PLENARY TALKS

Louis de Saussure
University of Neuchâtel

Revisiting affective effects

In recent works (de Saussure & Wharton 2020; Wharton & de Saussure 2023) we distinguish between ‘primary affective effects’ which elicit ‘direct’ experiential responses, and ‘secondary affective effects’ which arise only on the grounds of propositional meaning. In this presentation I focus on primary affective effects elicited by ‘expressives’ (interjections, expletives, slurs, insults…) and look at some of their properties (Potts 2007) though a slightly different lens.

Coming back to the difference between what they encode and what kind of effects they elicit in actual circumstances, I intend to re-address the notion that the import of expressives is ‘non-propositional’ (or ‘non-conceptual’), as a follow-up to the literature on this matter (see Wharton 2016). Drawing upon classical relevance-theoretic assumptions I will look at some challenges to the notion that affective meaning is encoded by expressives in an ontologically non-propositional format. That an interjection such as *Ouch!* gives access to a proposition (*It hurts*) only secondarily, after eliciting a direct non-propositional mental response, might not be the full story. Their descriptive ineffability (see Blakemore 2011) and their escaping tests of truth-conditionality such as non-redundancy and non-veridicality (Wharton 2003; Kleiber 2016) might be better explained by recruiting the notions of ‘non-mentalized’ propositions, following Ifantidou (2025), and external inscrutability (Papafragou 2006).

The directness of expressives is then due to their procedural meaning, which attracts attention towards a critical clash of the situation with shared expectations. A linguistic corollary is that expletive epithets scope over the most relevant participant of the situation (hence their syntactic position, Padilla-Cruz 2021), however I suggest that they function pragmatically as sorts of embedding predicates, giving rise to higher-level explicatures about contextual clashes. Ultimately I suggest that they are individual-bound but context-dependent ‘emotional evidentials’.

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Francisco Yus
University of Alicante

Images as inputs for inference: The case of emojis

Relevance theory has emphasised that the inherent object of relevance theory research (and pragmatics research overall) is the inference of propositions resulting from (coded) verbal utterances. Words are unique in their capacity to encode meanings, which are subsequently enriched into explicit and/or implicated propositions with the aid of context. Propositions thus provide us with a solid ground on which to base an inferential approach to communication, and "too bad if much of what is communicated does not fit the propositional mould" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 57).

Among the developments that have moved relevance theory away from this emphasis on propositional communication, I would underline two: One is the advances in the incorporation of non-propositional effects into the framework (e.g. Ifantidou 2021; Wharton and Saussure 2023). The second is the main point that I will address in this lecture: The analysis of images under relevance theory. In the increasingly visual and multimodal environment of today's social media, users massively post and exchange images (or discourses with multimodal mode combinations) with an intention to be interpreted in specific ways, not simply aiming at the audience's identification of their default visual referents but expecting interpretations that depart, more or less substantially, from those visual referents coded in the images, together with an expectation of context accessibility.

In this lecture, I will wrap up previous research on digital discourses (Yus, 2011, 2022, 2023) and, even if assuming that words and images are coded differently, a number of parallelisms with be pointed out that will (hopefully) show how the interpretation of words and images is not as different as it would initially be expected from a cognitive pragmatics theory that appears to dismiss departures from its emphasis on propositional contents communicated via verbal utterances as the main object of relevance-theoretic research.

The lecture will mainly be illustrated with real emoji uses in everyday messaging interactions, which has been the object of analysis in my latest research (Yus, 2025). These emoji uses will also illustrate how images are also crucial in users' efficient communication of non-propositional effects.

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CONFERENCE TALKS

Aoife Ahern, Jose Amenos Pons
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Exploring inferential links between evidentiality and affect: Spanish "estar" vs "ser" with individual-level predicates

In this presentation we explore a case of mismatching semantic features leading to contextual effects on the interpretation of speaker affect linked to experiential evidentiality. We present a study on how L1 Spanish speakers interpret expressions in which the copular verb "estar" is used with individual-level adjectival predicates.

Spanish has two copular verbs (ser / estar, 'to be'). Individual-level predicates (ILPs), which denote essential properties of an entity (Carlson, 1977), are canonically used with "ser" (1). "Estar" encodes the presupposition of spatio-temporal anchoring, and it is generally used with stage-level predicates (SLPs) (2)). However, many ILPs can also appear with "estar" (3), although this is a marked combination.

1) Juana es francesa.
   Juana is French.
2) Ana [*es] está enfadada.

Ana is angry.

3) Adrián está muy francés con ese gorro.
   Adrian is (=looks) so French in that cap.

We assume that the combination of "estar" with ILPs creates a feature mismatch, requiring extra processing effort for the addressee to identify the relevant interpretation (Escandell-Vidal 2018). The effect of these uses of "estar" + ILP is analysable as inducing a direct acquaintance inference (Coppock 2018), thereby conveying subjective, judge-dependent evaluations, in the sense of propositions whose truth is relative to the speaker's standards or outlook. We hypothesise that identifying this element of subjectivity suggests greater speaker-affective involvement, and is represented in the higher-level explicatures.

This presentation reviews the potential relations between the direct acquaintance inference and addressees' perceptions of the speaker's affective involvement. We analyse original data – collected through a written questionnaire – on the degree to which speakers of different ages, from adolescents to adults, show sensitivity to the effects hypothesised. Participants compared pairs of utterances differing only in the copulative verb used (ser vs. estar). Results can contribute to the study of expressive meaning from the relevance-theoretic perspective.

María Victoria Escandell-Vidal
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

The interpreter's view: A 3D account

Sperber and Wilson's (2015) square offers an elegant way of mapping the imports of communicative acts along two dimensions: a vertical one that ranges from *meaning* to *showing*, and a horizontal one that spans from *determinate* to *indeterminate*. This model not only departs from traditional accounts that equate intended meaning with propositional content but also makes room for non-fully coded ways of communicating.

However, the RT square is anchored in the communicator's perspective, privileging the speaker's resources and intended meaning. Yet, as RT has emphasised (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995; Wilson 2018), the hearer's interpretation does not have to be a perfect duplicate of what the speaker wanted to communicate—assuming that a specific set of assumptions exists in the communicator's mind.

This presentation proposes reorienting the model to place the interpreter's perspective at the centre. From this viewpoint, communication is modelled in a three-dimensional space: the *x*-axis represents the nature of the stimuli received, from symbolic to natural; the *y*-axis, the processes engaged for interpretation, from decoding to inference; and the *z*-axis, the array of assumptions involved in interpretation, including both contextual assumptions and inferred conclusions.

This three-dimensional model shows that human communication occupies a hybrid semiotic space where symbolic and natural stimuli interact, triggering decoding and inferential processes in varying degrees. Crucially, the model also shows how the driving force of interpretation (the search for relevance) and the satisfying criterion (the fulfilment of expectations of relevance) visually map as a balance between the array of assumptions obtained, on the one hand, and the processing effort and the contextual assumptions recruited to that end, on the other—the hypothesis about the communicator's intention being but one of those assumptions. In this way, some of the drawbacks of intention-based models are avoided, allowing for a clearer view of interpretation processes.

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Fabrizio Gallai
IULM

From fidelity to relevance: The pragmatic cost of ignoring prosody in machine interpreting

Advances in artificial intelligence are reshaping the relationship between interpreters and technology, with the prospect of moving from machine-assisted to machine-assisting professionals (Sun & Martín, 2025). For this shift to occur, however, machine interpreting (MI) must deliver outputs comparable in quality and efficiency to human performance. While automatic speech recognition (ASR) and machine translation (MT) have seen remarkable progress (Fantinuoli, 2022), replicating the nuances that underpin human communication remains a critical challenge.

This paper investigates the role of prosody—an essential yet underexplored dimension of multimodal pragmatics—in MI. Human speakers rely on prosodic variation to signal emphasis, attitude, and emotion, thereby guiding listeners' contextual interpretation (Wilson & Wharton, 2006; Wharton, 2009; Wharton & Madella, 2024). Current neural models, though powerful in capturing lexical and syntactic relations, still fail to encode or reproduce such prosodic cues (Korotkova et al., 2024).

Drawing on Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995), the study analyses how prosody contributes to meaning construction in MI. The dataset consists of a multilingual corpus from a European Parliament debate, comprising 35 speeches in five languages. ASR and MT outputs from Microsoft Speech Translation, Google Speech-to-Text, and OpenAI Whisper were evaluated against official interpretations. Annotation was carried out in ELAN.

Findings reveal that the neglect of prosodic features in cascading MI systems leads to error propagation and pragmatic failures. Unlike human interpreters, machines lack the (meta- and cross-) pragmatic competence to capture meaning conveyed implicitly through prosody. These pragmatically impoverished renditions compromise quality, understood as 'fidelity plus relevance' (Setton & Dawrant, 2016). The study argues for rethinking interpreter competence in the age of generative AI: professionals must be trained not only to monitor semantic accuracy but also to assess pragmatic adequacy. Future MI development should incorporate real-world corpora and new layers of analysis, including speaker diarisation and emotion recognition.

Keywords: Relevance Theory, machine interpreting, artificial intelligence, prosody, multimodal pragmatics.

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Alison Hall
De Montfort University, UK

Modulation of speaker commitment to implicitly communicated content: Alternatives and the saying-implicating distinction

Recent experimental work aims to understand factors that influence a speaker's perceived commitment to what they communicate. Much of this work focuses on differences between commitment to literal meaning vs commitment to an inferred interpretation, and has produced conflicting findings: some studies find far greater perceived commitment to what is explicitly said (in the relevance-theoretic sense) (e.g. Hall and Mazzarella 2023, Mazzarella et al 2018), while others find strong perceived commitment to implicatures (e.g. Bonalumi et al 2020, Reins and Wiegmann 2021).

In this talk, I assess different factors that have been proposed to help explain these findings. I focus especially on the proposal that salience and likelihood of 'alternatives' play a significant role in this explanation (Braun et al 2024). Alternatives have classically been used to account for quantity implicatures (Grice 1989) and have recently been more widely applied, e.g. to certain 'social meanings' (Acton and Hunt 2025). My tentative argument in this work in progress is that it is unpromising to apply the notion of alternatives to the kinds of ad hoc pragmatic enrichments that produced the inconsistent findings mentioned above, which are instead largely attributable to studies employing different conceptions of where to draw the saying-implicating distinction, as well as to differences in study design.

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Elly Ifantidou
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Relevance beyond the implicated proposition

What makes an input worth attending to from the mass of competing stimuli? In relevance-theoretic terms, perceivable experience (an utterance, a sight, a sound, a memory) is relevant to us when it connects with available assumptions to make a worthwhile difference to our representation of the world. For example, the news that "Cardiff orchestra cuts Russian composer from concert" (*The Guardian,* 2022) may make little worthwhile difference to my representation of the world, while "Russia invades Ukraine" (*The Guardian*, 2022) is far more likely to attract my attention and lead me to compute the consequences in the form of a range of inferences that are likely to be worthwhile for me.

Because all cognitive processing is effortful, an input becomes *maximally* relevant at the smallest possible processing effort, as predicted by Relevance Theory. The question is: What else, apart from a set of salient contextual assumptions, can impact on the expended processing by accelerating the interpretation process while expanding its rewarding effects?

In line with evidence from neurolinguistics that words are not processed in a nicely encapsulated language faculty (for a précis, see Hinojosa, Herbert & Kissler 2023; for a review, see Satpute & Lindquist 2021), I will argue that the maximum benefit from the most relevant stimulus available to an individual at a time is not exclusively cognitive. The spontaneous formation of assumptions in the process of inference is often interspersed with spontaneous activation of emotions and images, those experiential resources which free up our limited cognitive resources. In defense of this view, I discuss examples of metaphor and mirative evidentials, and how non-propositional objects may be represented in an expanded notion of implicated content which would then be more open-ended and more nuanced than previously thought.

Keywords: implicature, inference, emotional processing, metaphor, mirative evidentials

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Maria Jodłowiec
Jagiellonian University

A pragmatic and hermeneutic analysis of the English translation of selected poems by Wisława Szymborska

This paper explores the intersection of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2004, 2012) and George Steiner's (1975) hermeneutic motion in the context of literary translation, focusing on the translator's interpretive agency and inferential processes. Drawing on selected poems from Wisława Szymborska's *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku* and their English translation by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (*View with a Grain of Sand*, 1995), the study examines how the translators convey the meaning of the source text and navigate their ethical engagement with its content. Using relevance theory as a pragmatic framework, the analysis identifies explicit and implicit import in the source and target texts, highlighting how the translators are trying to replicate the original cognitive effects in the target text versions. Steiner's hermeneutic motion, comprising trust, aggression, incorporation, and restitution, is applied to trace the translators' interpretive trajectories and ethical positioning. The paper argues that these two frameworks, when combined, offer a nuanced model for understanding translation as a cognitively and morally complex act. The comparative analysis will focus particularly on the extent to which the target renderings diverge from the source text in both explicitly and implicitly communicated content, as well as in stylistic fidelity. It will also examine the translator's agency not only in linguistic decision-making but also in the cultural and philosophical mediation of meaning. By integrating the relevance-theoretic approach with hermeneutic ethics, this study suggests a hybrid methodology for translation analysis and offers insights into how translators shape meaning beyond semantic equivalence. It also affirms the translator's role as both relevance strategist and ethical interpreter, especially in the translation of poetry, where subtle pragmatic cues and cultural resonances are paramount.

Natasha Kennedy
University of Brighton

Relevance and multilingual communication: Meaning making in heterolingual literature

In *Speaking and Being*, Kubra Gümüşay claims that she writes poetry in Turkish, cries and prays in Turkish and tells her son she loves him in Turkish. These are things that do not come as naturally in her other languages (2022).

Beyond context-dependent code-switching, widely studied in sociolinguistics (Decressac, 2024), multilingual individuals often switch languages for more personal, and sometimes inexplicable, reasons. When it comes to expressing emotions, what impact does code-switching

have on an individual's communication? Preferences to switch languages for certain topics or contexts provide valuable insights into the reality of multilingual identities. Psycholinguist Aneta Pavlenko identifies reasons for and situations in which this occurs for what she calls "emotional expression" (2005); Louis de Saussure posits that the contexts through which we learn and use a language, and one's familiarity with a language affords individuals with a "particular relationship" with languages (2024).

Multilingual communication often features in heterolingual texts, which produce a unique reading experience, as the interaction between several languages somehow becomes a norm rather than an exception (Grutman, 1997; Suchet, 2014). My current research looks at the ways in which these texts reveal a writer's rapport with language. Though interdisciplinary research between relevance theory and literary theory is now more established (Cave & Wilson, 2018), little attention has been paid to relevance and multilingual communication (Chan, 2005), and research on relevance and multilingual literature appears to be non-existent. To what extent is code-switching paralinguistic, more akin to the non-verbal dimension of communication (Wharton, 2016)? Through a series of examples of multilingual conversations and heterolingual texts, this paper will discuss how code-switching can create meaning in multi/heterolingual communication in light of both the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/95).

Evangelos Koumantakis
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Dark humor and non-propositional effects in Tim Burton's multimodal poetry: A relevance-theoretic approach

Relevance Theory has brought forth the role of non-propositional effects in communication. Within Relevance Theory, communication is considered to be ostensive-inferential as the search for relevance lies upon the interpretation of speakers' intentions (Sperber and Wilson 1986). This is also the case for the author-reader communication through literary texts (Wilson 2018). Recent work in relevance-theoretic pragmatics has shown that the interpretation process is likely permeated by non-propositional effects through the activation of sensory-motor mechanisms (Wilson and Carston 2019), including emotions, images, sensations and memories (see Wilson 2018, Wilson and Carston 2019, Ifantidou and Piata 2021, Wharton and de Saussure 2023).

In this talk, I employ the Relevance Theoretic framework to analyze dark humor and non-propositional effects in Tim Burton's *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories* (2018). While the search for relevance may also be guided by the search for a humorous effect (Yus 2003), dark humor poses a challenge in that it may induce different and even diverging responses among readers (Dynel 2024), even more so when the intended import of the humorous text is constructed multimodally (Forceville 2014). The talk aims to unveil how the interpretation of multimodal dark humor is enabled, or at least facilitated, through the evocation of non-propositional effects. To this end, it will propose a cognitive stylistic analysis of Burton's literary work, which will be complemented through the compilation of a reader-response corpus from comments posted on Goodreads (2024).

The findings of both the stylistic analysis and the reader-response corpus suggest an interplay between non-propositional effects and dark humor. Overall, the study contributes new insights to the ongoing research within relevance-theoretic pragmatics by providing a link between multimodality, dark humor and non-propositional effects. At the methodological level, it follows from the current study that the compilation of a reader-response corpus may serve as a promising tool for the study of non-propositional effects.

Keywords: non-propositional effects, dark humor, multimodality, literary pragmatics, Relevance Theory, Tim Burton

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Alan Lombardini*, Giulia Giunta, Diana Mazzarella***, and Didier Maillat***
*** Université de Fribourg**
****Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca**
***** Université de Neuchâtel**

Misinformation detection in L2: The role of disfluency and (not-)at-issueness

This project investigates the effect of a second language (L2) on misinformation detection as a function of its *(not-)at-issueness*. Previous studies (e.g., Giunta, Domaneschi, & Mazzarella, 2025) have shown that at-issue content is processed differently from not-at-issue content in native speakers. The present study aims to extend this line of research to L2 processing, exploring how *disfluency* influences the processing of misinformation.

According to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), relevance is defined as an optimal ratio between cognitive effort and cognitive effects. Because L2 processing typically increases effort, we hypothesize that this disfluency will disrupt the allocation of cognitive resources during interpretation. Two competing hypotheses are tested. First, increased processing effort in L2 may blur the distinction between at-issue and not-at-issue content, leading to a more uniform treatment of information irrespective of its (not-)at-issueness. Alternatively, higher pressure on processing efforts may trigger a reallocation of cognitive resources toward maximizing relevance, thereby prioritizing the processing of at-issue content for nonnatives.
To test these hypotheses, we adapt a misinformation detection task from Giunta et al. (2025) in a 2 (Nativeness: native vs. non-native) × 2 (At-issueness: at-issue vs. not-at-issue) mixed design. Participants receive contextual information by reading a brief story about a criminal event. After reading the story, they are presented with a dialogue between a policeman and an informant. The participants' task is to assess the truthfulness of the informant's answer. We measure both the Accuracy and the Reaction Times of misinformation detection. Results will be analyzed with generalized linear mixed-effects models in R.

By examining how L2 disfluency modulates the processing of at-issue and not-at-issue information, this project contributes to a pragmatic account of how increased cognitive effort in L2 affects the processing of misinformation, offering new insights into the interaction between nativeness, relevance, and epistemic vigilance.

Manuel Padilla Cruz
University of Seville

Identity pathologisation and ambience affiliation on X/Twitter: A relevance-theoretic approach

Social networks have become outlets disseminating conflicting opinions on a variety of issues (Makhortykh & Lyebyedyev, 2015). The variety of discursive practices therein frequently gives rise to various forms of language aggression ad conflict (Liu & Weber, 2014; Lucić et al., 2020; Marwick & Boyd, 2014) which may factionalise and polarise users and, ultimately, society (Sältzer, 2020). Some of such practices attack identity.

Among them features *identity pathologisation*, or the representation of an individual or group as irrational or affected by some vice, illness or disorder influencing their behaviour. As a *digital practice* (Jones et al., 2015), it amounts to an individual or collective discursive endeavour aimed at constructing and imposing a new, harmful and degrading identity through indexical, positional and relational dynamics. When attempted collectively, it may create *ambience affiliation*, or a sense of connection and community around shared values, feelings and experiences (Zappavigna, 2012).

Relying on relevance-theoretic pragmatics (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995), this presentation will seek to account for why and how identity pathologisation may result in ambience affiliation. It will argue that the content of the cascade of postings identity pathologisation often generates may be *phatic*. As such, it would make manifest assumptions that are already manifest to platform users. This may trigger attitudes of belief endorsement and attribution of similar attitudes to other platform users.

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Émeline Pierre
University of Neuchâtel

Applying a relevance-theoretic approach to the backgrounding of information in public controversies

Drawing on Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986, 1995), this paper introduces the concept of relevance management through backgrounding as a discourse strategy in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports. We consider backgrounding (and, by extension, foregrounding), understood here as the demotion of the agent from its prototypical argument slot (Siewierska 2008), not only as a grammatical choice but as a local strategy (de Saussure 2005) and pragmatic device that guides the inferential process of the addressee. In this context, we assume that both backgrounding and foregrounding are forms of ostensive communication as they draw the addressee's attention to specific discourse elements, in a similar way as an explicit request to look at something or a nonverbal pointing to an object.

Within Sperber and Wilson's framework (1986, 1995), human communication prioritizes information that is relevant to the addressee. Applying this postulate to the analysis of periphrastic passives, we argue that the information foregrounded should be maximally relevant with a lower cognitive effort to process it, while the retrieval of backgrounded or omitted agents involves greater effort. Based on a corpus-based case study of Inditex's 2024 CSR report, we suggest that periphrastic passives in CSR report function as management devices to control which information is made accessible and which must be inferred. Finally, we also examine potential cases of strategic misdirection, where communicators may be deliberately foregrounding less relevant information to divert attention from responsibility or crucial issues which would otherwise be taken as relevant in the circumstances. In this context, we discuss the link between the passive, relevance, and uncooperative verbal communication (de Saussure 2005; Oswald et al. 2016).

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Agnieszka Piskorska
University of Warsaw

Context collapse in face-to-face communication?

Sperber and Wilson (1995) pioneered the idea that context in communication is a dynamic entity, not given a priori but selected in the comprehension process. Initially, the availability (or mutual manifestness) of contextual assumptions was illustrated by means of a dyadic face-to-face interaction between people sharing physical space as well as many cultural and private assumptions.

On-line discourse is governed by the same principles of inferential comprehension as face-to-face interactions (Yus 2025), but it also has its special characteristics. One of them is the phenomenon known as context collapse, discussed by Marwick and Boyd (2011) as gathering multiple audiences in one context provided by a message or thread posted on social media.
Some observations on current communicative routines and behaviours support the hypothesis that context collapse (or a corollary to it) is also beginning to permeate face-to-face interactions. Among the factors that may contribute to this situation is the proliferation of human created and AI-created content on social media, which is consequently getting more and more scattered and short-lived. Because of this, social media content consumers may not share many mutual assumptions that could be subsequently used as context in face-to-face communication. I attempted to verify this hypothesis in an empirical study conducted among MA students of English Studies Linguistics. The study consists of surveys (N=30) and interviews. In this talk I am going to present the results of the survey part, which indicate that many participants are familiar with the same cultural artefacts and characters but the familiarity is superficial. Encyclopedic information associated with such concepts may not be sufficient as contextual resources for drawing cognitively rewarding implicatures.

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Ismaël Pozner
University of Neuchâtel

The threshold of relevance: From synapses to expectations

From its inception, relevance theory has faced challenges in accounting for the origins and cognitive mechanisms behind expectations of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995). This theoretical gap has invited criticism, with some proposing the abandonment of the comparative-quantitative notion of relevance altogether (Mazzone, 2018)—despite its centrality to the relevance-based comprehension procedure (RBCP).

On the contrary, we argue that expectations of relevance are grounded in low-level neurophysiological processes. Specifically, we propose that satisfying an expectation of relevance in the RBCP corresponds to patterns of neuronal activation that surpass the threshold required to trigger an action potential. (cf. Kandel et al., 2013). This threshold, which determines whether a neuron fires, is mirrored in cognition as all-or-nothing activation levels of mental representations (see Quian Quiroga et al., 2008 on priming and visual recognition). On this account, expectations of relevance are instantiated by the activation thresholds of mental items—such as propositions or encyclopaedic entries—whose manifestness depends on neural activity and synaptic plasticity. This neurocognitive interface allows us to reinterpret findings on accessibility, epistemic strength, and recall rate (e.g., Maillat, 2023) through the lens of Hebbian learning (Hebb, 1949; Bliss & Lømo, 1973). Evidence from priming and recognition studies shows that contextual cues lower activation thresholds for concept accessibility (Ballesteros et al., 2015; Storbeck & Clore, 2008). Comparable mechanisms can be observed for evidential markers or affective cues in reference assignment.

Below the threshold, the mental item is weakly manifest. Once synaptic input raises the neuron's potential beyond threshold, the item is activated, and an inference is drawn. Crucially, if that item monitors distinct lower-level alternatives, the activation differential required to reach the threshold can be understood as an "expectation of relevance".

Such a neurocognitive framing not only grounds a key concept in relevance theory but also opens pathways for interdisciplinary research between pragmatics and neuroscience.

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Stéphane Rodrigues Dias
Instituto Federal Farroupilha

Relevance Theory and agency

In this talk, I will depart from three assumptions presented in my PhD dissertation (Dias, 2016:47, 66): 1) Relevance Theory (RT), in its original formulation (Sperber and Wilson, 1986,1995), can be interpreted as a general theory of coordination of cognitive behavior via communication, considering the establishment of mutual cognitive environments. Relevance, in its traditional approach, is a property of inputs (internal or external stimuli) and outputs (implicated conclusions). The predicate can be interpreted as involved in a function that assigns comparative values to cognitive objects, given the agents' cognitive environment. That is, agents algorithmically maximize the relevance of a given stimulus to be processed within a cognitive environment. As a consequence, the same stimuli can map to different values depending on the cognitive context in which they are processed, considering that the cognitive input is already the result of previous cognitive processing, taking into account both informative, emotional, cognitive as well as social costs and benefits. 2) Relevance is a goal-dependent or purpose-driven predicate (Gorayska and Lindsay, 1989a,b, 1993, 1995; Lindsay and Gorayska, 1995, 2004; Lindsay, 1996a; Rauen, 2014). In view of 2), individuals both assume a stimulus to be relevant and, centrally, act proactively, in the context of a prior specification of goal chains; 3) Individuals process and produce relevant stimuli as agents by calibrating epistemic and practical goals and other symbolic representations that line up with the type of agency involved. I will, then, focus on 3), giving special attention to the practical goals that guide communication.

Ryoko Sasamoto
Nara Women's University

The relevance of resemblance in ostensive communication

The focus on iconicity has dominated research on resemblance in language and communication**.** Originating in Peircean semiotics and introduced into linguistics by Jakobson (1965), iconicity is defined as the natural correspondence between form and meaning, with sequential or temporal iconicity as classic examples. Although it has been overlooked under Saussure's emphasis on arbitrariness, iconicity has since been re-evaluated and developed by scholars such as Haiman (1980), Langacker (1987) and Ohori (1987) as a form of cognitive motivation.

More recently, research on iconicity has been increasingly active across areas such as sound symbolism, sign language, and multimodality, and it is increasingly valued as a framework for explaining the form–meaning connection. (e.g. Perniss et al. 2010; Dingemanse et al. 2015; Imai et al. 2008; Akita et al. 2024).

In contrast, research into resemblance remains somewhat underdeveloped in pragmatics. In relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995), resemblance has been discussed mainly in relation to propositional or interpretive resemblance, such as metaphor, reported speech, and translation. Much less attention has been given to non-propositional, perceptual resemblance, such as the parallels between sound and meaning in onomatopoeia, expressions of impressions, or the resemblance between different modes in visual communication.

Against this backdrop, I will explore a range of examples that involve resemblance and argue that resemblance is not a derivative of iconicity but a fundamental cognitive capacity underpinning a range of communicative behaviours. Resemblance functions as an inferential cue, directing attention, highlighting contextual assumptions, and aiding interpretation. This way, communicative behaviours that have so far been analysed separately and in isolation can be explained across different domains underpinned by the single notion of resemblance as a cognitive ability.

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Daniel Sax
University of Warsaw

Time for a lovely little coffee! Polish diminutives in a relevance-theoretic perspective

Padilla Cruz (2020) laid the foundation for a relevance-theoretic analysis of "the diminutive morpheme" in terms of procedural semantics, proposing a number of ways the meanings of diminutives in Spanish might be captured in relevance theory: (a) by contributing to ad-hoc concept construction, (b) triggering representations of speaker affect, and (c) contributing to higher-level explicatures.

This paper reevaluates some of his proposals in light of the rich system of diminutives in Polish, which has a wide variety of diminutive affixes; some are illustrated in (1).

(1) (a) base form: *kawa* ("coffee")
(b) single denotive diminutive: *kawka* ("little coffee")
(c) double denotive diminutive: *kaweczka* ("tiny little coffee")
(d) single affective diminutive: *kawusia*, *kawunia* ("lovely little coffee")

"Double" or "stacked" diminutives, with intensified meaning, are illustrated in (1c). Polish also draws a distinction between two fundamental kinds: *zdrobnienia* ("denotative diminutives," primarily expressing smallness but which can also carry a variety of senses, including affect) as in (1b-c), and *spieszczenia* ("affective diminutives," inherently carrying an affective charge, expressing endearment) as in (1d). Adjectives and adverbials behave differently to nominals in this respect, being restricted to affective forms (2):

(2) (a) base form: *czysty* ("clean")
(b) single affective diminutive: *czyściutki* ("pleasantly clean")

(c) double affective diminutive: *czyściusieńki* ("super pleasantly clean")

I propose that Polish denotive diminutives have their effect primarily via ad-hoc concept construction, and follow Padilla Cruz's suggestion that this can probably be extended to cases such as (3), where the diminutive serves as a politeness mechanism:

(3) *Dasz papieroska*? ("Can I have a ciggie?" – denotive diminutive)

In other words, denotive diminutives in Polish encode "smallness" (literal or by extension) but not necessarily speaker affect. Affective diminutives in Polish, on the other hand, appear to encode speaker affect more straightforwardly, but not necessarily "smallness."

Kate Scott
Kingston University

Ostension, addressees and audiences: A relevance-theoretic perspective

Relevance theory, and, indeed, much work in pragmatics, has been primarily concerned with communicative contexts in which one speaker addresses one hearer. The intentions of communicators and the expectations of addressees lie at the heart of the relevance-theoretic approach to utterance interpretation. However, individual speakers and individual hearers may not be the only participants in discourses, and individually addressed hearers are certainly not the only participants who process communicative stimuli and derive interpretative hypotheses about a communicator's intended meaning.

In broadcast communication, including, but by no means limited to, digitally mediated discourse, a speaker may communicate with a multi-participant audience. This audience may be largely or completely unseen and unknown, and while some audience members may be considered 'addressees', others may be more like overhearers, eavesdroppers, or witnesses to the communicative act. Work in this area has drawn heavily on the notion of the 'imagined audience' but little has been said about how those audience members who were not 'imagined' by the communicator process and interpret the discourse.

In performance contexts (stage plays, television and movie dramas, staged interviews, etc.), a discourse is ostensively 'shown' to an observing audience. Members of the audience must interpret the utterances that they observe, even though these are not explicit addressed to them, and they must also find relevance in the act of showing that is directed towards them.

In this paper, I consider what the relevance-theoretic pragmatic framework can tell us about these other participant roles (observer, witness, eavesdropper, etc.). In particular, I discuss the role that ostension plays in the processes that non-addressees follow to interpret the communicative acts that they witness, overhear, or observe, and I consider what this reveals about how we communicate in such contexts.

Agnieszka Solska
University of Silesia

Metonymy as a mechanism for communicating meanings in messages integrating text and visuals: A relevance-theoretic study of English and Chinese VGTs

This study examines *Visual-Graphemic Texts* (VGTs) – multimodal messages in which visual elements are integrated into the structure of written language, replacing graphemes or their fragments to create hybrid visual-verbal forms. In such texts, visuals are not merely decorative but symbolically represent aspects of the natural or human-made world, functioning as integral components of meaning-making. The analysis focuses on examples drawn from public signage, advertising, and political communication, aimed at large and diverse audiences – particularly English- and Chinese-speaking populations – and employing visual cues that trigger pragmatic inference through associative links between form and meaning. Illustrative cases include Joe Biden's 2020 campaign logo, where three red horizontal stripes replace the letter "E" in *BIDEN* (a FLAG-FOR-NATION metonymy), and the name of a souvenir shop *Jing Wei* ('Beijing flavor') at Beijing Capital International Airport, whose graphically modified characters evoke iconic landmarks and scenes of everyday life (an OBJECT-FOR-ACTION metonymy). These and similar instances reveal how meaning emerges from the viewer's ability to infer conceptual connections between visual and verbal components within a single, integrated message.

The existence of such hybrid messages provides a valuable testing ground for assessing how cognitive-pragmatic principles operate in multimodal communication. The presentation aims to identify the inferential strategies that underlie interpretation in these contexts and to demonstrate that metonymic reasoning – understood as the cognitive process linking a salient element to a larger conceptual domain – plays a pivotal role. Building on Charles Forceville's relevance-theoretic model of multimodal communication (2020), the study extends this framework to account for such associative visual-verbal mechanisms as key drivers of meaning construction in text-image integration, offering insight into the universal cognitive principles that underpin multimodal communication across languages and cultures.

***Keywords*:** Visual-Graphemic Texts (VGTs); metonymy; multimodal communication; Relevance Theory

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Natalia Szczypuła
University of Warsaw

The language of jazz – where poetry meets music. A relevance-theoretic perspective

This paper explores the intersection of jazz and poetry through the lens of Relevance Theory, focusing on how rhythm, and metaphor, and improvisation operate as communicative devices that shape meaning and emotional resonance. Both as a musical and cultural phenomenon, jazz is inherently dialogic: it relies on improvisation, call-and-response patterns, and contextual sensitivity. This paper argues that as a form of artistic communication it is amenable to a pragmatic analysis with the use of relevance-theoretic tools.

The study examines how the language of jazz – its rhythmic structures, metaphorical density, and improvisational logic – permeates the work of poets such as Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, and Sonia Sanchez. Their poetry often mirrors the polyphony and syncopation of jazz, foregrounding relevance not only at the cognitive but also at the affective level.

By applying Relevance Theory to this interdisciplinary field, the paper argues that jazz poetry and jazz performance exemplify the dynamic interplay between ostension and inference. They highlight how linguistic input, embedded in highly contextualized and affect-driven settings, can yield maximal cognitive and emotional effects.

Ultimately, this project seeks to demonstrate how Relevance Theory can illuminate the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of artistic expression, showing that meaning in jazz and poetry emerges not only from what is explicitly communicated, but also from what resonates implicitly within a shared cultural and affective context.

Christoph Unger, Hendrik Buschmeier
Bielefeld University

Relevance theory meets rational speech act theory: The challenge of conversational implicatures

Rational speech act theory (RSA) has in recent years become a very influential formal approach to pragmatics, applying tools for modelling social cognition as Bayesian probabilistic inference

(Frank & Goodman 2012, Degen 2023). It has been studied intensively in the area of scalar inferences, word meaning language games, and other kinds of communicative exchanges. However, Bergen et al. (2016) point out that this reasoning scheme cannot account for certain kinds of implicatures, i.e., M-implicatures (1) and disjoint implicatures (2):

(1) a. John is able to finish the homework by noon tomorrow.
    b. John can finish the homework by noon tomorrow.
    c. (a. but not b. imply that. . .) John is not likely to finish his homework by noon tomorrow.
(2) a. John's performance at the concert will be stellar or dismal.
    b. John's performance will not be slightly above average.

Bergen et al. (2016) propose to alter the RSA inference schema by introducing an uncertainty factor in the literal meaning. This means in effect that inferential interpretation enters not only pragmatics but also semantics.

Relevance theory (RT; Wilson 2019) suggests that still further revisions to the inference schema proposed by RSA are necessary. One important factor is that listeners must reason not only about semantic uncertainty and pragmatic implications, but also about which context the speaker likely intended them to use. Moreover, listeners are sensitive to the cost of their own inference efforts, rather than merely to costs to the speaker induced by the complexity of alternative utterances.

We present a computational model of the RT account of implicature comprehension that leverages probabilistic knowledge graphs and probabilistic logic programming to model context selection and implicature–explicature alignment. We apply our model not only to the implicatures in (1) and (2) above, but also to conversational implicatures as in (3):

(3) a. Peter: Do you want some coffee?
    b. Mary: I don't want to drink energizing drinks at this time of day.

By formalizing RT in this way, we show how RT can engage constructively with other frameworks in the development of probabilistic computational models of cognitive processes in utterance interpretation.

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Gil Van Mulders
University of Neuchâtel

Natural codes or pragmatic's birth?

This theoretical study explores the interplay between procedural and conceptual content in human and nonhuman primate communication within the framework of Relevance Theory (RT, Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995). Traditionally, procedural signals are thought to encode instructions guiding the interpretative process rather than conceptual meaning, while conceptual signals convey truth-conditional representations (Blakemore, 1987, 2011; Wharton, 2003, 2016). However, we present comparative evidence from human and nonhuman communication which suggests that this dichotomy is overly rigid. We draw upon former assumptions that procedural and conceptual features are not strictly binary, with instead both types of features being present at various degrees in different communicative acts, whether propositional or not (Wilson & Sperber 1993; Fraser, 2006; Moeschler, 2002; de Saussure, 2011).

In humans, expressives such as interjections, prosody, and facial expressions illustrate how non-propositional cues guide inference and enrich meaning through affective and perceptual effects (Wharton & de Saussure, 2023; Kolaiti, 2020). Similarly, in nonhuman primates, vocal and gestural signals long regarded as purely emotional and automatic display complex context sensitivity and audience awareness (Crockford et al, 2012, Schel et al., 2013 ab; Fedurek et al, 2014; Townsend et al., 2016; Heesen et al., 2017; Berthet et al, 2025; Girard-Buttoz et al., 2025). These patterns suggest that, although they are not lexicalized, certain animal signals may function as procedural cues with embedded vague or indeterminate conceptual meaning enabling inferential interpretation rather than mere reflexive response (de Saussure, 2011).

To evaluate this, we employ the distinction between basic and mentalistic ostension to assess when and if observational evidence requires further, intention-attributing interpretation (Sperber & Wilson, 2025). This framework allows assessment of whether primate communication relies on minimal inferential capacities or expresses more advanced awareness of others' informational states. Ultimately, this study aims to model how communicative systems evolve from perceptually grounded cues toward increasingly inferential, flexible forms of meaning, bridging human language and primate signalling within a unified pragmatic framework.

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Stella Vasilopoulou
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

In hyperbole we do (not) trust: Hyperbole in Greek and English and its impact on epistemic vigilance

Hyperbole constitutes a pervasive figure of speech examined across different linguistic subfields, with pragmaticians focusing on its comprehension (e.g. Gibbs 1994; Carston 2018) and discourse analysts on its production (e.g. McCarthy & Carter 2004; Claridge 2010). While previous research prioritizes the identification of hyperbolic expressions, more recent work has begun exploring their cross-cultural variation (e.g. Martins 2017). Given hyperbole's figurative nature and the semantic gap between its literal and intended meaning, it has been proposed to engage epistemic vigilance mechanisms during comprehension (Sperber et al. 2010). In line with Sperber and Wilson's (1995) inferential model of communication, this talk interprets hyperbole within Relevance Theory, where speakers presumably express an informative and communicative intention. Comprehension, thus, involves a tentative stance of trust, developing into acceptance only when epistemic vigilance finds no reason for doubt.

In light of this, this research examines (i) hyperbole's frequency and pragmatic effects in everyday Greek and British English discourse and (ii) how cultural patterns of hyperbole use influence the activation of epistemic vigilance. To address these aims, two corpora of television data -one per language- were compiled, and two corresponding online questionnaires were completed by Greek and British monolingual speakers. Corpus findings reveal that the Greek dataset contains approximately twice as many instances of hyperbole as the British one. In both datasets, hyperbole primarily serves emphatic and persuasive purposes, while in Greek discourse, it further functions as a figure of affect, fostering rapport and trust. Questionnaire results indicate that Greek participants readily accept hyperbolic messages, suggesting that both communicative and informative intentions are fulfilled. In contrast, British participants activate epistemic vigilance only when hyperbole prompts a future action, implying comprehension without acceptance. Overall, these findings demonstrate that cultural variation in hyperbole use influences the interaction between comprehension and acceptance as predicted by Relevance Theory, revealing how figurative language may inhibit or facilitate epistemic vigilance across cultures.

***Keywords**:* Relevance Theory; epistemic vigilance; hyperbole; figurative language; cross-cultural pragmatics; inferential communication

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Gabriele Vitali, Didier Maillat
Université de Fribourg

Interpreting meaning, metaphors and irony in football celebratory gestures: A relevance-theoretic approach

In this study, we explore football goal celebrations as a distinct form of ostensive communication, applying the framework of relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995) to the analysis of non-verbal, gestural meaning in the absence of any co-speech. While football celebrations have been examined from sociocultural perspectives (Heliasz-Nowosielska 2021), little attention has been devoted to the inferential dimension of their interpretation. Adopting the relevance-theoretic model of ostensive–inferential communication, we argue that footballers' celebratory gestures are produced as intentional ostensive stimuli. Drawing on a corpus of authentic examples from professional matches, we examine how spectators identify both a communicative and informative intention behind such celebratory gestures guided by expectations of optimal relevance. In our analysis, we propose a revised taxonomy of football celebratory gestures, combining notions from traditional gesture studies (Ekman & Friesen 1969; Kendon 2004; McNeill 1992) with a relevance- theoretic account of non-verbal meaning. Thus, we proceed to show that the set of football celebratory gestures constitutes a semi-conventionalized repertoire composed of four primary categories: emblems, affect displays, pantomimes, and identity marks. We argue that each category, corresponds to a different inferential mechanism. In the last part of the paper, we focus on a subset of these gestures to develop an account of the interpretive processes triggered by figurative uses of such gestures. In a first case in point, we apply the relevance-theoretic notions of ad-hoc concepts to football celebratory gestures to explain how they are derived even in the absence of any accompanying verbal message (Padilla-Cruz 2023). In our second case, we illustrate how an echoic account of irony (Wilson 2006) can also explain the interpretation of ironic gestures found in football through second-order attitudinal inferences.

Keywords: relevance theory, non-verbal communication, gestures, football celebrations, metaphor, irony

Chara Vlachaki
University of Brighton

Relevance, aesthetic experience, and mental time travel

Artworks are a rich source of imagination, and the meaning they communicate is not always or solely of propositional nature. This meaning is often vague, slippery and cannot be fully paraphrased using words. These ineffable qualities are closely linked to an affective dimension, as the observer engages with the artwork and its interpretation cognitively and emotionally. The interpretation of such aspects of meaning found in artworks can often lead to an aesthetic experience, a type of experience where the observer becomes fully engaged and immersed with the artwork. Moreover, artworks may activate the observer's imagination through mental time travel, the cognitive process which allows humans to mentally project themselves backward or forward in time. With this presentation I will explore the role of imagination involved in art appreciation with a particular focus on affective states, aesthetic experience and mental time travel. It adopts Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, a theory of communication and cognition (1986/1995) as the theoretical framework, which can successfully account for a wide range of ostensive communicative acts, including art. The aim of this paper is to examine how imagination and mental time travel can be integrated into the cognitive-affective model of aesthetic experience proposed in Vlachaki (2025) and defined as 'the COGAFF model'. The model brings together relevance theory and cognitive science and accounts for aesthetic experiences in two levels that are intertwined and work closely together. Imagination, particularly in the form of mental time travel is proposed as a cognitive mechanism which enhances emotional engagement and resonance yielding a proliferation of cognitive and affective effects. By integrating imagination and mental time travel in the COGAFF model, I am hoping to contribute to a broader discussion on non-propositionality and to the understanding of aesthetic experiences from a relevance-theoretic perspective.

Keywords: relevance theory, non-propositionality, aesthetic experience, mental time travel, imagination

Ewa Wałaszewska
University of Warsaw

The relevance of self-talk: Cognition and communication?

Although it is hardly possible to use the expression *I'm busy talking to myself* as part of an apology for not being able to join the addressee at the moment of utterance (Goffman, 1981, p. 81), talking to oneself is a common phenomenon. Self-talk can focus on past events as a way to evaluate and respond to what has happened or on the present and future, in order to stimulate and guide action (e.g. Galanis et al., 2016). It can be used for instructional and motivational reasons; it may be full of praise (positive self-talk) or criticism (negative self-talk) (e.g. Hardy, 2006; Latinjak et al., 2023). Moreover, since the speaker is at the same time the addressee of their own words, both first- and second-person pronouns are available (***I** can do this* vs. ***You** can do this*) though the choice between the two depends on whether the speaker adopts the default self-immersed perspective or a self-distanced perspective (thinking about a situation from a first-person or non-first person point of view, respectively) (e.g. Holmberg, 2010; Schertz et al., 2025). In the light of the above, self-talk does not seem to be a unified phenomenon, with respect to its function or linguistic expression.

Even though self-talk is a language-based phenomenon, it has been given little attention in linguistic literature (see Deamer, 2021; Geurts, 2018, 2025); on the other hand, the phenomenon has long attracted philosophers' and psychologists' interest (e.g. in developmental or sport psychology). The psychological self-talk literature offers a number of definitions, most of which seem to converge on two aspects of the phenomenon: 1) its form: self-talk can be performed overtly (by saying something out loud) and covertly (as a small voice inside one's head) and 2) its content: it consists of self-statements, which are addressed to oneself, and not to others (e.g. Hardy, 2006; Latinjak et al., 2023). What has not been resolved yet is whether self-talk is to be analyzed as "a vehicle of thought" or as "a way of communicating with oneself" (Wiltschko, 2025, p. 172; see also Fernández Castro, 2016; Martínez-Manrique and Vicente, 2015).

The goal of this paper is to show that acts of self-talk can be seen as communicative, in the sense of Sperber and Wilson's (1995, 2015; also Wilson and Sperber, 2012) communicative acts. Furthermore, it is argued that both talking to oneself and talking to other people form a continuum of cases, which will supplement the theoretically well-entrenched continua between saying and showing, and between fully determinate meanings and impressions (e.g. Carston, 2002; Sperber and Wilson, 2015), with a view to revising the theory's approach to communication.

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Anna Wiechecka
Vistula University (AFiB Vistula)

"Time to have the 'where is this going' talk": A data-based study of fictive interaction in online discourse from a relevance-theoretic perspective

Fictive interaction, otherwise known as pseudoquotations or constructed dialogue, refers to a group of nominal constructions in which one component (typically the premodifier) takes the form of a made-up direct speech utterance. Such constructions are created spontaneously in order to evaluate on the head noun, usually a person, type of behaviour, way of thinking etc., as in "*my child is my best friend" attitude* or *he's always had a victim, 'the world owes me a living' mentality*. These evaluations range from critical to positive, i.e. by using fictive interaction, the speakers can distance themselves from the propositions, beliefs or ideas described or ridicule them, but also express their enthusiasm about them.

A peripheral but otherwise fascinating and highly promising area of everyday communication, fictive interaction still deserves academic attention, especially as regards its potential in pragmatic studies. The aim of this presentation is therefore to shed some light on one of its manifestations in online communication. One type of digital discourse which seems to abound in pseudoquotations is the content of the comments sections accompanying online advice columns. A notable example here is Miss Manners, a widely popular column devoted to solving savoir vivre dilemmas, co-run by Judith Martin, a well-renowned American etiquette expert.

Intended as a pilot study, this paper offers a classification of ca. 300 examples of fictive interaction encountered in the data source (i.e. Miss Manners comments sections) and elaborates on a few pragmatic phenomena observed therein, such as linguistic politeness understood from the perspective of Gricean pragmatics vs. more cognitive approaches, including Relevance Theory-based models. Additionally, the presentation aims to show how the study findings can be reconciled with selected aspects of Relevance Theory and in that way contribute to widening the scope of its applicability.

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Maria Zakaria, Caroline Jagoe
Trinity College Dublin

Co-constructed relevance-seeking: Applying Relevance Theory to naturalistic conversations of people with aphasia and dementia

Aphasia and dementia are neurogenic and cognitive communication disorders that present profound challenges to language processing and social interaction.

Relevance Theory posits that human cognition interprets communicative acts by seeking optimal relevance. Applying this theory to the full diversity of communication is important, particularly as aphasia and dementia present contexts where typical inferential processing assumptions are challenged by neurogenic and cognitive communication disorders. This paper addresses that challenge by extending previous work, utilising naturalistic conversational data and a robust coding framework guided by realist evaluation to apply Relevance Theory to these clinical populations.

Drawing on a developing multimodal corpus of interactions collected in Ireland and Lebanon as part of the Co-Construct project, the paper explores how cognitive, linguistic, and contextual factors shape relevance-based inferencing in these diverse groups. Empirical analysis and a realist review are ongoing. Early interpretation from the realist review suggest that communication support strategies, such as gesturing, keyword use, and propositional scaffolding, mediate access to intended meaning through specific cognitive pragmatic mechanisms.

This paper presents the development of Initial Programme Theories from the literature and provides an update on the empirical data on aphasia and dementia collected thus far in the languages of English and Arabic.