

## RELEVANCE IMPLICATURE COMPREHENSION IN 3-YEAR-OLDS

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In every-day conversation, speakers often intend to mean other things than they actually say. Thus, listeners need to make inferences and go beyond the sentences said.

Consider for example a child holding a packet of biscuits asking her mother:

(1) May I eat these biscuits?

A direct answer to this question would be when the mother would say either a “yes” or a “no”. But the mother might say:

(1a) You may eat some biscuits.

(1b) We are having lunch in a couple of minutes.

Neither in (1a) nor in (1b) the mother says exactly what she means. Rather, in (1a) the mother intends to convey, “Yes, you’re allowed to eat some biscuits, but not all” and in (1b) she means “No, you are not allowed to eat a biscuit” and she also gives a reason for why not. The meaning of (1a) may be derived by applying a scalar implicature, in (1b) the child needs to draw a relevance implicature.

While implicatures about scalar terms are quite thoroughly investigated, implicatures concerning conversational gaps are less well studied. Previous studies on relevance implicatures found that children must be at least 6 to 7 years old to derive the appropriate inference (Bucciarelli et.al., 2003; Loukusa et.al., 2007; Verbuk, 2009). However, a problem with these findings is that these studies measured children's comprehension of sentences as in (1b) by quite complex methods. In order to overcome these shortcomings, Cornelia Schulze (in collaboration with Susanne Grassmann and Michael Tomasello) conducted a first study on relevance implicature comprehension using an object-selection task. It was found that 3-year-olds are able to draw such implicatures. However, one could object that in this study the gap between the utterance and the intended meaning was easy too bridge (that is, few inferential steps were necessary, since the speaker said e.g. “I like lions”, meaning “yes”). So what about more complex relevance implicatures, where more inferential steps are necessary in order to bridge the gap?

Based on this question the first goal of the current project is to investigate 3-year-old children's comprehension of some more sophisticated relevance implicatures. The second goal is to integrate our experimental findings into the larger theoretical and philosophical background as provided by the researchers of UCL. As a third goal we want to test for children's presence of Theory of Mind in order to show that the comprehension of relevance implicatures does not depend on the presence of a full-fledged Theory of Mind (as stated by deVilliers et.al., 2009) but rather builds on children's ability of intention-reading and is therefore guided by the same principles that apply in very early communication and in word learning.