ASSENT AND COMPLIANCE IN CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

It is conventional to treat the meaning of an utter-
ance in a discourse in terms of two components, the
propositional and the pragmatic or speech act com-
ponent, the first indicating the meaning of the
sentence, the second indicating its intended use by
the speaker. Some arguments and evidence are pre-
sented to show that these two systems are interde-
pendent. Roughly, it appears that social considera-
tions, primarily status, determine which aspects of
a proposition are lexicalized in the utterance.
Thus, a child with high status relative to his inter-
locutor may use a command, "Give me a block", while
if he has low status relative to his interlocutor
he may use a request, "May I have a block?" If he
is an equal, a peer, (and perhaps only then) he will
use an explicit true proposition such as, "You have
two more than me". Only in this third case is the
propositional meaning explicit in the sentence per
se, and only in this case is an affirmative or
negative response dependent strictly upon truth con-
ditions (on assent rather than compliance).

This concept of the social aspects of meaning is
examined through an analysis of what is said vs.
what is meant in some child-child and teacher-child
conversations.

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Theories of human cognition have gradually ad-
justed their accounts of perception and of know-
ledge to the fact that neither perception nor
knowledge are simple copies of the environmental
events that occasion them. Bruner's (1957) "New
Look" in perception, which was devoted to showing
the role of hypotheses, expectancies and set on
the processes of perceptual recognition along
with Bartlett's (1977) analyses of the role of
"schema" in remembering helped to relativize the
accounts of the relation between stimulus and
perception or between reality and knowledge.

Now, however, we are asked to make our accounts
of human cognition even more relative as not only
to innate categories, and to expectancies based on

prior experience, but rather to the social relations
in which those knowledge structures are constructed.
Theories advanced under the banner of the "socio-
logy of knowledge" have claimed that the structures
of knowledge and perception reflect the organizing
properties of the social system in which the exper-
iences occur and are assimilated.

This line of argument is usually attributed to Durk-
heim. According to his biographer Steven Lukes
(1975) the cognitive processes reflect directly the
social and political structures of a society. "Con-
ceptual thought, was," Durkheim claimed, "social
and nothing but an extension of society" (Lukes,
1973, pp. 23-24) and again, "Logical life has its
first source in society" (Lukes, 1973, p. 441).

In an admirable collection of essays and monographs,
Mary Douglas (1975) takes up and extends the Durk-
heimian view. With Durkheim, she claims that:
"...ideas rest on classification. Ultimately any
form of knowledge depend on principles of classi-
fication. But these principles arise out of social
experience, sustain a given social pattern and
themselves are sustained by it. If this guideline
and base is grossly disturbed, knowledge itself
is at risk" (p. 245). Specifically, she argues that
the discriminating principles as to what is clean
and what is polluted and what generally is "against
nature" is derived from social structure. Nature
is classified in such a way as to uphold the social
order--thus in a social order in which men are
status-dominant over women and children it seems
only natural that women and children be assigned
low-status duties such as dish-washing.

Taken in their boldest form, these theories argue
that knowledge is socially constructed; there are
close ties between the social order and the concep-
tual order. But how does this social order affect,
come to be affected, or otherwise interact with
the conceptual order?

Most of the theories which attempt to relate social
structures to cognitive ones have postulated symbols
as the mediating link. Symbols are culturally de-
signed and they are acquired by children for use
in communication and for the interpretation of
experience. But where in a symbol system, such as
language, shall we look for evidence of their
relation to social structures? The best known
of these theories of this relation such as those

of Vygotsky (1962), Bruner (1966) or Whorf (1956) have tried to isolate the social constraints on the semantic, propositional side of language rather than the social, interpersonal or pragmatic side of language. In so doing they followed the then-predominant focus of linguistic and semiotic theory.

Theories of symbols have tended to emphasize the semantic, denotative or referential side of meaning at the expense of the social, pragmatic or interpersonal side of meaning. In his classical treatment of symbol systems, Nelson Goodman (1968) focused exclusively on the objective or informative or semantic aspects of symbols, that is, the relation that exists between the symbol and the event it represents, denotes, expresses or exemplifies.

Chomsky (1972, p. 24) too, focuses on the logical or semantic aspects of meaning--that aspect of meaning which is invariant across the various functions to which a sentence may be put, in his theory of language. Studies of language and cognition have similarly focused on labels and on grammatical relations in their attempts to find the relations between language and thinking. Hence Durkheim looked at classification systems, Vygotsky looked at the superordinate categories, and "scientific concepts", Bruner and Greenfield looked in the structure of adjectives, Cole and Scribner looked in the structure of logical inferences and so on for evidence of social-cultural differences. And indeed some indications of social differences have shown up in those studies although they tend to reflect simply degrees of familiarity with a certain approach to problems primarily, "learning to confine interpretation to the text" (Olson and Nickerson, 1978).

There is however a second dimension of language which has been brought to the fore by recent analysis of the functions of language under the rubric of speech act theory. Sentences are now considered and analyzed both in terms of the propositional content of the sentence, traditionally the semantics or meanings of the language, and the pragmatic function, what one is attempting to do by means of that sentence--promising, convincing, commanding, requesting, stating and the like. Searle (1969) following Austin (1962) differentiates propositional acts of referring and predicating from illocationary acts or stating, questioning, commanding, promising and so on. The same reference and predication can occur in the performance of completely different speech acts as in Searle's example:

1. Sam smokes habitually.
2. Does Sam smoke habitually?
3. Sam, smoke habitually!
4. Would that Sam smoked habitually. (p. 22).

Halliday (1970, 1973) too, in his analysis of the functions of language, differentiated three primary functions of language--the ideational function, the interpersonal function and the textual function-- which jointly specify the structure of any particular utterance or series of utterances. Clark and Clark (1977) suggest that speakers and listeners of the language use two general principles in comprehending utterances, the "reality principle" and the "cooperative principle". Again note that

the reality principle has to do with the relation between symbol and referent while the latter has to do with the relation between speakers.

Let us try to simply this relationship by means of a diagram. Figure 1 shows the set of relations sustained by any symbol.

Logical

Social: speaker ⟵— symbol —⟶ speaker
                         ↓
                     meaning
                         ↓
                     referent
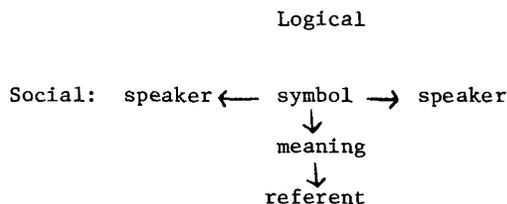
Figure 1.

Note first that a symbol simultaneously serves two sorts of relations represented in the diagram by two dimensions of language--one dimension, represented by the horizontal axis in Figure 1, is that specifying the social relations between speaker/ writer and listener/audience; the symbol expresses a social relation between speaker and listener. And the second dimension, represented by the vertical axis, is that specifying a relation between symbol and meaning or between signifier and signified. The first we may call the social or interpersonal meaning of a symbol and the second the logical meaning of that symbol, linguistic or otherwise.

It is this horizontal dimension, the social one, which until recently has not been given its due. Most studies of language for example have been devoted primarily to the syntactic/semantic meaning of words and sentences and the veridical relationships between sentences and the situations they represent. This is the aspect of language which most weakly reflects the social relations. And yet, as I mentioned above, this is the dimension of meaning that most hypotheses of the Durkheimian sort have focused upon.

It is the horizontal relation, the relations between persons that promises to illuminate the relations between social and cognitive structures. Let us consider what some of these social constraints on the meaning of a symbol may be. First, even the aspect of meaning represented by the vertical axis has an important social component. To be represented in the language, symbols must be socially shared. What gets into the language depends upon what others will agree to. Indeed, the semantic aspect of language may be important partly because it constitutes a relatively undisputed ground for the reaching of social consensus, what is coming to be called "intersubjectivity."

More recent work on the pragmatics of language, the horizontal dimension, and the social relations assumed and maintained in the expression of any sentence, goes far to put the social dimension of language back onto center stage. In the simplest case the declaratives "The door is closed" is logically related to the command "Open the door" and the request "Could you open the door." As Searle (1975) would say, the three utterances represent the same propositional content yet they

perform different speech acts: the first, an assertion, the second, a command and the third, a question serving as a request. While this speech act analysis contributes importantly to the view that the meaning of a sentence is more than the proposition it expresses, that is, it explicates the function or pragmatics of language, it seems not to go far enough.

It may be argued that in the above three utterances both the propositional content and the pragmatic function of the sentences are similar--they all represent the proposition: not (door(open)) and they all serve the pragmatic function of A attempting to get B to open the door. These sentences which have different illocutionary forces as part of their "sentence meanings" are being used indirectly to perform the same illocutionary act (Searle, 1975, p. 71). They vary in their indirectness, and politeness.

However, the important point for us to notice is that the social relations between the speakers assumed by the three sentences is entirely different. The command assumes that the speaker has superior status to the listener, the request assumes a differential inferiority of the speaker and the declarative assumes, perhaps, the equality of the participants. The point I wish to emphasize is that an utterance is simultaneously doing two things--it is specifying the logical relation between symbol and referent, the vertical dimension of Figure 1, and it is specifying a social relation between the interlocutors. Together, they contribute to the meaning of the symbol, utterance or expression. However, Searle's analysis is above all a theory of language. It is less a theory of the social structures that those linguistic structures construct and/or sustain. My concern here is to relate these two sets of structures.

One of the most notable attempts to construct a bridge between sociological theory and psychological theory of language and the cognitive processes is that of Bernstein and his collaborators (1971). Bernstein isolated two patterns of speech which, he claimed, mapped on to two social classes. The language of working class children he characterized as a restricted code which limited grammatical and lexical options, while that of the middle class children he characterized as an elaborated code with an expanded set of lexical and syntactic options. More fundamentally however, he argued that the root cause of these linguistic differences could be found in the patterns of social relations which held within each of the family types of the differing social classes. Working class familial structures he characterized as "positional"--a fixed hierarchical structure in which authority, responsibility, accountibility and priviledges were assigned on the basis of one's position in the family. Middle class families he described as person-oriented. Duties and priviledges were assigned to various roles, but a person was not permanently assigned to a fixed role but rather the role was contracted or negotiated with the other members of the social group. Duties, priviledges and responsibilities were assigned by a discussion and contract rather than being permanently assigned to particular individuals. Social theorists would recognize these patterns as essentially "monarchist" versus "soc-

ial contract" political structures. In the first case the parent with the highest status has the right to decree what family members are to do, he is awarded respect and he is assigned high status duties. Low status individuals are to be obedient and to accept responsibility for low status duties. In the latter case, such assignments are negotiated.

These social differences translate directly into the linguistic patterns mentioned above. The former, relying primarily upon position and status require the close observance of status relations and a minimum of negotiation. For the middle class, the social contract requires a high degree of linguistic competence in negotiating roles, rights, agreements and priviledges. Hence the latter can be expected to generate an elaborated code. Evidence for this theory has generally outweighed evidence against it but several writers have attributed the observed differences not to linguistic incompetence but to the social environments in which the data was collected. Labov (1972) for example found that speakers of Black English Vernacular were essentially as adept with the language when they conversed with their peers as were white children. Black children did especially poorly only when they were interviewed by a high-status white teacher/experimenter.

Bernstein's theory is primarily important for its assertion of a direct link between social structures and linguistic structures. However the differences should be expected less in the lexical and syntactic structures then in the social meanings--in the pragmatics of language. Working class children do know the pragmatic options as Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan's (1977) interviews make abundantly clear. However, working class children (more generally children from families with a positional, heirarchical structure) may be expected to assign themselves a low status relative to various authorities and assign interpretations on the basis of those status differentials more so than will middle class children. Thus, it may be predicted that if sentences which are ambiguous representations of speech acts were presented to working class and middle class children, the former would tend to comply, that is to treat the statement as an indirect request--while middle class children would tend to assent, that is to treat the statement as ability or information questions. To illustrate if asked, "Can you tell me what this is?", working class children may comply by responding "A pencil!" while middle class children may tend to assent by responding "Yes, I can!"

Generally speaking then, the linguistic options are presumably much the same for all speakers. The social relations assumed and maintained differ-- if you have low status you can expect to be given commands--if high, to give them. Many of our institutional practices can be seen as keeping people in their assigned status positions and language may be seen as one such means.

Nice illustrations of these social-linguistic games have been presented by Gumperz (Note 2), Ervin-Tripp (1977) and Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977). Gumperz reports a conversation between a husband and wife in which the husband asks "Where's the paper?" and the wife, with some annoyance, replies

"I'll get it." The first statement may be interpreted as either a request for locative information or an indirect request that she get him the paper. Her recognition of that second possibility, that he, even if only in the back of his mind, wanted her to get him the paper, was the source of annoyance.

Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan's (1977) example is even more apposite. In the course of a group discussion between an experimenter-teacher and a group of children one child gave an indirect command to the adult who had her foot on a chair: "I want that chair!" with which the adult complied. Some of the other children gasped and said "O-o-o-o Claudia, you gon' let her talk to you like that?" (p. 205). The social message is obvious. You have to have status to give commands and the child did not have this status. The children were well aware of that aspect of meaning. Mitchell-Kernan cites further examples of precisely this social game. Some of the children would try commands on other children simply to see if the listener would comply. If they complied, the child issuing the command would have gained proof of his greater social status. When they tabulated the frequency of various kinds of "directives", Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan found that addressees who were lower in rank than the speaker received over five times as many directives as those higher in rank (p. 203). They conclude: "Directives and reactions to them were constantly used to define, reaffirm, challenge, manipulate, and redefine status and rank. At times the directives involved actually served the ordinary function of directives—that of requesting goods or services—while at the same time, because of their frequency of occurrence or the particular form they took, served to test the addressee's view of the statuses involved" (p. 201). Ervin-Tripp (1977) too found a particular social distribution of various forms of directives in her studies of how children learn to honor various factors such as age, dominance, task and familiarity in making requests (p. 186).

As these authors point out, directives are used only as instrumental means of carrying out pragmatic speech acts suitable to particular interpersonal and social conditions but also to accomplish certain interpersonal functions—primarily establishing and maintaining a social order, a status quo. In using these constructions, the child is simultaneously learning two interrelated pictures of reality—the nature of "objective reality", that is the propositional or knowledge system, and his place in the social order—that is, who has a right to make requests, to issue commands, and to make true descriptions and so on. As argued above, this is because every symbolic expression has a value on both of these dimensions. And I have suggested that these two dimensions are interdependent; descriptions are more apt to be assessed exclusively in terms of their truth in some social relations than in others.

Less direct evidence of the uses of status differentials in the speech patterns comes from studies of language in the classroom. Feldman and Wertsch (Note 1) reported that teachers in the classroom rarely used what they called "stance indicators"—verbs such as may, or should, or wish or hope, think or believe or qualifiers such as maybe in their classrooms but they frequently used them in their speech in the lunchroom. That is, teachers in the

classroom act as spokesmen for the official public view and keep their feelings, aspirations and hesitancies from display. In their classic studies of the language in the classroom Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman and Smith (1966) found that a predominant form of language in the classroom was of the question-answer routines known as the "recitation method." Interestingly, it was the teachers who asked the questions and it was the children who provided the answers. It appears that the right to ask questions was a high status perrogative. Furthermore, the questions were not simply requests for information. The teacher already knew the answer—the point of the question was to see if the child knew the answer. The question serves primarily as a means of holding students accountable for the information acquired from reading the text. While the utterances specify true facts, that is, relations between symbols and referents, the form that the proposition takes again depends upon the social relations between the interlocutors.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) also found that many of the interrogative and declarative sentences used by teachers in fact served as imperatives. For example, the statement "Somebody's talking," "I see chewing gum" were not to be taken as true descriptions but as indirect commands. They called, as we prefer to state it, for compliance rather than assent.

Goody (Note 3) in an interesting study of the forms of questioning among the Gonja of Ghana, found that questions in that society were not merely means of securing information but were primarily reflections of the status of the interlocutors. Hence, children rarely asked questions, not because they had no need for information, but rather because asking a question of an adult would be to upset the social order. Goody comments: "The securing of information becomes secondary to considerations of status relations" (p. 42, 1975).

The surface form of an utterance depends upon both the propositional structure and on the pragmatic function. All sentences appear to do both simultaneously—as we have suggested the symbol simultaneously stands in a specifiable relation to a meaning—it represents a proposition—and in a specifiable relation to the speaker and his listener. Both of these dimensions may be invariant across some set of transformations. Different sentences may assert the same proposition, as for example active and passive sentences or declaratives and questions. Presumably, as well, sentences with different propositional content may be used to construct or maintain the same social relation between interlocutors. There is presumably more than one way to be obsequious and more than one way to be insubordinate.

Most theories of the pragmatics of language would agree, roughly, to this point. However, even if they may be differentiated, it is important to notice that those two dimensions, the logical and the social are not independent. This point may be expressed by the question: What are the conditions under which an utterance can be judged simply or exclusively for its truth value or its propositional meaning? And what are the conditions under which an utterance will be judged as an order, or a request for action? Let us distinguish these two

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criteria for interpretation by means of labels: the first, the judgment for truth or falsity we may say calls for <u>assent</u>; the second, the response to a statement as a call for action, we may say calls for <u>compliance</u>. My conjecture is that certain social and institutional arrangements lead any particular utterance to be regarded as a call for assent while others, as a call for compliance. Symmetrically, certain social conditions are more likely to generate assertions and information questions while others generate indirect requests and imperatives.

We have examined these conjectures in two ways. First we have examined some transcripts of children's discourse and secondly we have designed three small experiments to follow up and clarify some of the relations we seem to have isolated in the analysis of transcripts.

Nancy Nickerson has recently collected and begun to analyze a series of dialogues between pairs of children as they played with toys. We are intersted both in the quality of oral expression (in an attempt to see in what ways oral language competence is related to learning to read) and in the use of statements, questions and commands in cooperating with and controlling the behaviour of peers. Although that project is at an early stage, I shall present one analysis of a transcript in terms of the model described above. This dialogue occurred between two Nursery School children named Jamie and Lisa who had some difficulty arriving at an equitable distribution of a limited resource, namely some dominoes. Let us see how they use language to negotiate this social problem.

    L: Let's make a domino house out of these
    J: Okay

First, by grabs.

    J: Lookit how many I got....You <u>took</u> a couple
       of mine!
    L: Now you <u>took</u> a couple....

Then by commands.

    L: Now you got to give me three back!
      ....
    L: Now give me just one more and then
       we got the same

And then by requestful declaratives.

    J: Now, you got more than me-e

And denials.

    L: No-o we got the same

By fact collecting and inferencing.

    L: (Begins to count her dominoes). One, two,
       three, four....twenty-eight, twenty-nine
       (Then counts Jamie's dominoes). One, two,
       three, four....eighteen, nineteen...(short
       pause) twenty-nine.
    J: I got nineteen and you got twenty-nine....
       You got more than me.
    L: No-o (shouting) I COUNTED....You have the
       same as me....We got the same.
    J: NO-O-O

And when negotiations break down and again by grasping.

    (There is a shuffle of dominoes across the
    floor.)

And finally by appeal to authority.

    L: You got much more than me now
    J: No we got the same

    (Paul, a volunteer teacher, enters the room.)

    L: Does he have much more than me?
    P: Not too many more!

Note first that almost all of these quite different utterances are attempts to alter or preserve the social arrangement of two children playing together and sharing the limited supply of dominoes. "Now you got to give me three back," a command, has the same pragmatic function as "Now, you got more than me," an assertion standing as an indirect request, spoken by the same person. And both speakers appear to be aware of the social meaning, namely; that the listener should hand over one or more of the dominoes, even if in one case it is the explicit "give me" and in the other, the implicit "you have more." Why then do they use one device rather than another?

We may see how the logical and the social meanings interact if we score each sentence for both its logical or "truth" meaning, the assent criterion, and for its social meaning, the complicance criterion. For the logical meaning, true may be marked with a "+" and false with a "-". For the social meaning, the categories are less obvious. We let "+" represent the preservation of any current social arrangement, i.e., those not requiring compliance and "-" represent the realignment of any social relationship—statements which require compliance and call for revolutionary activity, so to speak. Now let us examine some fragments of this dialogue in this framework.

	Sentence	Gloss	Assent Truth Value	Compliance Status-Preserving
J:	"You got more than me."	(Give me some)	+	-
L:	"No, we got the same."	(I don't have to)	-	+
P:	"Not too many more."	(Yes, it's true she has more but she does not have to give you any).	+	+

Note that Jamie tells the truth with the hope of realigning the distribution of dominoes. Lisa, technically speaking, tells a lie. (Recall that she was the one who <u>counted</u> them). But her denial was not merely one of falsehood. She knows that if she

agrees to the truth of Jamie's statement, she will have to turn over some of the blocks. That she doesn't want to do so, she denies the statement. My guess is that that is what all lies are—tampering with truth value for social or personal ends. Truth, like falsehood is motivated.

More than that. Lisa is not denying the truth of Jamie's statement simply in the service of social ends. Rather, I would guess, she does not know any means of simultaneously meeting both the social and logical criteria. Paul, the teacher does. Note his reply when Jamie appeals to him. The presupposition of his sentence is that Lisa has more. Rather than deny it, he presupposes it and uses his sentence to hold that no redistribution is required, presumably on the premise that possession is nine-tenths of the law.

What I would like to suggest from this example is that truth conditions are not separated from social utility. Claims of truth will be advanced primarily if the gaining of assent implies compliance with some social goal. Symmetrically, denials of truth will be offered if the social consequence of assent are perceived to be undesirable.

It is at this point that social relations enter into the language. Micro social orders, small scale transactions, like the one mentioned above, involve the solution of small-scale interpersonal problems which must be solved either for individual machiavellian goals or for shared social goals. The main problem is how to secure compliance, agreement or at least to prevent the loss of the status quo (An interesting expression). That may be done by several means, direct action, commanding, pleading, or hard negotiation on a common ground. Facts are one such ground, which as we have seen, are overlooked if they are embarassing; authority is another such ground, which as we have seen, tries to get involved or take sides.

Disputes in the larger social order appear to be solved on somewhat similar means. As Foucault (1971) pointed out, different social orders make use of different criteria for truth and hence different grounds for the legitimation of the social order. Authority, the father in a patriarchical order or the priest in an ecclesiastical order, has the power to decide in the case of disputes, as judges do in our own courts. Hopefully, they have adequate recourse to the truth, but poor judgments carry just as much weight as good ones. The decisions likely to gain the greatest compliance have both.

It is interesting to recall in this context the wisdom of Solomon. One may wonder if Solomon's judgments were considered so good because he was so wise or because he happened as well, to be king. More likely the stories of his wisdom and justice, helped to legitimize the authority that was socially assigned to him.

In our own society, great weight is assigned to "truth", "facts", "sense data" as objective grounds for making scientific, social and political decisions. As long as people believe that truth is objective, it serves as an important means of "legitimizing" a social order (Habermas, 1973). Furthermore the establishment of institutions like universities devoted to discovering the "truth" independent of its social utility, helps to sustain the view that there

are such facts and that those facts can be used to sustain the social order. (Hence, we may count on some continued support even if we were (God forbid) unsuccessful in finding any such truths.)

A single argument between two four-year-olds may be insufficient empirical grounds to sustain a general social theory, hence, we have attempted to further examine some of these expressions and their interpretations by experimental means. Angela Hildyard recently took some of the statements from our transcripts and built them into a series of ten stories. Here is one of these:

> One Saturday morning Susie and Kevin Jones went to the movies. Their mum gave them some money to buy some popcorn. Susie bought a large box and they shared it out. When Kevin looked at Susie's share he didn't feel too happy. "You've got more than me" he said.

The stories describing social predicaments of this sort were each followed by a recall test, e.g., What did they buy to eat? What did Kevin say?

The most interesting results came from Kingergarten and Grade 2 children's reply to the second question.
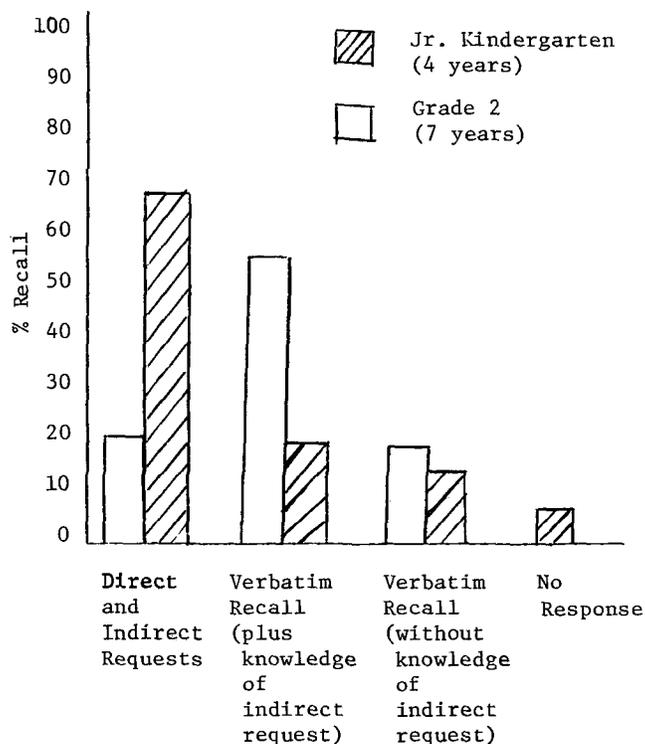
Figure 2. The recall of declarative statements as given (verbatim) and as direct and indirect requests by Junior Kindergarten and Grade 2 children.

Junior kindergarten children (Aged 4 and 5 years), when asked what Kevin had said would frequently answer with a request or a command, "Can I have some?" or "Give me some popcorn." By the second

grade (Aged 7 and 8), children tended to recall the statement verbatim: "You have more than me". When further queried as to why he said that, they replied, "Because he wanted more". These results are shown in Figure 2. The implication of these findings is that almost all of the children interpreted the statement, "You have more than me" not simply as a true statement but rather as an indirect request and that interpretation biased the recall of the younger subjects. Older subjects remembered both what was intended by the sentence and the means the speaker used, here a declarative, true statement, to achieve it. That is, the sentence was not interpreted and evaluated strictly or even primarily on truth criteria but on social ones. And the younger the children, the stronger the tendency to treat the sentence as a call for compliance and hence to report it as such.

These findings are similar to those we have obtained earlier in our studies of recall and inference from stories with children of different ages in which we showed that recall tends to be of "what was meant" rather than "what was said" and that with age (and schooling) children come to be able to differentiate the two (Hildyard and Olson, in press).

In a further study, Hildyard read the stories, excluding the last line, to Kindergarten (age 5) and Grade 2 (Age 7) children, and adults and asked them to imagine what the victim said—in the above story, for example, "What do you think Kevin said to Susie?" There were two important additional factors. First, the child may be either demanding a right—it may be that he is asking for his own sock back—or a favor—he may be asking for something that actually belongs to the other child. Further they could be asking these rights or favors of low status individuals, young children, or high status individuals, parents and teachers. There were 16 subjects at each grade level and there were three stories of each type.

Again, I shall mention only the most interesting results. First, favors were much more likely to be signalled by a conventionalized request than were rights. Over all age levels and item types, the favor items were marked by requests 77% of the time while rights were so marked only 45% of the time. How rights were signalled varied with the age of the subjects. The youngest subjects use direct commands to their peers and conventionalized requests to their parents and teachers. Thus they may say, "Give me my sock" to a peer and "May I have my gold star" (which had been promised) to the teacher. Adult subjects, while they use requests for favors, rarely use commands in attempts at obtaining their rights and tend rather to use declaratives "You have my sock", and questions, "Do you know where my sock is?" Adults use this device 33% of the time while children of both ages use it about 15% of the time. Adults, in obtaining their rights also use "legitimized requests", requests accompanied by reasons more so than do the children. These results are presented in Table 1.

Note that in all of these cases, subjects aspired to the same goal—either through their direct meaning or in their indirect meanings they conveyed the same illocutionary force. Yet the utterance used to express that intention took a different form depending upon the social relations between the participants. Primary among those factors is the status relations between them—commands may be is-

Table 1

The use of various forms of directives as a function of the type of request, rights vs. favors, and the status relations involved

	Kindergarten N=16	Grade 2 N=16	Adult N=16	Total
Use of Convention- alized Requests				
Favors	86	86	58	77%
Rights	59	49	27	45%
Use of Commands		--		
Favors	5	2	10	6%
Rights	19	6	14	13%
Declaratives and Questions				
Favors	7	5	14	9%
Rights	13	18	33	21%
Legitimized Requests				
Favors	1	6	11	6%
Rights	5	24	19	16%
Threats, Negotiations, Appeals				
Favors	0	0	7	3%
Rights	0	3	6	3%

sued to lower status individuals, requests must be issued to superiors even if you are only asking for your rights. Secondly, the presumed rights, the status quo, determines the form in which that illocutionary force will be expressed. Favors are largely expressed through requests, although adults also frequently add reasons, while rights may be expressed through commands, occasionally through threats, or through the provision of reasons (Declaratives and Questions). Ervin-Tripp (1977) has recently cited similar results from an unpublished study by Sharon James.

In a third study, Beverly Wolfus gave Kindergarten and Grade 2 children a series of direct commands such as (Tell me what this is! Put the penny in the glass!) and ambiguous ability requests (Can you turn over the cup? Could you tell me the name of this?), while pointing to a cup or other objects and observed how children interpreted and responded to them. She was particularly interested in whether the children opted for the direct expressed meaning or the indirect pragmatic meaning of the ambiguous expressions. Thus "Tell me if you can put the penny in the glass" could be answered by assent, "Yes I can"—the direct meaning—or by compliance, by actually putting the penny in the glass—the indirect, or pragmatic meaning. When issued direct commands, both age groups complied extremely consistently. Told "Open the book", everyone opened the book. To "Tell me what this is" every one said, "A pen".

The differences in the responses to ambiguous questions and statements for the two age groups were striking. These differences occurred in response to the questions and statements which were ambiguous between a propositional and a pragmatic interpretation, that is ambiguous in their call for assent as opposed to compliance. To the statement "Can you turn over the cup?" older children would say "Yes", that is, assent, younger children would silently turn it over, that is, comply. To "Tell me if you can put the penny in the glass", older children would assent by saying "Yes" or "I can", younger children would comply by putting the penny in the cup. To "Do you know what this is?" while pointing at a penny or a cup, older children would assent by replying "Yes", young children would comply by replying "Penny" or "Cup". To the statement, "The book is closed", young children would, more often than older children, silently open it, older children would not but rather await further information. These results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Assent versus compliance in Kindergarten and Grade 2 children's interpretation of sentences

	Assent	Compliance	Both
Put the top on the pen.			
Kindergarten		100%	
Grade 2		100%	
Tell me what this is.			
Kindergarten		100%	
Grade 2		100%	
Tell me if you can X.			
Kindergarten	8%	83%	8%
Grade 2	69%	29%	2%
Tell me if you know how to X.			
Kindergarten	13%	64%	8%
Grade 2	66%	27%	8%
Do you know what this is?			
Kindergarten	5%	88%	8%
Grade 2	30%	67%	3%
Can you turn over the cup?			
Kindergarten	8%	64%	24%
Grade 2	64%	19%	18%
Do you know how to X?			
Kindergarten	25%	11%	64%
Grade 2	91%	3%	5%
The book is closed.			
Kindergarten	73%	20%	7%
Grade 2	92%	8%	

Overall, these data show that the younger children took every utterance in terms of its expressed or implied illocutionary force and complied with it, while older children tended to differentiate the direct meaning from its indirect illocutionary force and respond to the direct meaning. Ervin-Tripp (1977), observed a similar affect. When told to "Say why don't you stand up" the child said "Stand up!" and stood up--that is, he complied. Again this indicates that the meaning of the statement is, at least at the beginning, not simply its truth value, although that meaning may be calculated as part of its more pragmatic meaning. Rather, the sentences are scanned, as it were, for their implications for action, and that is what the youngest children tend to opt for. Further we can see some indication of the transition from compliance to assent in the Kindergarten children in the item "Do you know how to X?" Here these young subjects would first assent and then comply 64% of the time.

Again, with age or schooling, children begin to differentiate the propositional from the pragmatic meaning and to be able to respond to either of them. However, it appears that this propositional meaning is not primary but rather specialized out of a primary undifferentiated social pragmatic meaning.

Note that one of the factors that appears to give those simple declarative sentences a powerful illocutionary force for the youngest children is that they are spoken by an adult in a school context. The child assumes that the adult is not just stating or asserting some thing "The book is open" but indirectly requesting that something be done about it. Given a high status individual in a hierarchically structured institutional context, the child assumes that any utterance requires compliance not assent.

Let us return, in conclusion, to some of the general issues raised at the outset. I have argued that all utterances serve both objective (truth) functions and social (compliance) functions and that these are not independent. Many examples from the studies showed that the form which a directive takes depends upon the status relations between the interlocutors. This is clearly the case for imperatives and requests--requests are more likely for privileges and imperatives for rights. Requests are more likely to higher status individuals and imperatives to lower status individuals. Imperatives occur more frequently when children address lower status individuals and rationalized questions, declaratives and requests occur more frequently in the language of adults. Further the evidence showed that almost any form of utterance from a high status individual including a declarative sentence such as "The book is open" tended to be interpreted as an indirect imperative when spoken to a lower status individual. That is, the statement called for compliance rather than assent.

Our question at this point is whether or not status differences, differences in the social relations between speakers affect the interpretation of statements with the putative status of true descriptions. Generally, are claims of truth independent of claims of status?

As I have suggested, putative true statements call for assent (or falsification) while putative imperatives call for compliance (or defiance). But, as we have seen, if a true description is given by a high status individual, a lower status individual may respond with compliance rather than assent. Can the two criteria be specialized? Can state-

ments ever be constructed such that they call for assent and not compliance? If not why are there such things as assertions? The fact that some statements can be assented to indicate that the truth functions can be isolated at least somewhat from their more general social functions. Even in that case however, the true statements would be generated (or denied) when they have social utility, much as Lisa denied Jamie's statement that she had more.

The alternative, however, that the meaning of a sentence is purely subjective, that is whatever you can get a listener to comply with, is even more precarious. As Harré (1974) pointed out this is a territory suited only for the bravest machiavelians --to assume the status to make demands and declarations and to continue to do so until someone refuses to comply.

A more promising approach would be to argue that the meanings of utterances can gain their agreement from speakers on the two bases we have discussed and that these two bases are in continuous interaction. One may get agreement, either assent or compliance, simply because of the status relations involved. One is in a position to command or to declare that such and such is the case and the other, agreeing to that higher status, receives those commands and declarations and assents or complies with them. The bulk of social negotiations proceed on this basis. But if there is a collapse of the social order, or a condition of general equality, no one person is in a position to demand either assent or compliance. Then the ground for the adjudication of disputes or more simply for the negotiation of meaning falls on to the objective, descriptive, or logical dimension of meaning. It is, presumably, easier to gain assent than to gain compliance; hence the importance of truth in any social order. And in the microsocial order, negotiations are carried out by any means available, but as Friere (1972) has suggested, genuine conversation is possible only between equals.

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