

## **Do children make Gricean inferences?**

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Recent developmental research on social cognition indicates that pragmatics plays 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 pre-linguistic 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.