1. The three-fold distinction between sentence-meaning, utterance-meaning and speaker's-meaning underlies the discussion (see Grice 1971; Dascal 1983). We take utterance-meaning (Grice's "applied timeless meaning of an utterance type") to be the conventional meaning of an utterance as it is used under given circumstances, after the missing, occasion-dependent elements have been supplied, and all the adjustments to the occasion of use have been made. Speaker's-meaning (Grice's "utterer's meaning") on the other hand, is what a given speaker means by uttering a given utterance in that context.

2. If the quotation marks surrounding the expression the endless nuances are interpreted as conveying the speaker's reservation, it is probably no more than some reservation vis-à-vis the use of enders in this context.

3. On the use of quotation marks and of claim to mark the speaker's attitude, see Weizman (1984a, 1984b).

4. For other classifications and different viewpoints about context see, for example, Clark and Carlson (1981), Dascal (1981), and Farrel (1985).

5. This is, in fact, a reformulation of what has been suggested by Clark and Carlson (1981: 318) as a technical definition of context: "context is information that is available to a particular person for interaction with a particular process on a particular occasion".


7. This convention is discussed in Weizman (n.d.).

8. On the notions of mismatch and "second channel" information as applied to speech, see Dascal (1983: chapter 3), as well as Dascal (1985). Their application to texts requires, of course, some elaboration, but it seems to be quite straightforward.

1. Pragmatic generalizations

Both studies of development and studies of diversity are necessary as a groundwork for the generalizations we want to make. The greatest connoisseur of diversity today is Dell Hymes, who has given us a framework for comparison. Much contemporary work on comparison is indebted to his identification of the dimensions to explore. The problem of evidence on diversity is how to use it not just to destroy faulty generalizations but to create new and more interesting, often conditional, statements. I can think immediately of two cases where generalizations need to be questioned.

1.1. Cooperation and truth

Grice's well-known analysis of conversational maxims has had wide influence because of its simplicity and power. The maxims are specifications for how to be cooperative. One is called the maxim of Quality: "Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" (Grice 1975: 46). But is Grice right?

People who give false route directions to inquiries are legion, an observation which seems to violate the second part of this maxim. In this case, the maxim seems to be overridden by another principle which is "Don't appear to be stupid or ill-informed". It is perhaps because of the threat to face in soliciting information of which the respondent might be ignorant that many languages have methods to avoid presupposing knowledge and thus forcing people without information to appear stupid or ill-informed. Instead of
Where is Dozing Hall? we say Do you know where Dozing Hall is? Thus the first reservation is that the maxim is a weak one, easily side-stepped by other considerations.

But the valuing of true information can differ culturally. Shirley Brice Heath (1982, 1983) has given us a description of two ethnically different towns in the United States in which quite different evaluations of false stories are taught. In Trackton, the highest value is placed on clever repartee and entertaining tales, regardless of factual validity. In Roadville, violations of veracity are punished. It looks as if Roadville knew about Grice and Trackton didn’t. Yet clearly we need to qualify this difference, to locate exactly in what kinds of reports the difference lies.

Elinor Och's presented a critique (1976) soon after Grice’s maxims were published that the Malagasy do not give information freely when it is solicited, since it is unavailable generally it is valued highly. Other reports of African societies suggest similar constraints, and imply that verbal replies are not presupposed in many conditions.

What are we to conclude about Grice’s powerful and simple maxims? One conclusion might be that the maxim of cooperation is simply wrong, and that cooperation through true replies is not the norm everywhere.

Another possibility is that the norm is veridical report, but that in every society deviant cases are marked, and insiders can usually identify socially organized lying, and adjust their expectations accordingly.

A third analysis would differentiate values by settings, genres, and functions. In each society there is utility communication that remains truth-based, and communication is marked when it is not truthful; but in other types of circumstances veridical report can be subordinated to alternative values such as entertainment, secrecy, or face. The argument that there must be such utility-based talk is based on the belief that some activities such as cooperation at a distance require accurate report or a way to calculate the real or believed state of affairs. These useful activities, of course, could be the exceptional or devalued cases, and not the norm for other interaction.

Which of these solutions is correct is an empirical question, which will call for more detailed analysis in the societies such as African communities where evidence challenging the Gricean maxim has made clear the need for a richer and more nuanced analysis.

In a larger sense, these studies call into question the philosophical basis of our western models of language, including the presupposition that language primarily conveys representations in the attempt to share knowledge of a common external reality. It is of importance to our quest for universals in pragmatics and conversational interaction that there are multiple functions of language and varying views of which functions are central or basic.

1.2. Interruptions

Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) phrased their generalizations about conversational turn-taking as universals and they have been taken as such. Thus is the tradition in ethmethodological writing, which has typically revealed no concern with cultural variation. Indeed, the argument in SSJ is based on beliefs about what must be necessary for orderly sharing of conversational resources, and what universal features are required by the processing of language in a multi-person, shared, channel.

Observations of young children’s interruptions of each other in dyads (Ervin-Tripp 1977) show systematic variation between orderly turn-taking and overlapping, depending on a situational principle. If what a speaker says is interesting or informative, orderly turn-taking occurs. This can be called a principle of utility to the hearer. Listeners stop talking and listen when they are interested in what is being said.

If the argument about orderly turn-taking is based on politeness, then we would expect that children would display more overlap in dyads than adults, since politeness is learned through admonitions not to interrupt, just as the sharing of goods and access (e.g., to the swing) is learned through taking turns. In this view, the floor is a limited good to be shared by speakers, through a learned social obligation.

If the partner’s speech is expressive rather than informational, predictable rather than novel — as in the case of sound play, giggling, nonsense, onomatopoeia, shouting or singing — overlap is typical in young dyads. It can be argued more positively that overlapping and joint timing facilitate the escalation of shared feeling. Four year olds use standard turn-taking for ritual exchanges, repetition games, narratives, and question exchanges. Thus, children seem to follow the principle of utility. By four, we find them giving and soliciting attention for novel utterances and structured exchanges in peer exchanges. Their turn-taking is situationally selective.

To the extent that adult speech retains the utility principle, we would expect overlap when speech is highly familiar and predictable, as among chats of intimates, or when there is escalation of shared emotion.

Overlapping can come to indicate involvement and empathy. It cannot then surprise us that there are groups in India, for example, where overlap is
valued as a sign of warmth and participation (Agrawal 1976). In some groups, two intimates can talk simultaneously without discomfort.

We can expect that groups may differ in what social relationships they value. Groups which emphasize autonomy, and value what Brown and Levinson (1978) call ‘negative politeness’ can be expected to leave the floor to one speaker, and to risk gaps or inattention more readily than interruption (e.g. Philips 1976). Groups which emphasize solidarity and ‘positive politeness’ are likely to look for evidence of closeness through the production of joint texts, proxy completions, and simultaneity.

Obviously there are other factors entering into the overlap norms, such as rank, honor to the speaker, and formality of the situation. For group comparison, these must be included.

What started out being viewed as a processing universal will, in the end, turn out to be related in complex ways to social dimensions and to interpersonal norms. Many of the preference structures will be universals — for example, the preference for interruption at turn-relevant points. Gapping, on the other hand, should be quite variable culturally since it seems not to be tied in any obvious way to processing or utility principles.

What I am proposing, then, is that generalizations such as Grice’s maxims have been viewed as hypotheses, and have to be tested by broader observation. Just as many beliefs about language that were based on Indo-European languages were overturned by comparative linguistics, so too the sociolinguistic and pragmatic principles we find in one language are not likely to be universal, considering that conversation is itself so sensitive to social features. Comparison in the search for deeper generalizations is fundamental to pragmatics.

The narrowness of our theories is due to the greater difficulty of getting access to foreign cultural material that we can understand, just as until the tape recorder we had trouble getting access to texts of unmonitored interaction, and had to depend on recall.

I have suggested so far two kinds of narrowness in our theories. One is a focus on a kind of positivism which makes veridical report the central function of language. The second is the parliamentary view of the floor as a scarce resource to be shared among speakers. In each case the observed data suggest more complex and more interesting generalizations. We obtain the broadening by using cross-cultural data.

2. Speech act theory

Much of our analysis of interactive speech is derived from introspection or recall rather than from systematic observations. When we introspect on our own speech activity we often turn our recall into a face-saving narrative, in which we plan ahead, have well-conceived goals, know exactly what we want our audience to do, use a Machiavellian calculus of means, and then in one go accomplish what we want through concise, easily labeled acts. Our accounts of speech sound like our accounts of our exploits — filled with obvious rationality, order, and foresight.

In the same way, our accounts of the understanding of speech lean heavily on the kind of introspection we do when we have misunderstood and therefore have to re-examine what was said. Our accounts of both speech and understanding derived from those marked circumstances when we look ahead at or retrospect on speech. Our models thus underestimate the grounding of speech understanding and production in ongoing events and larger activities and in the social and affective situation. They assume that isolated, planned acts by the speaker control the outcome, rather than a negotiated exchange between both parties. Labov has shown us how our reports of colloquial speech lean toward the standard norms. So too our recall of speech acts leans toward a simplified orderly account. The systematic study of the recall of speech events will no doubt show us that we categorize and simplify in this process just as we do in other recall.

I have been studying the interpretation of situated events experimentally, rather than from recall, and the production of speech events in families in natural contexts in their homes, with videotape which can be viewed repeatedly. These methods allow us to see events in process. We broaden the data base by observing children who do not have the same notions of retrospective rationality as adults.

2.1. Pragmatic inference

Let us look at the understanding of speaker intentions in cases of unconventional speech acts. An example would be a case where a mother enters a room where children are tumbling in a big fight, and she says Are you fighting? This is a conventional question, but it is not a conventional prohibition. The interpretation of this question as a prohibition is reached by virtue of some broader principle. According to interpretations based on Gricean conversational implicature, such a hearing would require:

(a) that the hearer first hear a question, and interpret it literally,
(b) then check the context.
(c) The hearer now must recognize that the question is ill-formed as a request for information, because the mother already sees what is going on.
(d) Her intention cannot be seeking information.
(e) In such a case, the fact that fighting is regularly prohibited in the household is recalled.
(f) Her question is interpreted as a prohibition.

This type of analysis starts with literal interpretation, then moves to context. It does not take the context as framing the probable interpretations before the language is heard.

If we take interpretation as starting from context, then we predict that young children will act as if there were directives and prohibitions in two cases:

(a) In the case that the context clearly implies the action or cessation of action, on practical grounds or on the grounds of prior sanction.
(b) In the case that the speech explicitly mentions action.

Our results show that where the context is unambiguous, the child infers the necessary act even when no speech occurs. An unambiguous context consists of one in which there is a familiar and regular trajectory of events and roles. One example is the case where children have spilled food on the living room floor. If an adult is present visually, or asks a question about what is going on, three year olds equally well interpret the situation as requiring an immediate clean-up. The presence of adults, quite simply, evokes adult-controlled behavior.

In the unambiguous context, the only time speech makes a difference is when it makes the context ambiguous by providing a conflicting interpretation. Thus, in the mess or the fight, if the mother says That's just beautiful. Go right ahead, many children do (through the story completion). In English, such conversational dares are not used by parents. They confuse the children, who hear them as lies, in our samples.

Thus what we see the children doing is starting from the context to make a practical inference from experience as to what should happen next. They hear language as specifying, contradicting or modifying that interpretation. For them, practical inference is primary.

If, when a child is spilling food, the mother says Are you spilling food? the children report that they clean up. This response looks as if it depends on a Gricean interpretative sequence, starting with language and looking for the intentions of a cooperative speaker. But the fact that young children propose cleaning up just as much when the visible mother says nothing tells us that the pragmatic interpretation does not directly derive from or even begin with what is said.

2.2. Practical ambiguity: Attention

Of course, it is not always the case that the context clearly suggests a program for action. We created such cases in real life. While the children were doing the narratives, we had accidental circumstances in which the experimenter needed help. For example, her purse or pen might be closer to the child than to her. We systematically varied the explicitness of mention of the act needed, though always mentioning the desired object. The most explicit was Can you give me my purse?, then I can't reach my purse, Is my purse there? My purse is there, Oh, my purse, or My purse is white.

We found that the three year olds required more specificity or explicitness to give the purse. That is, the more explicit, the more frequent the cooperative act. But for American five year olds, any naming was enough. Even my purse is white would result in getting the purse almost half the time. What seems to be going on is that the condition required is a cooperative partner. Language draws attention in this case to a situation, and practical intelligence infers what is required to change the scene and solve the problem. Something like this can be seen in children as young as two or three, if one sits without shoes, or with one shoe, points to a shoe across the room and says That's my shoe. If a very young child brings the shoe, are we to assume Gricean implicature? Or are we to look for the child's practical knowledge that shoes go with their owners?

2.3. Intention

If these kinds of apparent compliance with intention were based on Gricean implicature regarding intention, then children should be able to report intentions. We tested this part of the theory by using picture narratives analogous to our purse scene. In one picture, a mother carries a large sack of groceries, and asks the children, who are playing outside, Is the door open?

The usual reply of the children five and older is No and then opening the door. If the children interpreted the question literally, then it is not clear why they also report opening the door. We asked the children What did the mother mean when she said 'Is the door open?' What did she want? A third of the children said the mother just wanted to know if the door was open.

So we asked why the children opened the door, and they told us it was so the mother could bring in the groceries. Similar replies occurred to other con-
ditions, such as the wind blowing papers around (the children close the window) or the leash in the other room (the children bring it to the mother and the dog).

The literal processing of the questions, and accurate replies, seem to occur separately from a second, practical interpretation of the needs seen in the context. That the relationship is often one of attention rather than logical inference from the content of the question is suggested by the action following odd utterances like *My purse is white.*

The interpretations of intention were often slow and thoughtful, as if they were the result of a new reflection arising from being asked. The replies to the intention question were not always congruent with the proposed action, so that a third of the 4/5 year olds reported that the mother wanted the children to open the door, but they didn't propose to do so. Another third said the mother just wanted information, but proposed opening the door. For these reasons — incongruence, delay, and no report of relationship, I have come to doubt that a calculation of the intention of the speaker is a necessary component of the inference that leads to cooperation.

The conclusion we reach from this early behavior is that even quite young listeners can be attentive to context and cooperative in adjusting the context to the benefit of the partner. Their success is not necessarily dependent on a process of inference that follows the model of Gricean implicature. Indeed, an attentive participant, it is my contention, in many cases already knows a good deal about what is expected.

The role of language in this work may be various: to draw attention to a critical anomaly in the situation, to specify more exactly what is wanted, to motivate cooperation by threats, promises, anger, deference, or other social or emotional information. The exaggeration of the role of language in action inference leads to serious inaccuracies, and prevents us from attending to the diverse and important information language adds even when the hearer does not need language at all to infer practical action. The practical advantage of such a system of cooperative behavior is that it permits smooth coherence in cooperation even when the participants are not very attentive to the point of view and needs of others, that is, to their intentions.

Such a system does have constraints. It requires that the partner be cooperative. It is well-known from studies of children in different societies that differences in interactional cooperation and competition can be found, rooted in family values. We have found national differences in the cooperativeness of children with the adult examiners. There are clearly also elements of power in some cultural milieus in the likelihood of compliance; in the story narratives, child characters were less often given help for hints; in the families, younger children were the least successful in getting sibling compliance.

The system depends on expectations and clear action trajectories. Well-ordered families and classrooms make use of this principal to achieve great efficiencies by establishing regular routines which can be indexed briefly by word or gesture. In our research, scenarios that did not follow the usual role pattern didn't work. For example, a mother who asked her child *Is there any cake left?* was not usually offered another piece by a child.

Expectations and incongruity are culturally defined. For bilingual children tested in English, *Beautiful, go right ahead* said about a prohibited act is incongruous and seems to be a lie. When these children are tested in French, they report stopping and remedying the prohibited act, and do not interpret the mother's comment as incongruous. Within a few months, immigrant anglophones reject the literal interpretation in French. Are these children using Gricean implicature to interpret irony or conversational dares? If so, why don't they do so in English? Evidently their interpretation system is language-specific.

For children older than eight, we begin to see changes. Older children are more able to calculate speaker intentions, even for such imaginary conditions as narratives. That is visible from two pieces of evidence. Older children, even in English, interpret conversational dares as sarcastic. They thus have an alternative interpretation for the literal incongruity.

They are also able to take the perspective of characters in the story and anticipate when to lie. Older children offer false replies to questions about naughty behavior. *Are you spilling food? No.* Below, we will see that in production, too, children of eight or more are more sensitive to the listener's perspective.

There are cognitive limits to children's capacities to take the perspective of others. It is likely that similar age changes are found in all societies. But we can conceive that there may be some variations that arise from social training. For instance, Clancy (1985) has shown us that in Japan mothers systematically train their children to understand practical inference as intention on the part of the speaker. When someone says *It's noisy* they might say to a small child *He is saying 'turn off the radio'.*

In sum, our studies of interpretation by children under eight have shown us that what appears to be understanding through the use of implicature may
often be due instead to practical reasoning. Language has many more functions in these circumstances than just to direct action implicatures.

3. Production of requests

The standard model of request production is one that I call Macchiavellian. In this view, speakers know before they make a move exactly what they want the hearer to do. In the event that the speaker has power or rights to control the hearer, the act of the hearer will be made explicit in an imperative. In the event of mitigating circumstances the speaker calculates how to pay off or compensate the hearer or how to leave options to the hearer so as not to impose.

This model applies to some, but not most actual events. I have studied videotapes because it is possible to see acts within the context of larger goals and activities.

Requests are an ill-defined set. We find that when a mother grips her child tightly and says Don’t move it is not clear that the child is being given a proper order since no movement is possible. If a mother while picking up a toy says Pick this up, she is not making what is formally a felicitous order. A child who says I’m gonna jump produces the same outcome as one who says Get out of the way. For this reason we have taken up a larger category we call instrumental moves which are all acts which affect, or are intended to affect, the behavior of others.

3.1. Indirectness

Children directly represent in language what is on their minds; we find in our data three kinds of forms, two of which are considered by linguists to be indirect: Imperatives. “Don’t eat the raisins”. “Go away”. “Let go”. Typically these occur when activity is focal for the child, not objects. Want statements. “I want up”. “I wanta dolly”. These are formally interpreted by linguists as indirect because they do not specify what the hearer to do, and therefore require an act of inference by the hearer to be heard as requests. Problem statements. “I’m hungry”. “It broke”. “That doesn’t go there, it goes there”. “That’s my place”. “Johnny took my car”.

Problem statements were typically addressed to adults. They look like unconventional requests or hints, and for this reason they seem to be polite. They could instead be examples of cognitive incompleteness. The speaker has not thought about what the hearer is to do, and simply expresses the concerns that are focal for the speaker. From the standpoint of the speaker’s attention, there is nothing indirect or calculated in these forms. They can be seen as direct expressions of the speaker’s perspective. Wants, orders, and problem statements are the usual ways in which children express desires for change.

3.2. Resistance

Children do not always expect success with these moves. By two and a half they differentiate in their speech between occasions when help is usual and when it isn’t (Gordon and Ervin-Tripp 1984). (a) They do not expect to be able to get property that belongs to or is being used by others as easily as their own or unclaimed goods. (b) They do not expect routine help from fathers or from outside visitors.

These contrasts are expressed in two ways. The usual want, command, or problem statements are replaced in these cases. The younger children replace them with permissions and conventional requests, and polite adornments like please.

Conventional requests are the epitome of explicitness. They are explicit about what the hearer should do, and they put on record the symbolic payments which are made in the form of polite formals. So to a father we find Milk. Daddy, please, Daddy?; to a younger sister, Can I have your paint?, to a father Could you make me a bunny?, to a researcher Do you think you can fix this?

In older speakers, we might find more justifying to persuade or to appear polite, but even in our children over eight years old, the requests were accompanied by such justifications only 14% of the time.

As we look at these examples, we see that they involve more effort cognitively or linguistically than the simpler forms used when compliance is presupposed.

Could you make me a bunny is both linguistically and conceptually more complex than I want a bunny.

Can I have your paint is more complex than I need your paint, and Do you think you can fix this? is certainly both linguistically and cognitively more complex than This is broken.

It thus appears that certain types of linguistically defined indirectness are from the point of view of the speaker simpler than their alternatives, and do not arise from a process of calculated deviousness.
We can summarize the principles of production for two to five year olds as these:

(i) Say what is on your mind.
(ii) Be more explicit and more polite if you don’t expect success.
(iii) When what is on your mind is a problem, mention it.
(iv) When you want something, say so.
(v) When you want to start or stop someone’s actions, tell them so.

Are these forms produced because they are more polite? By four, children know the symbolism of politeness. They display it in role playing when there cannot be said to be practical payoffs. Thus politeness in role play is offered more to fathers than to mothers, and to doctors than to nurses (Andersen 1977).

3.3. Hearer-focussed politeness

But this is not the end of the story. There are major changes in children’s production of requests around eight. First, we find that certain formulae appear which address hearer concerns. In one experiment, we sent children to get letters or marking pens from busy adults. The younger children would say *My pen’s broken*, or *Where are the pens?* but the older children might say *Do you have any more pens?* or *Do you have a pen I could use?* This usage focusses on a potential obstacle to compliance. Though conventional, these forms are learned later than those which are not so focussed.

Young children seem to notice features of ownership, normal roles, and power in deciding when to put more effort into request forms, or in calculating that they might not get compliance. Older children add sensitivity to the disruption they cause hearers. There are two kinds of disruption — one interrupting the interaction of the hearer by making a request, and the other asking for effort or cost in compliance with the request. In adults, these two issues show up in *Pardon me, have you got a minute?* preceding a request, and in the escalation of politeness and justifications for larger requests — e.g. the loan of a car rather than a pencil. By seven or eight, children begin to be sensitive to these features and to use more negative politeness (apologies, deference) in response to these incursions on the hearer. This change requires a new perspective.

Older children are capable of more artful persuasion and of accommodation of their projects to schemes more likely to motivate or persuade addressees (Ervin-Tripp and Gordon 1984).

In all of these ways, older children attend more to the view of the hearer.

Eventually, at a point which we have not yet identified in our child data, speakers come to prefer implication and brevity among friends and co-workers who like each other. In the cultural milieu of our family studies, on record polite formulae are taken either to warn of a very high cost request (therefore unlikely to get compliance) or to indicate social distance, formality.

The study of developmental changes in instrumental behavior has thrown into question at least two generalizations commonly made about requests.

One is that hints or unconventional requests are understood by implication, which operates on the hearer’s beliefs about the speaker’s intentions. I have shown that there is often another route available which also leads to an appropriate response without requiring calculation of the speaker’s intention. This route may be common and important in routine everyday cooperative behavior.

The other is that speakers always know what they want, and delete what would be rude or too explicit. A simpler explanation is that many hints, or as Levinson (1983) calls them, “pre-requests”, accurately report attentional states. Brevity can arise from how speakers think, not just from what they think and don’t say.

4. Brevity and solidarity

If children learn to increase explicitness about the hearer’s actions and overt politeness formulae in order to symbolize deference and distance, then does vagueness symbolize closeness? On the semantic differential, polite is judged cold.

We have found that adults who work together for weeks in the kitchens of cooperative housing gradually minimize specificity of actions, as in *We’re out of ketchup*. This allusion seems to reflect the same efficient process that H. Clark reports for strangers in the two person communication game, who increased brevity with time. But I want to add that there is a symbolic element in the preference for allusion over explicitness.

If you put together American sorority friends in the two person communication game (communication about referents when out of sight), they are more likely to choose compact, metaphorical descriptions than are strangers of the same background. If explicitness and politeness symbolize social distance or dislike in this cultural milieu, we predict that among intimates allusion will be preferred over explicitness, whenever specificity is not required by the task. What I am suggesting is that allusion is not simply a
result of efficiency, but can acquire value and imply familiarity, empathy, and positive politeness.

Explicit formulaic politeness or the advancing of justifications is found by judges to be faulty for two reasons: it assumes that overt compensation is required to intimates, which is insulting, and it assumes the hearer is not attentive or informed, and must be told what is to be done to complete the scenario implied by the speaker.

This principle is not a simple one. Its realization is mediated through cultural differences. In those cultures which value negative politeness, status, and autonomy, we can expect that explicit markers of politeness will be more often used, and interrupting will be disvalued. We may not only be able to see these differences as the result of a cultural style, but look at the suppositions or values which differ.

I am suggesting today that what linguists call indirectness may arise from processing simplicity for the speaker. Simplicity in turn can acquire cultural value and become preferred.

5. Conclusion

The study of children and cross-cultural comparisons are relevant to students of pragmatics in order to test current generalizations and bring us to new ones. In particular, cross-cultural studies have thrown into doubt Grice’s maxim of quality and the preference for non-overlap. These studies also show us that the maxim of quality interacts with values in a way that can lead to quite different outcomes in different cultures.

Developmental studies have thrown into doubt speech act theories derived from normalized recall. They indicate that we can successfully understand ‘indirection’ without assessing the speaker’s intention through implicature. Studies of children suggest that the categories considered by linguists to be indirect requests, though they might be categories in recall, do not correspond to natural categories in production.

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MINIMIZATION AND CONVERSATIONAL INFERENCE

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Minimization: A cross-cutting theme

The range of disciplines, methodologies and intellectual preoccupations represented at meetings like these must raise the question whether Pragmatics is not a mere flag of convenience, under which divergent interests can momentarily find common profit in academic coalition. That suspicion is unlikely to be lulled by anything less than the odd successful synthesis across the different research traditions represented under the flag. It may be that in none of these traditions are the ideas yet clear enough to make successful integration possible; but I take it that we ought at least to be live to the possibility, and looking for opportunities to achieve such synthesis, and it is in this spirit that I offer the following tentative and in many ways premature suggestions in one small but important area.

In this paper I want to try and connect three distinct research traditions: (Neo-)Gricean principles of inference, conversation analysis (CA) and some recent issues in syntax. There is a particular interest in trying to connect the first two, for both Gricean approaches and CA approaches claim to be about the nature of conversation, and the lack of rapprochement ought to be embarrassing to our pragmatics coalition. In this paper, though, I do not intend to take on this synthesis of conversation analysis and conversational implicature directly. To do that, one would, for example, investigate naturally occurring speech events where the ground rules outlined in the maxims are not in force, and see whether, as predicted, implicatures fail to arise (see e.g. some suggestions in Levinson 1979).

Instead, I want to take a particular theme, minimization in linguistic