

Grallimatics!

- the grammar of Bulls**t

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What makes something bullshit?

- Not lying
- It's “not caring whether things are true or even can be true”

Often recognized.

Seldom defined.



Why do we hate it?

- It ruins communication
- It pretends to be communication
- It's quick to ruin things
- It's hard to call out - takes too long to explain.
- The meta-message is disrespectful

My plan / point of this presentation:

- Identify the most used categories of BS
- Name them so they can be referred to
- By referral, calling bullshit can be quicker

Main categories of BS I will present

- “Straw man logic” – logical fallacies
- “Conflations” – concept fluffing
- “Colloquialism at will” – word play as excuse
- “Irresponsible Insinuations” – dodging accountability
- “Logical collapse” – actually not making sense

Straw man fallacy

Like in the popularized notion of a voodoo doll, where an attacker makes a straw man that resembles the intended victim and then cause injuries to the straw man in an attempt to hurt the victim, a straw man fallacy is when you attack an argument that **RESEMBLES** your opponent's argument, in an attempt to crush the opponent's actual argument.

Straw man bullshit

- Conflation straw man

Straw man bullshit

- Conflation straw man
- One chain-link straw man

Straw man bullshit

- Conflation straw man
- One chain-link straw man
- Bifurcation straw man

Conflations

- Concepts of similar, or partially equal, effect
 - A penny saved is a penny earned
 - Spend your way out of a recession
 - There's no such thing as a free lunch

Conflations

- Conflating rolls and relations, with the items
 - Our employees will be the best

Conflations

- Conflating relative and absolute metrics
 - We now have the biggest house on the street!
 - I'm now the highest paid person in the team!
 - Our department must be the most profitable.
 - I will be the best olympic figure skater.

Conflations

- Conflating descriptions with real qualities
 - Being a winner (having won at least once)
 - Become a winner! / You can be a winner!

Colloquialism at will

- Idiomatic meaning
- “When I left home this morning, locking my door was the last thing on my mind.”
- “We've made it harder to make any mistakes”

Colloquialism at will

- The “sprinkle of must” (removes responsibility)
- Works like magic to remove free will! :
- “We had to....” = We're not to blame.
- “You will have to...” = You must do as I say, but even though it sucks, you at least have a clear conscience.
- “We will have to...” = like above but we're not accepting responsibility ourselves either.

Colloquialism at will

- Nouning and reification
- The market, trends, indicators
- Human resources. (Not “humans” in teams.)
- “Quality Assurance” is very often just a title.

Colloquialism at will

- Adjective fetish

- Calling yourself “strategic” because you have a written strategy.

- “Agile”...

- “Green” cars...

Irresponsible insinuations

- Qualifiers are NOT like other adjectives
- Grammatically they are equal
- In your mind they match the pattern of “being some description of what ever the following noun is”
- Logically they're saying the following noun is not necessarily a correct description.
- Speaker gets to say, “without having said”.

Irresponsible insinuations

- The hard-working single mother
- The 33-year old bank robber
- The sadistic serial-killer

Irresponsible insinuations

- The hard-working single mother
- The 33-year old bank robber
- The sadistic serial-killer
- The suspected murderer

Logical collapse

- Often relies on familiar format, phrasing
- Either self-contradictory or logically can't be true

Logical collapse

- Self-contradiction / Meta-message conflict
 - Sokrates saying “This sentence is a lie”
 - Jedi saying “Only the Sith deals in absolutes”

Logical collapse

- Self-contradiction / Meta-message conflict
 - Sokrates saying “This sentence is a lie”
 - Jedi saying “Only the Sith deals in absolutes”
- Logically can't be true
 - Lottery saying “we wish everybody good luck”
 - Politician saying “no student should be below average”.

Further reading

- Book “On Bullshit” (2005) - Harry G Frankfurt, Professor emeritus of Philosophy, Princeton University
- “On the reception and detection of pseudo-profound bullshit” - Judgment and Decision Making (2015, By Pennycook et al)

What I hope you take with you:

- Bullshit is different from lying. Don't call a bullshitter a liar or you're bound to lose your case.
- Bullshit can be categorized by its structure.
- The shorthand for how something is BS can help you call it and describe it.

Overview

Straw man arguments

- Bifurcation
- Conflation
- Single chain link

Logical collapse

- Meta-message conflict
- Logically impossible

Irresponsible Insinuations

- Casual use of qualifiers as adjectives

Conflation

- Fuzzy definition boundary
- Similarity of effect
- Relation/item
- Absolute/Relative status

Colloquialism

- Idiomatic meaning
- A sprinkle of must
- Reification
- Adjective fetish

Thank you for your time!

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