

An Unknown Case of Speech Encryption

Dan Howitt

Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts, the United States of America)

E-mail: dth055@g.harvard.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1027-8917>

Howitt, Dan (2023) The Case of Tito and Soma Mukhopadhyay: Factitious Heroism by Proxy, Factitious Heroism, and Revealing the Deception Thereof for the Future of Autism Treatment. *Future Human Image*, Volume 20, 55-72. <https://doi.org/10.29202/fhi/20/6>

Profoundly autistic man Tito Mukhopadhyay has been presented as the perfection of the perfection of autism treatment. A cure for autism has of course never been devised. And no one even knows what kind of treatment could even possibly cure autism, because no one knows what the neurological mechanism of autism is. However, I demonstrate that Tito's communication therapist engaged in multifaceted communicative deception with him during the 2003 – 2017 extensive nationally televised presentations of the therapists' communicative method. The therapist is Soma Mukhopadhyay, who also is Tito's mother. It was not known that she was using a speech encryption method, nor other methods of deception. However, from the outset there was suspicion among a vast array of scientists, clinicians, etc., that she was, somehow, responsible for Tito's written communications. However, despite that they analyzed Soma's presentations with Tito, and published journal-articles on the "absence of evidence" that Tito, himself, was communicating, they were not able to auditorily observe the speech encryption, nor visually observe and auditorily observe the other methods of deception. That is, they were not able to observe "proof of deception". "Absence of evidence" and "proof of deception" are of course different. In 2008, a team of scientists who studied Soma and Tito for over 1 year, including the renowned Michael Merzenich, and in 2011 the renowned Oliver Sacks, concluded that there is an abundance of evidence that Tito himself is able to communicate via writing. However, I demonstrate that there is an abundance of proof of deception, and that Sacks, Merzenich, etc., were not able to observe the speech encryption and other methods of deception. (This article consists of revisions and a correction of my 2021 article).

Keywords: autism, speech encryption.

Received: 12 November 2023 / Accepted: 5 December 2023 / Published: 30 December 2023

Introduction and Method

Since he was eleven years old in 2000, to the present, Tito has been presented by Soma as being able to write-communicate and type-communicate not only normally, but at an advanced level, and on his own accord – that is, from an independent content of his mind – with the assistance of the Facilitated Communication method that she treats him with, which she refers to as the Rapid Prompting Method (Terrill, 2000; Blakeslee, 2002).

In this article, I provide my visual observations and auditory observations of the extensive nationally televised presentations of Soma; and my observations demonstrate that she, via speech encryption, and other methods of deception, engaged in what I refer to as “Factitious Heroism By Proxy”, and Factitious Heroism (Feldman, 2018: 100-103; Feldman, 2004: 102, 117).

The medium of my experimental study is the array of national television coverage of Soma presenting her method with Tito, and a journal-article in which a purported email-conversation between the author of the article and Tito is provided. The context of my study is an array of literature and media coverage on Tito and Soma, the Rapid Prompting Method, and Facilitated Communication.

My method was to visually assess and auditorily assess what transpired during the televised presentations of Soma’s method. With my observations, all persons can now observe what I observed.

The video of the televised presentations of Soma with Tito, which are extensive, are of the same, if not better, quality as an in-person study. Soma declined being studied in-person.

History of Facilitated Communication. A Major Development In Autism Education

In 1990, Douglas Biklen of the United States presented the 1970’s clinical communicative method of Rosemary Crossley of Australia, namely what is referred to as “Facilitated Communication”. Biklen is considered to be the first person to do so in the United States; and Crossley is considered to be the founder of the method (Biklen, 1990; Autism Parenting Magazine, 2021). Biklen states (Biklen, 1990: 291):

Jonathan Solaris cannot speak. David Armbruster can say a few words, usually unintelligible. ... I was not surprised by how either of them appeared. Theirs were the behaviors of autism. But what I did not anticipate was that their communication with me would assault my assumptions about autism and ultimately yield important lessons for education.

In 1995, the following article described the method, delineated its history, and argued that it is illegitimate (Jacobson et al., 1995).

Facilitated communication (FC) ... a teaching-treatment technique ... is a method of assisting people with severe developmental disabilities to communicate.

... this technique, which involves providing physical support to people with disabilities as they type out messages on a keyboard or letterboard, appears to result in unexpected literacy and to disclose normative or superior intellectual skills among people with lifelong histories of severe developmental delay.

Controlled research using single and double-blind procedures in laboratory and natural settings with a range of clinical populations with which FC is used has determined that, not only are the people with disabilities unable to respond accurately to label or describe stimuli unseen by their assistants, but that the responses are controlled by the assistants.

In 2018, the following article described the method, delineated the history of scientific studies of the method, and argued that it is illegitimate (Hemsley et al., 2018).

Facilitated communication (FC) ... is a technique that involves a person with a disability pointing to letters, pictures, or objects on a keyboard or on a communication board, typically with physical support from a “facilitator.” The physical support of FC usually occurs on the hand, wrist, elbow, or shoulder (Biklen et al., 1992) but can also occur on other parts of the body.

... there are no new studies on authorship and therefore no evidence that FC is a valid form of communication for individuals with severe communication disabilities. Given that facilitator control has been documented repeatedly and replicated by several different research teams across continents over the last 26 years, it is not surprising to see that there are no additional studies addressing the question of authorship in FC. What is noteworthy, however, is that there are also no studies that demonstrate that the individuals with disabilities are the authors of the messages generated with FC.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned critical articles, and the following, aforementioned statement,

not only are the people with disabilities unable to respond accurately to label or describe stimuli unseen by their assistants, but ... the responses are controlled by the assistants.

there are no articles that provide precise descriptions of *how* the assistants (speech therapists, etc) control the communication of the disabled persons. While the articles *deduce* that the assistants accomplish this via

physical support ... on the hand, wrist, elbow, or shoulder ... [and] on other parts of the body.

there are no studies that provide analyses of videos of assistants working with their clients, and descriptions of *when* in the videos the assistants engage in this communicative deception, and precisely *how*. And this is perhaps why, despite the findings of the critical articles, the aforementioned 2018 article provides leeway for the procession of Facilitated Communication by emphasizing that wherever the method proceeds, there should be scientific examination of the authorship of the communications of the disabled persons who are undergoing the method:

With substantial scientific evidence demonstrating the influence of facilitators over messages produced using FC, it is ethically and scientifically imperative to empirically test authorship of messages produced using FC and analyzing FC message data without authorship testing reduces the credibility of findings.

However, if precisely *how*

the responses ... [of] the people with disabilities are controlled by the assistants

were demonstrated, perhaps it would be concluded that there is no need for additional scientific examination of the various employments of the method, nor variations of the method, such as the aforementioned Rapid Prompting Method. Moreover, the aforementioned is perhaps why Facilitated Communication and the Rapid Prompting Method are considered to be significantly beneficial by a considerable extent of people: The aforementioned Autism Parenting Magazine, despite discussing the array of negative aspects of Facilitated Communication, also discusses an array of positive aspects of it, and does not reject it (Autism Parenting Magazine, 2021); the following two major US media articles of 2016 and 2018 clearly indicate that Facilitated Communication is readily employed by a significant extent of people (Shermer, 2016; Salzberg, 2018); and the following major autism media article of 2020 states the following about the Rapid Prompting Method (Borrell, 2020):

Despite rapid prompting's popularity, no rigorous scientific studies show that the method works. There is no empirical support for the idea that it spurs academic progress or that its students express their own thoughts.

But the lack of proof has not dissuaded many parents. Mukhopadhyay conducts up to 11 sessions a day and holds workshops around the world several times a year. In Austin, she sees her clients at the offices of a nonprofit called Helping Autism through Learning and Outreach (HALO), founded for her programs in 2002. Four-day HALO camps cost \$850, and training sessions for parents and providers are \$950. HALO sells Mukhopadhyay's books and a variety of letter boards. It also has lent its trademarked seal of approval to 10 independent providers in the United States, the United Kingdom and Mexico. Mukhopadhyay draws a salary of more than \$150,000 per year, according to tax filings. And HALO has competitors, such as the Growing Kids Therapy Center in Herndon, Virginia, which provides training called Spelling to Communicate that also focuses on motor skills and encourages autistic people to use a letter board to communicate.

Parents have also tried to introduce the method into U.S. special-education classrooms. According to a 2018 study, 17 percent of 535 special educators surveyed in Tennessee used the rapid prompting method with their students every day – a frequency on par with their use of such evidence-based practices as pivotal response treatment and the picture-exchange communication system.

Regarding what the Rapid Prompting Method is (Borrell, 2020):

Rapid prompting appears straightforward: A teacher holds up an alphabet board or a choice of two words on scraps of paper and then verbally or physically prompts an autistic person to point to individual letters or to words. The teacher might, for instance, tell the student that the sky is blue and then ask what color the sky is. Although teachers try to avoid moving the student's hand directly, they may nudge an elbow or tap a shoulder.

Moreover, the employment of the method can be observed in the extensive television coverage that I provide and discuss later in this article.

The Rapid Prompting Method began in the United States in 2001 (Schlosser, 2018):

The Cure Autism Now Foundation introduced RPM to the USA in 2001 (<http://www.halo-soma.org>). ... In 2001, the Cure Autism Now Foundation offered Mukhopadhyay a fellowship to implement her teaching method at a school in Los Angeles, working with nine children with ASD.

Aside, Portia Iversen is who co-founded Cure Autism Now (which later became Autism Speaks); and I discuss her later in this article in the context of my discussion about the PBS *Closer To Truth* television presentation in 2003 of Tito and Soma, of which she was an interviewee and participant. Moreover, regarding the involvement of Iversen and Cure Autism Now with the Rapid Prompting Method (Borrell, 2020):

In the early 2000s, the media billed Tito as a miracle. Mukhopadhyay first brought him to the U.S. in July 2001 with the support of Cure Autism Now, a nonprofit that later became part of Autism Speaks. The organization's co-founder, Portia Iversen, wanted Mukhopadhyay to work with her own son, Dov. Within months of her arrival in the U.S., Mukhopadhyay was working with other parents, and Iversen's publicity machine attracted the interest of scientists. "Autism experts are studying him, amazed to discover, for what they say is the first time, a severely autistic person who can explain his disorder," journalist Sandra Blakeslee wrote in a 2002 article about Tito in *The New York Times*.

Regarding discussions about, and criticisms of, the Rapid Prompting Method (Lang, et al., 2014):

FC [Facilitated Communication] and RPM [Rapid Prompting Method] are strikingly similar in terms of claims of miraculous hidden communication and intelligence evident only during facilitator-dependent communication. ... RPM may create an illusion similar to FC by fostering indefinite prompt dependency.

RPM facilitators generate and subsequently prompt participants to convey messages that may not represent the individual's genuine desires, thoughts, or emotions.

Given the similarities between RPM and FC, it seems very likely that the messages are (unintentionally and subconsciously) authored by the RPM facilitator (Boynton, 2012; Todd, 2012; Tostanoski et al., 2014; von Tetzchner 2012).

... indefinite prompt dependency is entirely incompatible with genuine independent skill leaning -- because the aid is actually making the responses and using the participant as a mechanism of expression. ... prompt dependency precludes independence by rendering an individual facilitator-dependent. It is possible that no actual academic or communicative skills are taught to participants in RPM. Instead, participants may only learn how to better follow subtle, rhythmic, and frequent prompts. The danger, of course, is that an untrained observer might not be able to readily recognize such subtle prompts and may mistakenly assume that prompted responses accurately reflect the true preferences, academic abilities, and emotions of the individual. Such an outcome would make RPM equally as dangerous and inhuman as facilitated communication (FC), a thoroughly debunked method that creates a powerful illusion that seems notably simpler to RPM (Todd, 2013; Tostanoski et al., 2014; Travers, Tincani, & Lang, in press).

Notwithstanding, and as I discussed of Facilitated Communication, what in my opinion explains the persistent prevalence of the Rapid Prompting Method is the apparent absence of analyses of videos of employments of the method; and this would explain why the authors of the aforementioned study state the following; and via italics I add emphasis to the words that demonstrate that the authors, as is the case of the authors of the critical studies on Facilitated Communication, do not, and cannot, argue that there is proof of communicative deception:

It is *possible* that no actual academic or communicative skills are taught to participants in RPM. Instead, participants *may* only learn how to better follow subtle, rhythmic, and frequent prompts.

While of course there is an “absence of evidence” of effectiveness of the two methods, this of course is different than a presence of “proof of deception”, “proof of fraud”, etc.

The following aforementioned position of the aforementioned authors demonstrates, I believe, that not only has no one observed communicative deception occur during the employment of the Rapid Prompting Method, but that, perhaps due to the unsaid belief that it is impossible to do so, there is not even the goal to do so: The authors believe that what is crucial is observing the *prompts* that occur, and the prompted responses, and that when the prompts are not observed, observers may mistakenly observe the communications of the disabled persons to be from an independent content of their minds.

The danger, of course, is that an untrained observer might not be able to readily recognize such subtle prompts and may mistakenly assume that prompted responses accurately reflect the true preferences, academic abilities, and emotions of the individual.

However, as is stated above (Borrell, 2020):

Rapid prompting appears straightforward: A teacher holds up an alphabet board or a choice of two words on scraps of paper and then verbally or physically *prompts* an autistic person to point to individual letters or to words.

The *prompts* are observational self-evident, as are the prompted responses, as can be observed in the videos that I provide of the extensive television coverage of the employment of the method. What is not only not observationally self-evident, but of the near observational impossibility of masterful practical magic, is the multitude of variations of novel, highly surreptitious, multifaceted communicative deception that Soma engages in with Tito, even in the presence of world-renowned physicians, scientists, professors, and journalists, and the founder of the most important autism organization in the United States, who herself has a profoundly autistic child. Moreover, this has occurred in the presence of, via television, what I would estimate to be fifty to one-hundred million or more people world-wide over twenty-one years and ongoing. None of the above persons observed any of the communicative deception. Two of the most elite physicians and scientists in history – Oliver Sacks (Neuman, 2015) and Michael Merzenich (Farley, 2016; Farley, 2015) – studied Tito and Soma extensively, and concluded that Tito has a normal, if not advanced, brain and mind, and that he communicates from an independent content of his mind. Sacks is quoted on the back-cover of a book that is purported to be written by Tito as stating the following (Mukhopadhyay, 2011):

... it has usually been assumed that deeply autistic people are scarcely capable of introspection or deep thought, let alone of poetic or metaphoric leaps of the imagination – or, if they are, that they are incapable of communicating these thoughts to us. Tito gives the lie to all these assumptions, and forces us to reconsider the condition of the deeply autistic.

Merzenich is quoted on that back-cover as stated the following (Mukhopadhyay, 2011: back cover):

Tito is not only authentic, but also miraculous. ... [He] is a beautiful example of the possible.

Demonstration of speech encryption and computer deception 60 Minutes, 2003 (Mabrey, 2003)

In 2003 on 60 Minutes, at **0:11 – 0:42** (YouTube video), the aforementioned Merzenich is interviewed about Tito, and states,

I was surprised when I – certainly surprised when I met him – to see the very compelling evidence that he was for real.

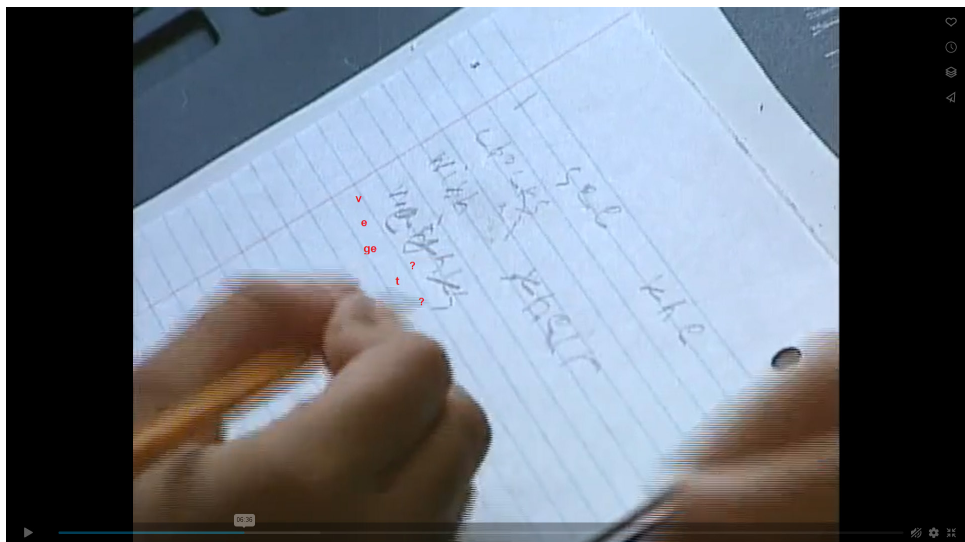
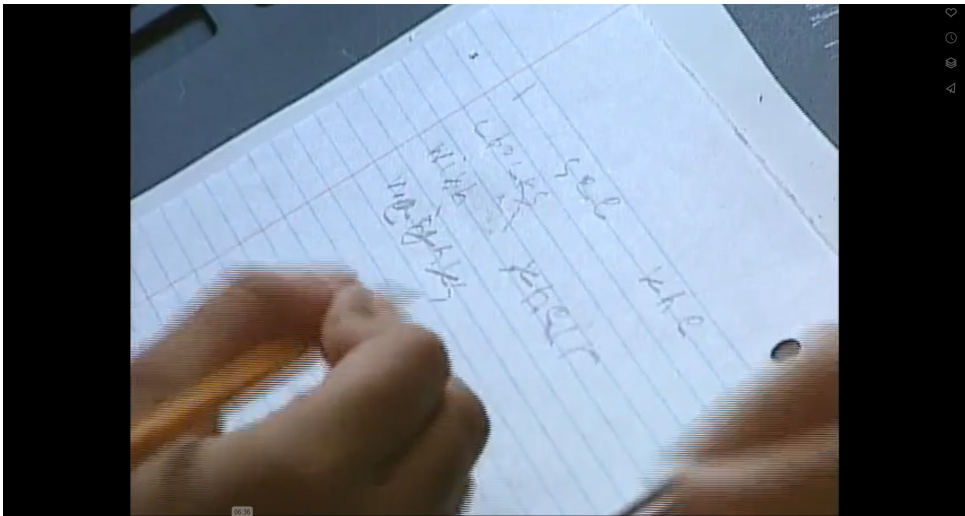
The narrator states that Merzenich had been studying Tito for nearly a year, and that Merzenich says that Tito is not only authentic, but miraculous.

Merzenich then states,

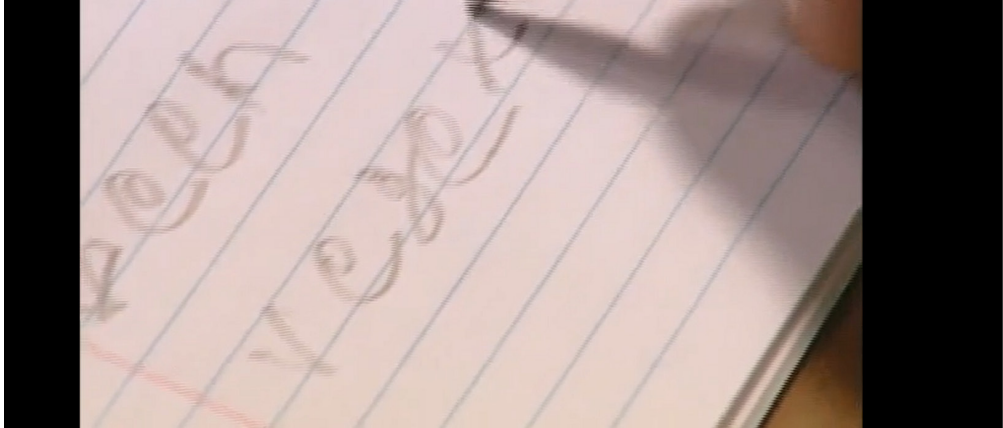
There can be little question in the writing behavior in Tito that he's providing the answers and that the answers are coming from his brain.

However, and to begin:

1:54 – 2:03 (YouTube video); **6:32 – 6:39** (Vimeo video): While the following is comparatively incidental – as I will discuss later in the context of the issue of the inferred preparatory rote training of Tito – it I believe provides physical indication of Soma’s preparatory rote training with him. To begin: Soma and Tito are not with the interviewer, and she is assisting him with his handwriting. When they are on a bed, Tito writes a word, she removes the pencil from him, she erases the word, she returns the pencil to him, he writes it again, she removes the from him, and she erases the word. As is shown in the below first video-photograph, Tito appears to have written, or attempted to write, the word ‘vegetable’. In the below second video-photograph, I, in red letters at the left of Tito’s written word, insert what I believe are some of the letters that he wrote; and I do so to the left of five letters. I have question marks next to the other two letters.



For comparison, at 7:32 – 7:58 (Vimeo video), which is after the above video-segment, Tito more clearly writes ‘vegetable’, as is shown in the below third and fourth video-photographs, which are in two parts, because the camera moves across the word as he is writing it.



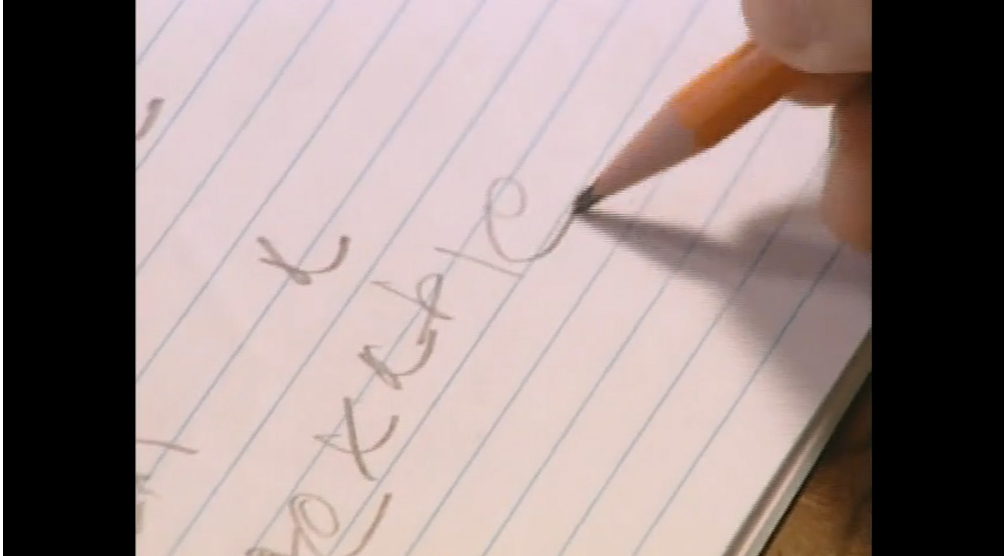
(1) Regarding the aforementioned erasing, it surely made the underlying paper less clear than it would have been, which is likely why there seems to be a second ‘v’, (2) as is shown in the second and third video-photographs by his legible e’s, they swoop downward significantly, which occurs in the first video-photograph, (3) his word in the first video-photograph could be observed as ‘vegehts’, especially given the way that he wrote other characters for other words that are above it (eg, his ‘s’ and ‘h’), (4) ‘vegehts’ is likely practice for ‘vegetable’, (5) he does not finish the word in the first video-photograph; and it, as she says, which motivated her two erases of his two attempts, is comparatively not as legible, (6) he ends the word in the first video-photograph with one letter after ‘t’, (7) as is shown in the second and third video-photographs via his writing of ‘vegetable’, his t’s look like x’s, which is also the case in the first video-photograph, (8) in the second video-photograph, he combines his ‘ge’, which he also does in the first video-photograph, (9) the positions of the letters ‘v’ ‘e’ ‘ge’ ‘t’ in the word are the positions for the word ‘vegetable’.

While there is not certainty about the above, it provides evidence of something that there already is a clear basis to infer, namely that the entirety of Soma’s work with Tito is not of the standard educational process (that is, learning the alphabet and numbers, learning how to write them, learning the meaning of words, learning how to write sentences, etc), but rather a process of extreme rote training. Aside, Soma has never discussed, nor demonstrated, how, when Tito was a child, she taught him the alphabet and numbers, how to write them, the meaning of words, how to write sentences, etc. Instead, as is shown in the television episodes, she represents Tito as already having acquired these capacities, and that her method is simply a way of evincing his capacities. However, her method is not that, as I demonstrate below:

To begin: **2:55** (YouTube video), the interviewer is present, and Tito and Soma are sitting with her in a different area. The interviewer asks him a question, and he writes “I would have been a vegetable”. As I will further explain below, it is clear that Soma extensively trains Tito what to write.

3:04: As I explain further in my below section on the 2003 PBS *Closer To Truth* television episode, the following is the case about Tito’s writing of “I would have been a vegetable”. Tito

appears to start each sentence with “I” on his own accord; and he does so in essentially an autonomic matter (that is, without intentional thought, purpose, and meaning). Soma then reads each word that he writes, and verbally adds a letter at the end of each word; and the letters cue Tito on what to write for the next word. For the above sentence, she states “I-w”, “would-h”,



“have-b”, and “av”. He writes “I would have been a vegetable”. Aside, he appears to have written ‘a’ on his own accord, after which she said “av”. This is why it was not necessary for her to say “been-a”. Also aside, she may have said “have-eb” rather than “have-b”, because saying “have-b” alone is very difficult and does not allow the ‘b’ to be enunciated very well, whereas saying “have-eb” allows the ‘be’ to be enunciated clearly, especially so that it is the last sound that is heard: If she said only “have-b”, the last sound would have been ə (schwa), or eh, which is likely contrary to her system of rote training: Likely according to it, Tito interprets any ə or eh as signifying that the next word should begin with e.

3:34 – 4:02: The interviewer states,

He has written hundreds of poems, including this one, which we watched him write from beginning to end.

However, at **3:57 – 4:01** he is shown typing with one finger. They then show the 12 line poem. Regarding whether they carefully watched him write – that is, whether they watched each key that he typed, and observed what appeared on the screen – I will provide the following:

PBS, Closer To Truth, 2003 (Kuhn, 2003)

In 2020, the creator and host of the PBS televised program Closer To Truth, Robert Lawrence Kuhn, who has a PhD in neuroscience from UCLA, stated to me, after assessing the above, and the following, that I have proven that Soma engages in communicative deception with Tito, and that Tito, as such, does not know what he types and writes – that is, that it does not arise from his

own mind. Moreover, in 2020 the aforementioned Merzenich, after assessing the above, and the following, stated to me that he wished that he was more careful with his study of Soma and Tito, and that he agrees with my analysis of them.

0:40 – 0:58: Kuhn talks to Tito, and then asks him a question. When Kuhn is finished with his question, Soma begins tapping on Tito's right shoulder with her right hand's fingers, at which time Tito, at **0:59**, begins to write. He writes "I get". First, as is seen on the piece of paper on which he is writing, he begins his above sentence also with "I get", and the top sentence with "I can get". As was discussed above, the "get" and "can" were surely cued by Soma by her verbally stating "I-g" and "I-c" after Tito wrote "I". Second, as he is finishing the "et" of "get", Soma states "I get a-f". He then begins and finishes writing "flattered". As I further discuss below, Soma, by extending her vocalization of a word that Tito writes with the first letter of another word, she is queuing him on which word to write next by stimulating his memory on what she previously prepared him to write upon hearing the first letter of the other word.

2:17: Portia Iversen asks Tito a question. Tito writes "I", Soma quickly says "I", Tito writes "just", and Soma quickly says "just-n". The next word that Tito writes, immediately after he hears the "n" of "just-n", is "need". Soma then says "need-t", and Tito writes "to". Both the "n" and "t" are quickly but sharply voiced. The filming then stops, and then resumes as Tito is writing the last word of the sentence. Soma is queuing Tito on what he should write for the next word by including the first letter, of what she has prepared him to write for the next word, as the last letter of the word that she verbally calls out. (Aside, for the above first word "I", Soma says "I-s", which was likely done in order to cue him to write a word that begins with "s" for the next word).

For the question that Iversen asked, there likely are many answers that Tito could have written. Since he proceeded with "just" after "I", Soma likely adjusted the kind of answer that she wanted him to produce. Aside, most people likely overlook the above because they attribute it to her Indian accent: While Americans et al do not state, for example, "just-n" for "just", and "need-t" for "need", most people, upon hearing her intense Indian accent, likely think that this anomaly is due to her accent.

4:16: The filming begins with Soma saying "have-t"; and Tito then writes "to". Soma then says "to-w", and Tito writes "wait". Soma then says "wait-l", and Tito writes "long". Soma then reads the sentence "I do not have to wait long".

8:18: Soma begins with saying what Tito wrote. He writes "I", and Soma says "I-c"; and you can moreover see how she pronounces the "c" with her mouth. Tito then writes "couldn't". Soma then says "couldn't-n"; and Tito then writes something like "not". Soma then says "not-e"; and the filming of that instance of him writing stops, and Soma does not read the sentence that he wrote.

12:28: Soma says "it-c", "can-b", then-d", for Tito's writing of "It can become bigger than the door". It is difficult to hear the entirety of what she says; and what Tito actually wrote is not shown. Moreover, I think that she calls out "because" rather than "bigger", as Tito is writing, and then verbally corrected it in her final reading of the sentence. Soma cues "can", "become", and "door", and then likely adds and corrects some of the words in between, namely "bigger" for "because", and "the" prior to "door".

25:17: When Soma reads a sentence that is already written by Tito, she does not say any post-word letters.

3:51 – 4:50: Before Kuhn asks him a particular question, and while the group is having a discussion, Soma begins to state some words, and Tito concurrently is writing. At the same time that Kuhn finishes asking a brief question, Tito is finished with the core of his answer. Tito then continues to write something that is completely separate from Kuhn's question. I believe that Tito knew what to write before Kuhn asked him the question – that is, that Soma prepared him for the answer. Tito then continued to write something that was separate from Kuhn's question, likely due to being confused about what to write at what time. Aside, no one was observing, for the above, the coordination between Soma speaking and Tito writing. It is possible that she stimulates him, via his memory, to provide X answer by stating one or a few words to him at the outset, which seems to be the case for the above. Moreover, as he was writing, she could have been stating words before he wrote them. For the above, the camera was not filming his writing.

5:23: Kuhn asks, "Does he read?" He has never been shown to read to an even extremely minimal degree, and, it is clear that he cannot read his own writing. He has never replicated what he just wrote, and has never been publicly asked to replicate what he just wrote.

7:42: Soma says that he sometimes edits his writing. She has never publicly demonstrated that he does this. He has had significant television coverage, and other kinds of public coverage. This episode of Kuhn's program was in 2003, which is when Soma and Iversen worked together. In 17 years, no editing has been demonstrated. **7:56,** Soma states that he "corrects himself, backspaces, opens his files". This has never been demonstrated.

8:13: Iversen begins to ask Tito a question, and when she is about half way through her question, Tito begins to write. Her question is entirely unclear half way through, and it is necessary to wait until she is finished in order to understand what she asked. As for his answer, this is uncertain: Soma states the three word answer, and I believe that it is something like "I could not".

10:11: At the instant that Kuhn begins to ask Tito, "Tito how do you see color?", Soma presses a key on the computer. I believe that the key that she pressed prepares a prearranged computer program to proceed upon the next key-strike – that is, her key-strike puts the prearranged program in ready-mode; and then the program proceeds upon the next key-strike. In this case, the program is a prearranged automated verbal statement, namely "Shapes come first and then color". Upon Tito's first key-strike, the prosody of the automated verbal statement begins, and is of a consistent prosody. Tito's second key-strike is a miss-strike, as he lightly touches three keys in between each other. The camera then does not show any more typing until his last key-strike. For his last key-strike, the automated voice states "color" (the last word of the above statement) before he makes the key-strike; and after he makes the key-strike, there is no automated voice.

In addition to the above, while it appears that he makes at least 3 key-strikes, of the 6 that would be needed for the 6 word sentence, the keys that he strikes are letter-keys, not word-keys: On the keyboard of 26 letters, there are no keys which, when pressed, result in the words "Shapes", "come", "first", "and", "then", "color". That is, there are no keys that are devoted to these particular words. Moreover, there are no typed-communication programs that use the 26 letters in this way; and such programs would, in any case, be useless.

In addition to the above, Soma, while the automated voice is proceeding, verbally reports the first 4 words of the above statement in the following manner.

Computer: "Shape"

Soma immediately thereafter: "Shape"

Computer: "Come, First"

Soma immediately thereafter, and rapidly: “Shape-Come-First”
Computer: “And”
Soma simultaneously: “And”

Soma is reading the words from the screen. While this is not relevant to the above, I believe that she does this as a distraction, namely to try to distract observers away from fully attending to the keys that Tito is pressing, and from the relation between the automated voice’s prosody and the keys that Tito presses. Moreover, I believe that she, in doing this, is trying to provide legitimacy to the relation between Tito’s key-strikes and the automated voice: She is trying to convey that since she is reading the words on the screen, she is simply reading what the computer program is also reading, namely Tito’s key-strikes. Aside, there is no need for Soma to say anything, at any time, during Tito’s typing and the automated voice’s speech. There is also no need for Soma to verbally state each word that Tito writes with his pencil.

10:38: While the group is having a discussion, the camera shows Tito in the process of writing with his pencil, and Soma stating several words during this time, as she watches him writing. (However, there is no audio of her voice, and only her mouth can be seen forming words). At **10:45**, Soma states “door”, and then taps 5 times total with her right index finger on the clipboard holding the piece of paper on which Tito is writing. Tito then writes the last word of that statement, which is “door”. Soma then states what he wrote, “Only after I see the door”; and then she adds “I see the room” “Only after I see the door”. It is unclear whether “I see the room” is what she is adding to the discussion *about* Tito’s statement “Only after I see the door”, or whether Tito also wrote this during that time-period. Regardless, it is clear that she verbally instructed him to write “door”. And again, she should not be verbally stating anything, at any time. Aside, it is fine if she wants to ensure that he has a pencil in his hand, and if she asks him to write, and if she touches the paper in order to further direct him to write, and even if she directs him back to his chair if he gets up from it, but she should not be verbally involved at any time; and care should be taken by observers in order to ensure that she is not pointing to anything in particular, such as particular keyboard keys, and particular words that may be pre-written on the paper or screen.

In addition to the above apparent purposes of her verbal involvement, there is now proof that she verbally instructs him on what to write. Moreover, as is shown in the above 60 Minutes segment, there is proof that she extensively prepares him on what to write.

12:25: Soma abruptly states “I can see a point”, and gives Tito his pencil; and then he apparently writes “It can become bigger than the door”. Again, Soma began a process without notifying anyone of it. In this instance, I believe that her stating to Tito “I can see a point”, signifies to him that it is time to write “It can become bigger than the door”.

Aside, in the various television coverage from 2003 to the present, Tito provides the same brief statements, or variations thereof.

Also aside, autistic author Donna Williams of Australia in 1992, 1994, and 1998 was the first person to provide such statements (Williams, 1992; Williams, 1994; Williams, 1998). All of the statements, which I argue that Soma provides for Tito, are usurped from Williams, both directly, and in slight variations, in order to give the appearance of novelty. Williams is well known for describing what she calls “fragmented vision”, and for describing the disintegration of her sensory experience.

17:09 – 17:42, and 21:14 – 21:30: Tito is shown in the process of writing, and Soma is shown speaking to him at times.

25:17: Soma interrupts Dr. Eric Courchesne, and begins to read from the piece of paper; and Tito is now several feet away. Since Tito was away from the paper, there was no need for Soma to interrupt Eric. She reads from the paper, “That it will lead to the better kinds of treatment.” As was reported by 60 Minutes in 2003 (Mabrey, 2003), Tito does not write on his own accord:

He can’t pick up the pad and pencil to write without his mother’s constant prodding and urging.

It is clear that Soma initiated his writing of that statement, and either verbally guided him while the camera was filming elsewhere, or stimulated Tito in some way to produce a statement that he was previously prepared to write. Aside, and as is especially shown in the below PBS video of 14 years later, it clearly appears that there are words which, when spoken to Tito, stimulate his memory of previously taught statements: As is the case when Kuhn and Iversen asked Tito questions, he clearly appears to respond to a particular word, and begins typing or writing after hearing the word, despite that the question has not been fully expressed, and despite that the sense of the question has therefore not even partially been conveyed. I believe that Soma has taught him that certain words should be followed with certain written/typed statements; and this would explain why it is not necessary for him to listen to the entire question, and instead only approximately half of it; and in the below video, he sometimes begins typing after hearing only 1-2 words of a question.

PBS, 2017 (PBS, 2017)

0:02: The interviewer asks Tito a question. At **0:09**, just after he begins typing (he types 4 letters), shown at the top of his computer screen is a pre-typed statement, namely, “about my sensory perception”. I also believe that the first word of his own statement below it, namely, “My”, was pre-typed, since it was present despite that he had typed only 4 letters, namely, “sens”. Clearly the pre-typed statement is there as a cue to Tito for what he should type: He clearly is taught to identify the appearance of the above phrase as meaning that he should proceed with X answer, which he typed from the extensive preparatory instruction that Soma provided to him.

0:59: The interviewer begins to ask him a question, namely, “Is there one sense that is more powerful than others?”; and when the interviewer reaches “sense”, Tito lowers his arms and hands and begins typing. I believe the word “sense” cued him to write a prepared answer: An answer that Soma previously taught him to write.

1:27: Tito is shown typing, he then briefly hesitates, the interviewer asks “What does sensory overload feel like to you?”, he continues to type after she says “like”, and does 3 key-strikes. Soma then reads an approximate 28 word statement from the screen. While it is likely that there was a break in the filming at the time (**1:36**) when Soma picked up the computer to read the screen, it is still apparent that Tito was writing his answer even prior to the question being asked; and this was likely because there was a cue-topic at the top of the screen, written by Soma, which Tito was already instructed on how to answer.

2:17, The interviewer asks Tito, “What helps calm your sensory system?” At **2:21**, it appears that a portion of the filming was excised, and that it resumes from a slightly different angle. Tito likely had hesitated to respond.

Disabilities Studies Quarterly, 2010 (Savarese, 2010)

Tito's claimed responses in the below email-interview with Professor Ralph Savarese are in diametric contrast to the statements of his during the above television interviews. In the television interviews, Tito's responses are extremely brief, extremely simplistic, and not of dialogue, whereas in the email interview with Savarese, his claimed responses are complex, elaborate, and of the nature of dialogue. I believe that this further demonstrates that Tito's in-person written communication is the result of Soma's aforementioned interventional conduct, and that Soma is who emailed with Savarese. Tito has never been shown to provide even a minimal degree of the below kind of responses in any of his extensive national television coverage. For example:

T.M. Who knows from where I learnt it? But one thing is for sure: I was exposed to poems very early on in my life. Mother recites, and used to recite, poems in Bengali, Hindi and English languages. I by-heart most of them because I appreciated the sound pattern. Maybe I felt that my words would sound something like that. Or maybe I did it unintentionally without any kind of care. But you noticed it and asked me because you appreciated it. Thank you.

T.M. In one of my yet to be published works (in fact it is a book about my social experiments), there is a character who is a flying, invisible kangaroo that never looks straight, only cross-eyed. When they did the interview on CNN, I was writing this piece. The whole world looked like a field to me as would be seen through the eyes of that flying, invisible kangaroo that never looks straight, only cross-eyed. The kangaroo could separate this from that – the specifics from general, the colors from shapes, properties from labels – and giggle at all the confusion that could happen after that!

T.M. I have described it in my book *How Can I Talk if My Lips Don't Move?* However, since you ask it again, I may say this about my processing – it may make me disassociate myself from the totality of the situation and select one aspect of it. After that I may be completely within a labyrinth with my overindulgence or overassociation in that single aspect of the environment that has multiple aspects, making me ignore the other parts of the situation. Does it link to poetry? I do not know.

Conclusion

At **5:17 – 5:24**, the following is stated in the aforementioned 60 Minutes presentation (Mabrey, 2003).

If Tito is a miracle of autism, the miracle worker is his mother Soma ...

The statement continues with,

... Soma, who gave up a career in chemistry to devote her life to teaching her son – even though doctors in India said he would never be able to learn.

Soma desires to publicly portray Tito as a miracle, and to publicly portray herself as a miracle worker; and in order to accomplish this, she engages in, and continues to engage in, the novel, highly surreptitious, multifaceted, communicative deception that I revealed, and which has evaded the millions of viewers of them over the last approximate twenty-three years, including the vast array of scientists, physicians, other clinicians, journalists, autism organization leaders, etc., who studied them (Merzenich et al., 2008). In so doing, Soma, with regard to Tito, engages in Factitious Heroism By Proxy, as she, via her deception, portrays him as accomplishing something (that is, as being a “miracle”) in order that he is admired by other people, and in order that she encounters immense gratification. Moreover, Soma engages in Factitious Heroism, as she portrays herself as being the hero (that is, the “miracle worker”) of the accomplishment that she presents Tito as having accomplished.

In 2003 on Good Morning America, during an episode of Dr. Tim Johnson’s presentations, Johnson states the following (Johnson, et al., 2003: 19th, 32nd, and 18th paragraphs respectively):

Tito’s poetry caught the attention of world-renowned autism experts, who wanted to study him. The boy was one of the few people with autism able to describe his inner experience.

Johnson then invokes Merzenich:

Merzenich says Soma and Mukhopadhyay’s efforts should be examined closely by the medical world. “So we need to look at the strategy more widely and determine whether or not it is a valid strategy for a large number of children,” Merzenich said. “That’s still unresolved. But the initial observations are extremely hopeful.”

Johnson then quotes Merzenich:

“There might be thousands of children like Tito, and one of our challenges is to determine whether anything can be done about that and whether there are more children that can be in a sense awakened like Tito,” Merzenich said.

References

- Autism Parenting Magazine*. (2021) Facilitated Communication for Children with Autism. London. <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-children-facilitated-communication/>
- Baron-Cohen, S. (2017) Editorial Perspective: Neurodiversity – A Revolutionary Concept For Autism And Psychiatry. *J Child Psychol Psychiatr*, 58: 744-747. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12703>
- Biklen, D. (1990) Communication Unbound: Autism and Praxis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60(3), 291-314. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.60.3.013h5022862vu732>.
- Blakeslee, S. (2002) A Boy, a Mother and a Rare Map of Autism’s World. *New York Times*. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/19/science/a-boy-a-mother-and-a-rare-map-of-autism-s-world.html>

- Borrell, B. (2020) How One Communication Tool May Fail Some Autistic People. *Spectrum*. Available online: <https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/deep-dive/how-one-communication-tool-may-fail-some-autistic-people/>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021) Signs and Symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorders, Available online: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/signs.html>
- Farley, P. (2016) Michael Merzenich Wins 2016 Kavli Prize in Neuroscience. *University of California – San Francisco News*. Available online: <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2016/06/403136/michael-merzenich-wins-2016-kavli-prize-neuroscience>
- Farley, P. (2015) Neuroscientist Wins Prize For Cochlear Implant Contributions. *University of California News*. Available online: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/neuroscientist-wins-prize-cochlear-implant-contributions>
- Feldman, M. (2004). *Playing Sick* (p. 102, 117). Routledge.
- Feldman, M. (2018). *Dying To Be Ill* (p. 100-103). Routledge.
- Google-Books (2021) Available online: www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=inauthor:%22Tito+Rajarshi+Mukhopadhyay%22&tbm=bks
- Hemsley, B., Bryant, L., Schlosser, R., Shane, H., Lang Russell., Paul D., Banajee, M., Ireland, M. (2018) Systematic Review of Facilitated Communication 2014–2018 Finds No New Evidence that Messages Delivered Using Facilitated Communication Are Authored by the Person With Disability, *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, Vol. 3, p. 1-8. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2396941518821570>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2396941518821570>.
- Iversen, P. (2007) *Strange Son: Two Mothers, Two Sons, and the Quest to Unlock the Hidden World of Autism*. Riverhead Books.
- Jacobson, J.W., Mulick, J., Schwartz, A. (1995) A History of Facilitated Communication: Science, Pseudoscience, and Antiscience Science Working Group on Facilitated Communication. *American Psychologist*, 50(9), p. 750-765. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.50.9.750>.
- Johnson, T. (2003) Boy Sheds Light on Autism Mysteries” (paragraphs 19, 32, and 18 respectively), Series: “Autism: Unlocking the Mystery. *Good Morning America*. Available online: www.abcnews.go.com/GMA/DrJohnson/story?id=125418&page=1
- Kuhn, R. (2003) How Does the Autistic Brain Work. PBS, *Closer To Truth*. Available online: <https://clostertotruth.com/video/how-does-the-autistic-brain-work/>
- Lang, R., Tostanoski A., Travers, J., Todd, J. (2014) The Only Study Investigating The Rapid Prompting Method Has Serious Methodological Flaws But Data Suggest The Most Likely Outcome Is Prompt Dependency. *Evidence-Based Communication Assessment and Intervention*, 8(1), 40-48. Available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17489539.2014.955260>, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287216044_The_Only_Study_Investigating_the_Rapid_Prompting_Method_has_Serious_Methodological_Flaws_but_Data_Suggest_the_Most_Likely_Outcome_is_Prompt_Dependency.
- Mabrey, V. (2003) Breaking The Silence, partial transcript of television segment www.cbsnews.com/news/breaking-the-silence-14-01-2003/, complete television segment (00:00-13:40). Available online: www.vimeo.com/76576048, television segment used in this article (00:00-09:01) www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nfiap3a7Tuo. 60 Minutes.
- Merzenich, M., Bonneh, Y., Belmonte, M., Pei, F., Iversen P., Kenet T., Akshoomoff N., Adini Y., Simon H., Moore I., Houde J. (2008) Cross-Modal Extinction In A Boy With Severely

- Autistic Behaviour and High Verbal Intelligence. *Cognitive Neuropsychology*, (25)5, 635-652. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643290802106415>
- Mukhopadhyay, T. (2011) *The Mind Tree: A Miraculous Child Breaks the Silence of Autism*. Arcade.
- Neuman, O. (2015) Oliver Sacks, Renowned Neurologist And Author, Dies At 82. Available online: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/08/30/436013382/oliver-sacks-renowned-neurologist-and-author-dies-at-82>. NPR
- PBS (2017) Tito's View, Series: "Spectrum: A Story Of The Mind." Available online: www.pbs.org/video/spectrum-story-mind-titos-view/
- Salzberg, S. (2018) Facilitated Communication Has Been Called An Abuse Of Human Rights. Why Is It Still Around? *Forbes*, Available online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevensalzberg/2018/06/18/facilitated-communication-may-be-an-abuse-of-human-rights-why-is-a-university-teaching-it/?sh=169b35bf29f3>
- Schlosser, R. (2018) Rapid Prompting Method and Autism Spectrum Disorder: Systematic Review Exposes Lack of Evidence. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, (6) 403-412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-019-00175-w>.
- Shermer, M. (2016) If "Facilitated Communication" Is a Canard, Why Teach It? *Scientific American*. Available online: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/if-facilitated-communication-is-a-canard-why-teach-it/>.
- Savarese, R. (2010) More Than a Thing to Ignore: An Interview with Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, (30)1. Available online: www.dsqsds.org/article/view/1056/1235
- Terrill, C. (2000) Tito's Story. BBC. Available online: www.genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/de5d2fc1ae9b4294a7abc1d6225820b5
- Williams, D. (1992) *Nobody Nowhere*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Williams, D. (1994) *Somebody Somewhere*, Crown Publishing Group.
- Williams, D. (1998) *Like Color To The Blind*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Zuger, A. (2007) Tantalized by the Hint of a Cure for Autism, (4th paragraph). Available online: www.nytimes.com/2007/02/27/health/27book.html.