Deceptive language: A new methodology in language acquisition and implicature theory

Mailin Antomo, Yuqiu Chen, Susanne Müller, Markus Paluch, Katharina Paul & Maik Thalmann
University of Göttingen

mailin.antomo@phil.uni-goettingen.de, yuqiu.chen@stud.uni-goettingen.de, susanne.mueller01@stud.uni-goettingen.de, markus.paluch@stud.uni-goettingen.de, katharina.paul1@stud.uni-goettingen.de, maik.thalmann@stud.uni-goettingen.de

We will present four experimental studies demonstrating that deceptive language in experimental pragmatics is a suitable method for distinguishing different kinds of meaning and for revealing children's pragmatic competence. Studies on whether lying, as opposed to merely deceiving, is possible with untruthful implicatures conflicted (affirmative: Meibauer 2014; dissenting: Saul 2012). First, we discuss two experiments investigating whether untruthful PCIs and GICs are judged as lies (Antomo et al. to appear). Our results show that false implicatures are categorized as lies, but that participants differentiate between assertion and implicature. Moreover, the contrast between GCIs and PCIs only features in truthful usages, whereas untruthful GCIs and PCIs are judged alike. Last, our results reveal an overall similar performance across tested age groups (5–6 years, 8–9 years and adults), showing that inferences are accessible earlier than originally thought. We conclude that deceptive language not only does not add to the complexity of the task, but implicated lies might also prove to be a setting which brings to the fore children's inferential abilities.

In a follow-up experiment, we show that using deceptive language is a novel way to distinguish between different kinds of meaning. In the study presented above, GCIs and PCIs were rated on par in untruthful usage. However, results differ employing a Forced Choice Task with the options 'truth', 'lie', and 'deception'. Here, we obtained a significant difference between implicatures such that false GCIs were predominantly categorized as lies, while untruthful PCIs were regarded as deceptions. This result supports the neo-Gricean distinction between GCIs and PCIs, whereas it challenges post-Gricean pragmatics such as Relevance Theory. The results of the same experiment, conducted with speakers of Mandarin Chinese and items translated accordingly, in order to assess whether this pattern results from a universal phenomenon

References: • Antomo, M. et al. to appear. When children aren't more logical than adults: An empirical investigation of lying by falsely implicating. *Journal of Pragmatics.* • Meibauer, J. 2014.: *Lying at the semantics-pragmatics interface.* Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. • Saul, J. 2012. *Lying, misleading, and what is said.* Oxford: OUP.