

Little 'Gricean' comprehenders: Implicature, presupposition and metaphor development.

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Tuesday 2nd December 12 noon – 13.30pm
Room 6.208 University Place
University of Manchester

ALL WELCOME

Abstract

Recent developmental research on social cognition indicates that pragmatics play a grounding role in the development of children's communicative skills even before they utter their first words. Furthermore, much evidence in language acquisition suggests that young children could not learn to speak without impressive pragmatic abilities. In stark contrast with this picture, linguistic pragmatic inferences (e.g., reference assignment, implicatures, metaphors, presuppositions and irony) appear to develop later than other linguistic abilities.

According to leading pragmatic theories, inferences involved in understanding various types of implicit and non-literal meanings require (a) intention reading, (b) taking into account common ground (or mutual knowledge), (c) and at least some degree of cooperation. Empirical findings suggest that prelinguistic children already master these skills. Words and syntax, it seems, are all there is left to learn for children to become perfect little 'Gricean' comprehenders. Yet, prior developmental research on linguistic pragmatic phenomena suggests otherwise.

This talk tries to reconcile the development of pre-linguistic and linguistic pragmatic abilities by presenting data on three phenomena: scalar implicatures, presupposition and metaphor. I will discuss evidence showing these phenomena might be understood much earlier than prior results suggest, and that several factors – independently of children's pragmatic abilities *per se* – may explain children's apparent struggle with pragmatic inferences.

Speaker Biography

Nausicaa Pouscoulous is a Lecturer in Linguistics at University College London. She received her PhD from the École de Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris for work done at the Institut Jean-Nicod in Paris and at the Institut des Sciences Cognitives in Lyon on scalar inferences and their processing by adults and children. She then did a postdoc in the Department of Developmental and Comparative Psychology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary

Anthropology in Leipzig, where her work focused more specifically on pragmatic development. Currently her research combines experimental and theoretical approaches to study phenomena at the interface between semantics and pragmatics, such as scalar implicature, presupposition and metaphor. Lately, she is particularly interested in the acquisition of pragmatic abilities by typically and atypically developing children.

Directions: University Place, Oxford Road, building 37 on the [Campus Map](#).

Further information

For further information about this seminar, please contact michaeline.k.glover@manchester.ac.uk or about LuCiD, please contact helen.allwood@manchester.ac.uk