred to as *overhearers*, are participants who listen to a conversation without the speaker's (and usually ratified hearers') authorisation. They are divided into *bystanders* and *eavesdroppers*.



Participants in one conversational turn/utterance

### 3.1. Participant vs. non-participant

If an individual is absent or is in the vicinity of interacting participants but happens to be oblivious to an utterance or a non-verbally conveyed meaning (which is of secondary importance here), he/she is a non-participant in a particular contribution. *Nota bene*, Goffmanian *non-focused interactions* reliant upon an individual's presence and emergent meta-messages, e.g. concerning his/her appearance and identity, are not taken into account here. A non-participant may have his/her perception constricted and/or may be engrossed in a different activity, paying no heed to the interaction. It should be noted that while a visual perceiver can easily block the latter channel of communication (by averting his/her gaze), aural perception is more difficult to control, unless one has headphones or ear plugs. Otherwise, when an individual is within earshot, he/she stands a strong chance of gleaning some meanings, whether or not entirely purposefully. The view espoused here is partly at variance with Goffman's claim (1981e: 3) that "all those who happen to be in the perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it." On the other hand, Goffman conceptualises participants as those who do listen to a conversation, rightly observing that even "ratified receivers may not be actually listening" (1981c [1979]: 133). This twofold definition leads to ambivalence as regards the participant vs. non-participant status. Moreover, the speaker's will to communicate meanings to the hearer is not a reliable criterion, which is in contrast to what Levinson (1988) avers, inasmuch as there are also participants of the unratified type, who are not meant to garner meanings and yet do. Additionally, due to channel obstructions, speaker-intended ratified hearers may not be able hear the speaker's utterance at all, and thus emerge as non-participants, oblivious to any communicative turn having taken place. In the light of the above, the participant is perceived as an individual who can hear, and listens to (and frequently also sees), the speaker convey meanings to him/her and/or to another participant. The example below illustrates that two interactions may run parallel in one room, the interlocutors within either dyad being non-participants from the perspective of the other, save one moment when one speaker communicates nonverbally with a hearer from the other pair of conversationalists.

## Example 1

(Monica and Chandler are throwing a Thanksgiving party. They are entertaining a guest, Will, Monica and Ross's friend from high school, who was bullied by Rachel due to his obesity. All participants are standing. Will and Ross are conversing in one corner of the room, while Monica is standing in the opposite corner, where she is later joined by Rachel, when she has entered the flat.)

1. **Will:** I'm a commodities broker.
2. **Ross:** Really? Yeah that-that sounds interesting.
3. **Will:** Yeah, it's not. But I'm rich and thin.

[...]

4. **Ross:** So how long are you in town?
5. **Rachel:** Hi!
6. **Monica:** Hey sweetie. Oh good.
7. **Will:** (glaring at Rachel) Rachel Green.
8. **Ross:** Aw... oh, that's right. Are you going to be okay?
9. **Will:** Oh, I'll-I'll be fine. Just God I hate her Ross! I hate her!
10. **Ross:** Will, high school was-was a long time ago.
11. **Will:** Look at her standing there with those yams! My two greatest enemies, Ross: Rachel Green and complex carbohydrates
12. **Rachel:** (sees Will) Oh my God Monica, who is that?
13. **Monica:** That's Will from high school!
14. **Rachel:** Oh! I do not remember him! Wow! He's really got that sexy, smouldering thing going on.
15. **Will:** (angrily staring at Rachel, distinctly mouths) I hate you.
16. **Rachel:** Oh my God, he's... Look at the way he's just staring at me. I think he's trying to mouth something to me, but I can't make it out.

Season 8, Episode 8

A dyadic conversation between Ross and Will (1-4) is topically affected by Rachel's appearance (7-11), who starts an interaction with Monica (5-6), reliant also on Will's presence (12-14). Regardless of this interdependence, it is not until Will's non-vocalised utterance (a relatively rare phenomenon), coupled with his non-verbal message, to Rachel (15) that the two become interactants for one turn. Even though Rachel cannot grasp its import, she does register the message and, consequently, produces a response (16) addressed to Monica, with the author of the preceding contribution being a non-participant in her utterance, given that he is out of hearing range.

## Example 2

(At Christmas, Ross, dressed up as an armadillo, and Chandler, in Santa Clause's costume, meet at Monica and Chandler's to entertain Ben, Ross's son. Initially, all participants are gathered in a circle.)

1. **Monica:** Okay Ben, why don't you come open some more presents, and Santa, the Armadillo and I have a little talk in the kitchen? There's a sentence I'd never thought I'd say.

(While Ben stays in the living room, the adults walk into the adjoining kitchen, stand in a circle and lower their voices.)

2. **Ross:** (facing Chandler) What are you doing?

3. **Chandler:** You called everyone and said you were having trouble finding a Santa costume, so I borrowed one from a guy at work!

4. **Ross:** Thank you, but, but you, you gotta leave.

5. **Chandler:** Why?

6. **Ross:** Because, I'm finally getting him excited about Hanukkah, and, and you're-you're wrecking it.

7. **Chandler:** But I didn't get to shake my belly like a bowl full of jelly.

8. **Ross:** I'm sorry Chandler, but this, this is really important to me.

9. **Chandler:** Fine, I'll give the suit back.

(Ross turns around and walks back to Ben.)

10. **Monica:** (teasingly, to Chandler, twirling his beard) Hey, you think, you can keep it another night?

## Season 7, Episode 10

Once Monica has informed Ben of their willingness to talk in private (1), the three adult conversationalists assume the attitude of *full concealment* (see section 3.3) towards the child by moving to the kitchen and lowering their voices so that he cannot hear them. Earlier the addressee, Ben becomes a non-participant, not an overhearer, as he does not appear to be able to hear anything from the three adults' interchange. It is comprised of a few intertwining turns produced by the two men, who alternate in their speaker and addressee roles, while Monica acts as the third party (2-9), ratified in the interaction but not contributing to it verbally. With Ross having joined Ben, thereby gaining the position of a non-participant, Monica becomes the speaker and addresses her private utterance to Chandler, the sole ratified hearer left, i.e. the addressee (10).

### **3.2. Addressee vs. third party**

In the case of dyadic conversations, the speaker need not choose the addressee, who at some point becomes the next speaker, for the interlocutor naturally presupposes his/her address and turn to talk. However, when more conversationalists are present, no such certainty is guaranteed, irrespective of whether the speaker addresses one or more hearers simultaneously. Participants normally jointly negotiate their statuses via non-verbal (e.g. eye gaze) and verbal means (e.g. second person pronouns) (Goodwin 1979, 1981). Nonetheless, this need not always be the case, as the speaker may not be able to sit vis-à-vis, or maintain eye contact with, the addressee, for instance out of shyness or when the addressee is collective. Secondly, while it is sometimes assumed that the addressee is a participant entitled to reply (Goffman 1981c [1979]), there are interactions when no reply is expected at all, e.g. in the case of a longer monologic performance. The criterion of the right to respond will also be fallible if the addressee is collective and would not be able to respond simultaneously. Additionally, a speaker may self-select to take the floor (Sacks et al. 1974).

What is crucial, the third party participates in a conversation on a similar basis as the addressee, even if feeling that the utterance is addressed to another individual. Moreover, the speaker may overtly address one participant, while intending to communicate meanings primarily to another ratified hearer (see examples 9 and 10), while meanings communicated to each of the ratified participants may be similar or divergent. This feature looms large in the case of disaffiliative humour (Dyrel 2010, forth). In the light of the above, differentiating between the addressee and another ratified participant, i.e. the third party, may not always be possible and actually of little importance, as long as the speaker means both types of ratified participants to listen to his/her utterance and interpret it. The two examples below testify to the complexity of polylogues held by ratified participants.

### Example 3

(Phoebe enters Central Perk, the friends' favourite café, with all the other five central characters already there, sitting in a semi-circle on a three-piece suite.)

1. **Phoebe:** Hi guys!
2. **All:** Hey, Pheebs! Hi!
3. **Ross:** Hey. Oh, oh, how did it go?
4. **Phoebe:** Um, not so good. He walked me to the subway and said 'We should do this again!'
5. **All but Rachel and Phoebe:** Ohh. Ouch.
6. **Rachel:** What? He said 'we should do it again', that's good, right?
7. **Monica:** Uh, no. Loosely translated 'We should do this again' means 'You will never see me naked'.
8. **Rachel:** Since when?
9. **Joey:** Since always. It's like dating language. You know, like 'It's not you' means 'It is you'.
10. **Chandler:** Or 'You're such a nice guy' means 'I'm going be dating leather-wearing alcoholics and complaining about them to you'.
11. **Phoebe:** Or, or, you know, um, 'I think we should see other people' means 'Ha, ha, I already am'.

### Season 1, Episode 3

Phoebe's first utterance (1) is addressed to a collective addressee, viz. all the people present, who duly produce a synchronic collective speaker's response (2). Taking the floor, and choosing to "self-select as next speaker" (Sacks et al. 1974: 711), one ratified participant addresses his turn (3) to Phoebe, the addressee, but simultaneously directs it to all the third parties present, also interested in receiving an answer to the question posed. The answer (4) is addressed to the previous interlocutor and directed to everybody present, eliciting the collective speaker's response (5). The floor is then taken by another participant who poses a question (6) not addressed to any particular interlocutor in isolation, which means that all conversationalists are the addressees and any of them is legitimised to respond. Indeed, one does produce a reply (7), directing it to the previous speaker, now the addressee, and to all the third parties. This prompts the previous speaker's/current addressee's response in the form of an additional question (8). However, rather than evoking a response from the chosen addressee, it is met with another third party's response (9),

followed by two more contributions from self-selected ratified participants (10, 11), the third parties to the question (8).

Similar is the case of another scene, exhibiting an interaction of the collective addressee and the collective third party, gender being the criterion.

#### Example 4

(All the friends are sitting in a semi-circle in Central Perk.)

1. **Monica:** What you guys don't understand is, for us, kissing is as important as any part of it.
2. **Joey:** Yeah, right! ...You serious?
3. **Phoebe:** Oh, yeah!
4. **Rachel:** Everything you need to know is in that first kiss.
5. **Monica:** Absolutely.
6. **Chandler:** Yeah, I think for us, kissing is pretty much like an opening act, you know? I mean it's like the stand-up comedian you have to sit through before Pink Floyd comes out.
7. **Ross:** Yeah, and-and it's not that we don't like the comedian. It's that that... that's not why we bought the ticket.
8. **Chandler:** The problem is, though, after the concert's over, no matter how great the show was, you girls are always looking for the comedian again, you know? I mean, we're in the car, we're fighting traffic... basically just trying to stay awake.
9. **Rachel:** Yeah, well, word of advice: Bring back the comedian. Otherwise next time you're going to find yourself sitting at home, listening to that album alone.
10. **Joey:** (pause)...Are we still talking about sex?

Season 1, Episode 1

In this exchange of six ratified participants, the first speaker's utterance (1) is directed to three male addressees and two third parties, the two women. While the immediate response (2) is addressed to the producer of the first turn, the response (3) is provided by another interlocutor, i.e. initially the third party. The following two contributions made consecutively by two female conversationalists (4, 5) appear to be directed at all male addressees, and the third parties, i.e. the remaining two women. In view of their content, the consecutive three utterances contributed by two male conversationalists (6, 7, 8) emerge as being oriented towards female addressees and the remaining male third parties. The response coming from a female interlocutor (9) is, on the other hand, addressed to male

conversationalists, but also aimed at the female third parties. The interchange closes with the speaker's question addressed to all hearers (10).

### **3.3. Bystanders vs. eavesdroppers**

Bystanders and eavesdroppers comprise the category of unratified hearers. It is here argued that although overhearers do not contribute verbally to a conversation, they deserve to be treated as participants, not non-participants, as suggested by Levinson (1988) or Clark and co-researchers (Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1987, 1992), insofar as they do participate in interactions, by construing meanings on the basis of speakers' utterances.

It is the speaker's awareness of/obliviousness to an unratified participant that is the determining factor of the overhearer status attribution, since the way an utterance is formed is the speaker's responsibility, while all hearers, ratified or not, interpret it as they see fit. Sometimes the speaker's and the ratified hearer's/hearers' attitudes to overhearers may be divergent. Should the addressee's (or the third party's) vantage points not be compatible with the speaker's, the divergence will show when the hearer assumes the position of the speaker and contributes his/her own utterance.

Overhearers are divided into *bystanders* and *eavesdroppers*. The difference between the two is premised on a criterion different to the one that may arise in the light of folk understandings of the terms. This is particularly salient in the case of the bystander, who is defined as, not merely an accidental witness to a conversation, but a party listening to a conversation. It might be tempting to follow Goffman's (1981c [1979]) criterion, i.e. whether or not the overhearer (in Goffman's parlance, the bystander) instigates the listening process purposefully, having engineered the overhearing act. Thus, whilst a bystander's overhearing begins inadvertently and somewhat innocuously, an eavesdropper contrives to listen to the speaker on purpose. However, this conceptualisation is elusive, because listening is, by nature, a controlled, purposeful action, while only hearing is not. An unintentional act of hearing can occur when aural

perception cannot be blocked (e.g. in the absence of headphones or engrossing mental activity). Prospective bystanders may, however, choose not to listen to a conversation (even if they are capable of hearing it), in which case they do not become bystanders, but remain non-participants. Nevertheless, if hearing is not terminated, it easily develops into (partial) listening conducive to meaning generation. Even a chance witness may grow preoccupied with, or at least partly interested in, the ongoing talk, hence intentionally (even if not always willingly) becoming an overhearer, i.e. an unratified participant. The criterion of the inadvertent vs. planned act of overhearing may then be employed only as a variable of secondary importance.

The distinction is made on the strength of another factor, i.e. whether or not the speaker (frequently, together with the hearer or hearers) realises he/she is, or at least may be, listened to, as advocated by Bell (1984, 1991), as well as Clark and co-researchers (Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1987, 1992). Admittedly, some overlap can be perceived with the other criterion, namely the (covert) eavesdropper's being planned and frequently mischievous and the (overt) bystander's being spontaneous and accidental. This point of convergence, manifesting itself in prototypical contexts, does not mean that intermediate cases cannot be found (cf. Clark and Schaefer 1992).

According to Clark and Schaefer (1992), speakers may assume several attitudes towards overhearers, which can be grouped into four categories: *indifference* (speakers take no heed of whether overhearers can grasp the meanings conveyed), *concealment* (speakers overtly hinder overhearers' understanding, which the latter acknowledge), *disclosure* (speakers design utterances with a view to being understood by overhearers), and *disguisement* (disclosure of a misrepresentation; speakers conspiratorially facilitate overhearers' comprehension, as a result of which the latter draw ill-advised inferences). Nevertheless, a belief is espoused that only the first two are possible attitudes towards overhearers, bystanders to be exact (of whom speakers are aware), inasmuch as the speaker does not wish to communicate meanings towards unratified hearers. Consequently, the speaker either neglects the bystander, heedless of what the latter can infer, or renders the latter's

comprehension processes more challenging/impossible, when talking to the ratified hearer. Furthermore, a claim can be ventured that *full concealment* on the interlocutors' part, which gives rise to their inaudibility to a potential overhearer, puts the latter in the position of a non-participant (cf. example 2 above).

Moreover, an act of eavesdropping is conducted without the speaker's awareness, and sometimes by stealth. The speaker, oblivious to the unrated hearer's presence, talks freely, not bothering to employ any attitude to the latter. It would be wrong to assume that the speaker is indifferent, since this attitude also rests on the speaker's consciousness of an unrated participant's presence.

#### Example 5

(All characters are in a Barbados hotel. Phoebe, Monica and Chandler are standing face to face in one room. There's a door slamming in Ross's room next door, and some indistinct murmuring can be heard.)

1. **Monica:** Yeah, you can hear everything through these stupid walls.
2. **Phoebe:** Sounds like he's with someone.
3. **Chandler:** He could be alone. This morning I heard him do push-ups, and then talk to his triceps.
4. **Monica:** Wait a minute, I think Phoebe's right. You know I hear someone else in there with him.

(They all put their ears against the wall to be able to hear what's being said. The camera moves to Ross's room where he and Charlie, his girlfriend, are kissing.)

5. **Charlie:** Ooh... Dr. Geller!
6. **Ross:** God, you're amazing... I didn't even have to ask you to call me that.
7. **Monica:** Oh my God, that's Charlie!

Season 19, Episode 1

Unable to hear distinctly the conversation in the adjacent room, the three interlocutors resort to a dishonest means to be able to eavesdrop on two conversationalists oblivious to anybody's overhearing them (5-6). While this instance corroborates that eavesdroppers are intent on hearing the talk from the outset, in the one below, the eavesdropping act starts innocuously. Also, in the

context of the next example, a question arises as to what happens if the speaker should discover that he/she is being listened to. Admittedly, this does change the status of the overhearing party, who thus instantly becomes a bystander even if he/she does not recognise the fact that the hitherto covert act has already transpired. The speaker and the hearer may thus pursue their conversation as if nothing had happened, albeit employing the attitude of indifference or concealment towards the bystander. On the other hand, once the eavesdropping act is disclosed, the eavesdropper's status may change into that of a ratified participant.

#### Example 6

(Rachel walks quietly into Joey's room, but Joey cannot see her, absorbed in rehearsing his speech, which he hopes to deliver at an awards ceremony if he is chosen Best Actor.)

1. **Joey:** (pretending to be an announcer) And the winner is...Joey Tribbiani! (Joey gets excited and goes over to the counter to practice his acceptance speech using a bottle of maple syrup as the award.) Oh... Wow! I honestly never expected this. I uh, I didn't prepare a speech. But umm, I'd like to thank (Rachel enters quietly) my parents, who've always been there for me. I'd also like to thank my friends, Chandler, Monica, Phoebe, Rachel...
2. **Rachel:** I'm fourth! (Joey is startled.) Look at you with your little maple syrup award!
3. **Joey:** Yeah may... maybe you don't tell anyone about this.

#### Season 7, Episode 18

In this classic example of a speech rehearsal (1), a type of *self-talk* (cf. Goffman 1981b [1978]), the speaker first impersonates another persona and then communicates with an imagined addressee, i.e. his audience. Joey is caught red-handed performing the embarrassing act by an eavesdropper, who happens to hear him purely by chance and becomes absorbed in the talk. Lingering in the room unbeknownst to the speaker, the eavesdropper performs a stealthy activity, albeit instigated by sheer fluke. Reacting to what she hears, Rachel reveals her presence (2) and, receiving Joey's response (3), asserts herself as a ratified participant.

In contrast to what is argued here for an eavesdropping act, the bystander's presence is overt to the speaker (and ratified hearers). The speaker is well aware that he/she may be, or even is, listened to. This is why the utterer will prototypically assume the attitude of concealment or indifference (Clark and Carlson 1982) towards the unratified party, who is not entitled to garner any meanings.

The next example also testifies that an eavesdropper may be purely inadvertent and unwilling to listen, emerging also as a bystander from another ratified hearer's perspective. Additionally, aware of the bystander's presence, interlocutors may assume the attitude of indifference to the former.

#### Example 7

(Ross comes over to Monica and Chandler's and finds Chandler sitting in the living room. They start conversing, with Ross standing a few meters away from Chandler. Monica is in the bathroom.)

1. **Ross:** Hey.
2. **Chandler:** Hey.
3. **Ross:** You have a blue tie that would go with this? Emma spit up on mine.
4. **Chandler:** Oh, yeah. But you have to give it back if I get a job. Of course, by that time in the future ties will be obsolete and we'll all be wearing silver jump suits.

(Monica storms out from the bathroom, heading towards Chandler and failing to see Ross.)

5. **Monica:** Hi, good morning, Lover! I've got to say after last night, I'm a little weak in the knees.
6. **Ross:** Here's an idea. You walk into a room...take a quick scan!
7. **Monica:** (Facing Ross) Sorry. (Facing Chandler) But I kind of have this feeling that we may have made a baby last night.
8. **Chandler:** Oh God, I have to tell you something. You're not pregnant.
9. **Monica:** What are you talking about?
10. **Chandler:** That thing that I have to do to make a baby. I faked it.
11. **Monica:** What!? You faked it?
12. **Ross:** You know what? I don't need a tie. I mean, it's better, open collar. You know, it's more casual (He leaves.)

Season 9, Episode 9

Oblivious to Ross's presence, Monica interrupts the conversation he has been holding with Chandler (1-4), whom she addresses on entering the room. From the addressee's viewpoint, Ross is a bystander to Monica's utterance (5). It carries a message, normally relayed in private, which Ross implicitly suggests, thereby revealing his presence to her (6). Having acknowledged it, as well as the inaptness of her earlier utterance (7), Monica, assumes the attitude of indifference towards him, as does her interlocutor. Consequently, Ross is made to participate passively in the two conversationalists' interaction (7-11) as a reluctant bystander, until he self-selects (Sacks et al. 1974) as the speaker and returns to the topic of his earlier dyadic conversation with Chandler (12).

As the example above also indicates, ratified participants (namely, the speaker, the addressee, and, if present, the third party) may enjoy different perspectives on the overhearer's presence. If one ratified participant starts appreciating the presence of an overhearer (whether inadvertent or purposeful), the former can signal this to the interlocutor, whose verbal performance may change accordingly. On the other hand, keeping another ratified participant in the dark may be motivated by the knowing party's intention to deceive him/her.

#### Example 8

(The scene takes place in Monica and Chandler's kitchen, where Monica, Chandler and Joey are eating breakfast. Joey is intent on not meeting Rachel.)

1. **Joey:** (hearing Rachel and jumping up with his plate) Oh God! That's Rachel!
2. **Monica:** Joey, you have to talk to her!
3. **Joey:** No-no, I can't! I can't! Not after the other night, it's just it's...too weird, okay? Don't tell her I'm here! (Turns to run to the bathroom and his bagel falls off the plate onto the floor.) Don't eat that! (Runs to the bathroom as Rachel enters.)
4. **Rachel:** Hey!
5. **Chandler:** Hey!
6. **Monica:** Hey Rachel!
7. **Rachel:** Is Joey here?
8. **Chandler:** I don't see him. (To Monica) Do you see him?
9. **Monica:** I don't see him. Hey! Maybe he's in the sugar bowl! (Opens the sugar bowl) Joey? Nope! (Closes the sugar bowl and they both laugh.)
10. **Rachel:** Well, at least you make each other laugh.

Season 8, Episode 17

Initially the speaker, having hidden in the bathroom, Joey becomes an overhearer to the interaction between three interlocutors (2-10). Oblivious to the presence of anybody else but her two conversationalists (notably, addressees), to whom she addresses her utterances (4, 7, and 10), Rachel must perceive the latter's behaviour as most uncanny. The couple, on the other hand, behave strangely (fostering a humorous effect for the viewer's benefit) and address each other (8, 9) or even the allegedly absent party (9), owing to the presence of the bystander, which is not to be recognised by Rachel. Taking account of her obliviousness, Joey comes over as an eavesdropper from her perspective. On the other hand, Monica and Chandler are aware of Joey's presence and thus regard him as a bystander to their interchange with Rachel, which he may hear from the bathroom. Interestingly enough, Monica and Chandler's inept concealment and deception are not meant to disadvantage the bystander, to whom they seem to assume the attitude of indifference, but the ratified participant, whom they wish to delude.

### **3.4. Ratified hearers (third parties) vs. overhearers (bystanders)**

Controversial as it may be, it is here argued that alleged overhearers should be conceptualised as ratified participants, usually third parties, when speakers not only are heedful of them, but also intend to be listened to by them. The speaker thus assumes the attitude of disclosure or disguise (cf. Clark and Schaefer 1992) towards such bystanders, inclusive of initially undisclosed eavesdroppers whose (mischievous) activity is discovered. Thus, the speaker intends them to generate certain meanings, whether or not explicitly authorising their participation. The speaker's intention to communicate meanings to, and be understood by, a chosen party is propounded as the primary criterion for the differentiation between ratified and unratified hearers (Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1992). Normally, the speaker (and other ratified participants, on the whole) bear no conversational responsibilities towards unratified hearers (cf. Schober and Clark 1989), who are thus marginalised in the conversation and may fail to understand it, thanks to common-ground building strategies interlocutors use.

Therefore, a distinction should be drawn between the folk understanding of terms “overhearer”, “bystander” or “eavesdropper” and the formal conceptualisation of hearers to whom meanings are purposefully communicated. In non-theoretic terms, a physical context (e.g. being in a different room) or social context (e.g. a stranger in a train compartment) will, by default, grant a participant an unratified status in a conversation held by other conversationalists. This popular (mis)conception reverberates also in theoretical conceptualisations of hearer roles (Goffman 1981a [1976]; Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1992). Nonetheless, if the speaker of a turn appreciates the presence of such an initially illegitimate hearer and, rather than show indifference or concealment, wants him/her to glean some meanings, the latter assumes the position of a ratified hearer, usually the third party.

The speaker’s attitude to such a legitimised third party is reminiscent of that posited by Clark and Schaefer (1992) for other ratified hearers (in their terminology, participants, who embrace only the addressee and the side participant). This attitude is anchored in the speaker’s intentionality of communication, which is to be “openly informative” (Clark and Schaefer 1992: 225). Nevertheless, a few reservations must be made. First of all, communication is not tantamount to conveying (factual) information but may be oriented to achieving a plethora of other goals. Secondly, the openness parameter is questionable and elusive. It is by no means so that the speaker must explicitly state his/her intention to communicate meanings to ratified hearers (even the addressee), or otherwise indicate their ratified status, which is of vital significance to the hearer category in focus. Finally, speakers need not use literal language. From the examples the authors provide, a conclusion can be extrapolated that speakers need to do is follow the widely acknowledged Gricean model of Cooperative Principle, frequently flouting maxims, and hence generating implicatures.

#### Example 9

(Monica and Rachel are in the hall, sitting in front of Monica and Chandlers’ and Rachel and Joey’s flats. Rachel confides that she is willing to have an affair with Joey.)

1. **Monica:** You want to fool around with Joey?
2. **Rachel:** Yeah! You know, ever since I had that dream about him, and can't get it out of my head! And what's the big deal, people do it all the time!

[...]

3. **Monica:** Rachel, things can get incredibly complicated.
4. **Rachel:** All right, all right, you're right, I won't do anything with Joey, I just thought that we...

(Joey enters the hall.)

5. **Rachel:** Ok so that would be two cups of tarragon, one pound of baking soda and one red onion?

(Joey enters his flat and the two women's conversation is no longer within his earshot.)

6. **Monica:** What the hell are you cooking?!

Season 9, Episode 20

Once Joey unintentionally disrupts Monica and Rachel's private conversation (1-4), of which he is the focal subject, Rachel swiftly diverts the topic halfway through her turn (5), in case the bystander should listen to what she is saying. The irrelevant utterance, which is supposed to indicate culinary advice the speaker has received from the conversationalist (but amounts to a random and absurd list of ingredients), typifies disguise towards the third party, who would emerge as being a bystander in folk knowledge. Since the speaker construes the utterance solely for the latter's interpretation, instead of communicating meanings to the addressee, who, however, does understand the speaker's rationale, it is here posited that the accidental participant is actually a ratified hearer, not an overhearer, who is by nature unratified. This argument receives further support from the next example, which exhibits an interaction staged in front of a third party.

Example 10

(Ross and Joey are sitting at a table for four in Delmonico's Restaurant. The waiter is pouring water into their glasses.)

1. **Joey:** Can you believe they're still not here?

2. **Ross:** I know. A double blind date, and we both get stood up. What are the chances?
3. **Joey:** I know, I'm so bummed. Can we have our free crab cakes now?
4. **Waiter:** What?
5. **Joey:** We've been stood up. (sniffles) And we want our free crab cakes.
6. **Waiter:** Guys, give it a rest. Nobody's betting on you tonight. Although we do have a pool going to see how long it takes that guy to cry.

Season 9, Episode 14

In a canonical restaurant context, an interaction held by customers at a table puts the waiter in the position of a bystander (or an eavesdropper if customers are ignorant of his presence) if he is capable of hearing and actually listening to their communicative exchange. Here, however, the two conversationalists are well aware that they can be heard and actually want the alleged bystander to listen intently to their talk (1, 2, 3), providing him with all information as they see fit. Thereby, the two grant the latter the position of a third party, for whom their ostensibly dyadic speaker-addressee interchange is actually instigated, which becomes evident once an utterance is addressed to him (3). Consequently, the waiter, hitherto the third party and now the addressee, is invited to legitimately join in as the speaker (4), after which he is again the addressee (5) when Joey is talking on behalf of himself and the third party. *Nota bene*, whether or not the third party realises this, the first three turns produced by Joey and Ross are hinged on disguise, i.e. false information, of which the viewer should be cognisant on the strength of earlier events shown in the episode, as well as Ross's and Joey's stilted behaviour in the scene. The objectives underlying Joey's and Ross's utterances become overt halfway through the scene, when one of them explicitly issues their request (3, 5).

Moreover, a ratified participant reconceptualised as the third party may join in an interaction of interlocutors, who do not explicitly invite him to do thus, as the next instance also shows. Additionally, only one of interlocutors may wish another individual, non-interlocutor, to be able to hear the talk, treating him/her as a third party, while other interlocutors regard him/her as a bystander or non-participant.

## Example 11

(On the set, Joey is rehearsing a scene with Lennart, a famous actor. The crew are not satisfied with Joey's performance.)

1. **Lennart:** (muttering) My god in heaven.

(The producers, a man and a woman, stand up.)

2. **Producer 1:** Joey, hang on for a second. Lennart, can we talk to you for a moment?

(They stand a few metres away from Joey and start talking.)

3. **Lennart:** You, you gotta be kidding. See, h-he, he can't act.

(Joey hears this, and his disappointment is reflected in his facial expression).

4. **Producer 1:** (whispers something inaudibly)

5. **Lennart:** Hey! I-I-I don't care if he's hot, you know. If you want to sleep with him, do it on your own time. (Joey smiles smugly.) This is a play. No, listen: if you insist on this, I will call my agent so fast on a cell phone that has a connection that is so clear he's going to think I'm next door.

(Joey approaches the interlocutors.)

6. **Joey:** (interrupting their conversation) Ah, hi, ah. Thank you so much for whispering for my benefit, but, ah, look, if you just tell me what I did wrong, I'd just love to work on it and come back and try it again for you. And, and also (to the female Producer) 'How you doing?' (to Lennart again): You should, please, just give me another chance. I really want to get better, please.

## Season 9, Episode 15

In this exchange, Lennart makes no attempt at concealing his criticism of Joey (1, 3, 5), ascertaining that the latter hears it. Therefore, it can be argued that the former deems Joey as a third party, although he is treated as a non-participant by the other interlocutor, whose turn is inaudible (4) due to the full concealment employed. Having heard most of the conversation, as envisaged by one of the interlocutors, and responded non-verbally, Joey takes the liberty of contributing to the communicative exchange, addressing the interactants collectively and singly (6).

The postulate advanced above holds for situations when the speaker is mindful of the alleged overhearer's presence. Therefore, the "overhearer as the third party" thesis holds for bystanders but is not applicable to eavesdroppers unless at some point the speaker becomes cognisant of the latter's listening. It will thus obtain for eavesdroppers who have evolved into bystanders, i.e. hearers whose stealthy activity falls through or who willingly reveal their capacity to listen. Having discovered the presence of an unratified participant (and optionally his/her mischievous behaviour), the speaker controls the act of overhearing, by disclosing or disguising information as he/she chooses to. Sometimes, the eavesdropper may continue to assume that his/her participation is not presupposed, which results in a doubly deceitful act, with the speaker and overtly ratified hearer(s) having the upper hand. Alternatively, the eavesdropper may realise that his/her eavesdropping has been discovered. Which is the case may again be consistent with, or violate, the speaker's intention.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The present paper offered an extension of the dyadic model of communication, focusing on the diversity of hearer roles in fictional discourse of a sitcom. Drawing on a critical analysis of existing proposals (Hymes 1972, 1974; Goffman 1981a [1976], 1981c [1979], 1981d; Bell 1984, 1991; Levinson 1988; Clark and Carlson 1982; Schober and Clark 1989; Clark and Schaefer 1987, 1992; Clark 1996), a new classification of hearers was conceptualised, whose summary is presented in the table below. The final column presents the division of hearers created here. It should be highlighted that because authors assume diversified criteria, the categories listed horizontally are not always fully compatible, which is immediately relevant to unratified hearers.

Hymes (1972, 1974)	Goffman (1981a[1976], 1981c[1979], 1981d)	Bell (1984, 1991)	Levinson (1988)	Clark&Carlson (1982), Schober &Clark (1989), Clark&Schaefer (1987, 1992)	Here
	production format and participation network	participants/parties	production and reception roles		participants
speaker/sender	speaker	speaker	production roles		speaker
	ratified participants/hearers/listeners/recipients	ratified participants	reception roles: participants	participants	ratified hearers/listeners
addressor	addressed hearer	addressee	interlocutor intermediary	addressee	addressee
hearer /receiver/ audience	unaddressed official/ratified hearers	auditor	indirect target audience	side participants	third party
	unratified/non-official participants; bystanders	not ratified participants	reception roles: nonparticipants	nonparticipants/overhearers	unratified hearers/listeners/overhearers
	not encouraged (inadvertent) overhearer	unacquainted overhearer (speaker aware)	overhearer	bystander (speaker usually aware) eavesdropper (speaker usually not aware)	bystander
	not encouraged (engineered) eavesdropper	eavesdropper (speaker not aware)			eavesdropper
	encouraged overhearer	acquainted overhearer	targeted overhearer		(third party)
	encouraged eavesdropper				

### Conversation participants viewed by different authors

The article teased out a number of intricacies concerning non-participants and participants, notably ratified and unratified hearer types, in the context of participants' individual vantage points and turn-taking procedures. A most significant, yet controversial, postulate championed here concerns theoretical discrimination between the bystander and the third party, depending on the attitude the speaker assumes towards the hearer, most notably, whether the speaker intends to communicate meanings to him/her. Controversial as this thesis may seem, it is hoped not to have evoked the feeling in the readers that they must be hearing things.

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