Urbanová, Ludmila

Indirectness and implicitness

In: Urbanová, Ludmila. *On expressing meaning in English conversation : semantic indeterminacy.* Vyd. 1. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2003, pp. 30-48

ISBN 8021032529

4. INDIRECTNESS AND IMPLICITNESS

4.1 Indirect Speech Acts as a Linguistic Problem

According to Crystal (1987.121), "some speech acts directly address the listener, but the majority of acts in everyday conversation are indirect". Mey's view is identical: "...it cannot be just by accident that in our daily use of language, indirect speech acts abound, and in some cases... are far more numerous than direct ones" (1993.143).

From the linguistic point of view, however, indirectness is a controversial notion, which is reflected in a variety of standpoints linguists take when dealing with this phenomenon. It is by no means easy to provide a satisfactory theoretical explanation of the utterance in which a tension arises between the sense and its force. At the same time, the high frequency of occurrence of indirect speech acts in everyday use of English which have been conventionalized and have become commonplace requires theoretical justification.

Searle (1991.266) characterizes indirect speech acts as "cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another". Simultaneously, he tackles the problem of their interpretation: "In indirect speech acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer" (1991.266).

Leech (1983.39), however, argues that "Searle's concept of a direct speech act underlying an indirect speech act is an unnecessary construct resulting from Searle's way of looking at illocutionary acts as defined by conventional rules, rather than as defined by their function in a means-ends analysis".

Sadock explains indirectness in terms of non-correspondence between form and function: "Based on this discrepancy between surface form and use, such sentences have been termed *indirect illocutions*" (1974.73).

Bach and Harnish (1984) present a more subtle classification of indirect speech acts which operates on the basis of the distinction between literal versus non-literal. "We will use the label *indirect illocutionary act* for an illocutionary act that is performed subordinately to another (usually literal) illocutionary act" (1984.70). Bach and Harnish's distinction between direct and indirect is based on assumptions different from Searle's. In their interpretation one linguistic form (pattern) can have **two illocutionary forces with different content**, e.g. *Can I have a drink?* has two forces: that of a question and that of a request for a drink. In both cases the speech acts are **direct**, whilst *My mouth is parched* is **indirect**. For Bach and Harnish, indirectness of a request for a drink is imparted by a wording different from the "direct request" *Can I have a drink?*.

According to Bach and Harnish (1984), indirect strategy can be literally-based and non-literally based. **Non-literally based indirectness** conveys sarcasm, irony, figures of speech (a figurative or metaphorical use), or exaggeration, e.g. *I wasn't born yesterday.* In the non-literal indirect use this utterance implicates the detached view of the speaker, the speaker's lack of identification with the state of affairs, or even disapproval.

Wierzbicka (1991.88) refutes indirectness as a linguistic issue arguing that "direct and indirect speech acts should be abandoned—at least until some clear definition of these terms is provided". I would only suggest that the absence of an acceptable definition does not necessarily question the existence of a linguistic issue, however complicated it may appear.

Similarly, Lyons (1995.284-285) expresses his reservations with regard to Searle's definition of indirect speech acts as "cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another". Lyons considers this definition to be "theoretically controversial" (1995.285). I agree with Lyons that it is problematic to conceive of **interchangeability of two speech acts** and their alternation in different contexts.

Leech (1980,1981) speaks about the dual meaning of these utterances which display two illocutionary forces, one being derived from the other. According to Leech, the sentence *Can you speak more slowly?* has two very different deep structure performatives:

I hereby ask you	*Can you speak more slowly?*
I hereby request you	*Speak more slowly!*

Lyons' argument (1995.285), which is most appropriate, distinguishes between **diachronic** and **synchronic** indirectness: "...many of the textbook examples of so-called indirect speech acts involve the use of conventionalized, quasi-formulaic locutions whose meaning in utterances of this kind should be regarded, from the viewpoint of synchronic descriptive linguistics, as being encoded in the language system... it is highly implausible to suggest that present-day speakers of Standard English would interpret the utterance *Do you mind if I smoke* as a request only secondarily after having it first interpreted as an information-seeking question".

Searle (1991.274) distinguishes between "meaning and use" and speaks about "conventions of usage that are not meaning conventions". Sadock (1972) speaks in favour of **speech act idioms**. The explanation given by Morgan (1991.242-253) is that indirect speech acts are based on **short-circuited (conversational) implicature** which is calculable, i.e. the meaning can be derived from a particular context, but is not calculated. According to Horn (1988), short-circuited implicatures undergo further conventionalization on the way from usage convention to meaning convention.

In his evaluation of pragmatic theories, Mey (1993) claims that there are two possible approaches to the recognition of indirect speech acts:

(a) the **philosophical-semantic approach** represented by Searle et al.
(b) the **pragmatic approach** represented by Levinson

The distinction between the two approaches is based on the difference between the strict application of Grice's Cooperative Principle (its non-observance) and usage in which certain speech acts, e.g. imperatives, are **dispreferred**, and thus have the tendency to be expressed indirectly. According to Levinson (1983.264), "...the imperative is very rarely used to issue requests in English; instead we tend to employ sentences that only indirectly do requesting". The main reason why indirect speech acts are used tends to be justified in terms of politeness. Equating indirectness with politeness, however, would be a mistake. It is evident that indirectness covers a wider semantic range, being also a manifestation of **self-protection, self-defence, evasiveness, irony, rhetorical novelty, uniqueness** etc.

Meier (1995) states that indirectness is not inextricably bound to negative politeness, and as such it should not be associated with negative politeness. There are devices other than indirectness which can be used to express politeness, such as polite formulae and idiomatic expressions (*Would you mind..., I feel obliged..., With pleasure* etc.), social deixis (honorifics, e.g. *Your Majesty*), the use of formal vocabulary rather than colloquial expressions etc.

Thomas (1995) explains reasons for the "all-pervasive" occurrence of indirectness by the desire to make one's language interesting (i.e. defamilarized), by the reinforcement of the message (often used in oratories and poetry), competing goals (in situations when one does not want to sound authoritarian) and, finally, by politeness.

4.2 Declarative Questions

Semantically speaking, the difference between a statement and a question is clear-cut: a statement expresses **an assertion** based on knowledge. The speaker is able to assign a definite truth value to it.

Example 5:
and she does no teaching apart from the summer school which crops up just once a year (S.1.5.436-438)

A question expresses **an assumption**; the speaker is not able to assign a truth-value to such a proposition; an assumption is a reflection of a "desirable thought" (see Wilson and Sperber 1988.78-101).

Example 6:

well what do they put in a computing programme (S.1.5.465-466)

A desirable thought can equally be represented by a **statement** expressing **a belief or doubt**, i.e. a tentative assertion.

Example 7:

I don't suppose you need Old English and Anglo-Saxon (S.1.5.25)

In English, the line of demarcation between expressing a tentative assertion, i.e. an assumption or a doubt, on the one hand and posing a question on the other is fuzzy: a statement expressing a doubt can potentially be utilized in **asking situations**. I owe the term *asking situation* to Brazil (1995).

The **dubitative mood** which is grammaticalized in some languages (e.g. Hidatsa, see Palmer 1986.83) tends to be expressed in English either lexically or prosodically within a declarative sentence. The term *declarative* is used "in the grammatical classification of sentence types, and usually seen in contrast to imperative, interrogative etc., moods. It refers to verb forms or sentence/clause types typically used in the expression of statements..."

The proposition expressing a doubt is similar to that expressing a question. Due to its semantic indeterminacy, it is frequently utilized in face-to-face conversation in an asking situation in which the matter presumed to be negotiated is subject to subsequent confirmation by the hearer. My broad delimitation of a **declarative question** comprises instances of speaker's doubt expressed by a declarative sentence which is followed by the hearer's response confirming or disconfirming the speaker's standpoint.

Example 8:

elicitation: *he's not he's not easy to guess actually*
response: *no he got brilliant first when he was twenty and it meant he couldn't graduate till he was twenty one they wouldn't give it to you*

From the linguistic point of view, **the notion of indirectness** is interpreted by Searle as a difference between what is said and what is tacitly implied or implicated: "the speaker's utterance meaning and the sentence meaning come apart in various ways" (Searle 1991.265). Wilson and Sperber (1981.159) object that the distinction between saying and implicating is untenable since the two notions are "neither exclusive nor exhaustive". They argue that "...it would be more satisfactory to distinguish... between the proposition the speaker is taken to have expressed—partly explicitly, partly implicitly—and the deductions of various types which can be drawn from it. The conversational maxims, and in particular the maxim of relevance, have a role to play in both aspects of interpretation".

In my view, it is crucial to distinguish between indirectness and implicitness, though these are closely related to each other.

Indirectness refers to the encoding process, the manner of presentation of the speaker's message. In terms of usage, with certain speech acts preference is given to the way that is not straight, avoiding the direct mention.

Implicitness reflects the decoding process, the way the hearer has to deal with such a message to be able to understand its implicature(s), drawing inferences and making deductions on the basis of Grice's maxims of conversation.

4.3 Socio-Cultural Aspects of Indirectness and Implicitness

Lyons' claim that "natural languages vary considerably in the degree to which they grammaticalize expressive meaning. English does so to a relatively low degree" (1995.44) is in harmony with my finding that "...question markers (or question qualifiers) other than the grammatically expressed question form are typical means of the act of inquiring in English" (Urbanová 1995.59).

Poldauf's theory of **the third syntactical plan** touches upon the locutionary subjectivity which is present in the message: "The third plan has in it components which place the content of the sentence in relation to the individual and his special ability to perceive, judge and assess. An individual has some particular sort of concern in the content of a communication" (1964.242).

Poldauf explains the reasons for the speaker's concern: "...the speaker may regard what he communicates with joy or sorrow, with fear, curiosity, the feeling of need to share his views with others, etc." (1964.245).

Another reason connected with the use of subjective evaluation is the **weak uncertainty avoidance** in Western cultures (Hofstede 1991). The speaker shows a high degree of uncertainty (i.e. absence of authority) as far as the interpretation of his/her message is concerned, leaving it open to the hearer.

The socio-cultural approach to language study advocated by Mathesius stresses the fact that different means are utilized in different languages to fulfil the same function (1982.92): "For both tasks, both for the naming of the elements of the extra-linguistic reality and for the expression of the speaker's attitude in the act of communication, every language and every period have their own means which differ from similar means of another language and another period not only through their appearance, but also through the concepts of meaning and the shades of meaning. Every language perceives the reality in its own way and modifies and simplifies it with regard to its own system of signs" (translated from the Czech by the author of this book).

Poldauf expresses the view that the third syntactical plan is "far less represented in English than in Czech and also that where it is represented it is in different forms or at least the different forms prevail" (1964.254). When studying authentic English conversation in the texts of face-to-face conversation

published in *A Corpus of English Conversation* (1980), I discovered a rich configuration of **subjective evaluative signals** in conversational language carried by intonation.

Weber (1993.57) makes the following observation: "Intonation, gesture, accessibility of information and sequential position in the talk along with morpho-syntactic form are relevant factors in the interpretation of any utterance".

In Weber's enumeration of factors, it is not the morphosyntactic form which plays the crucial role in the final disambiguation of the message. It is evident that phonic features, body language, information gaps as well as the linear factors of communication (subjective word-order and sequencing) substantially influence the meaning of the message, at the same time signalling shades of meaning relevant for the hearer.

Schiffrin (1997.77) stresses the function of **a particular speech act in a particular situation**: "Thus, we cannot understand a particular speech act (e.g. a question) if we do not know anything about either the speech event (e.g. question/answer exchange) or speech situation (e.g. an interview) in which it occurred". Consequently, the final interpretation of the meaning of a particular utterance depends on the knowledge of **the range of possible senses** (given by semantic rules) and a decision about **the intended sense on that particular occasion** (the context-sensitive aspect).

As has been mentioned, the interpretation of the message largely depends on the circumstances in which it is uttered: "Words admit of interpretations, then conceivably they may bear different understandings on different occasions for understanding them" (Travis 1997.103).

4.4 Implications Conveyed by Intonation

I have stressed the indispensable role of intonation in English in the modification of meaning, especially with regard to **implications** (Urbanová 1984). In English, nuances of meaning expressing the speaker's stance and the speaker's evaluation are mediated mainly by intonation. In this respect I draw on Firbas: "...the type of tune may convey additional meaning to, or rather emotively colour, or give special emphasis to, the meaning conveyed by non-prosodic means" (1992.155). Due to this, English intonation has a high functional load. It also plays a role represented by evaluative particles in Czech.

Example 9:

Czech: Vždyť *jsem ti to* **přece** *říkal!*

In Czech, the reproach is conveyed by means of the particles *vždyť* and *přece*.

English: *I have* ***told*** *you, you know.*

In English, the reproach is conveyed by means of emphasis and tune. Another possibility of rendering this message in English is by means of the emphatic *do* and the pragmatic marker *actually*: *I **did actually** tell you.*

Intonation patterns showing the necessity of confirmation are those of the **fall-rise** and the **rise**; sometimes, however, even the **fall** is connected with an indirect elicitation. Sequencing in the talk influences the interpretation of the message as well.

My present interpretation of the **meaning of English tones** is based on Halliday (1970), O'Connor and Arnold (1973) and Urbanová (1984).

4.5 Emotiveness versus Informativeness

Sapir (1961.10-11) claims that "ordinary speech is directly *expressive*", taking into consideration that "...in all language behaviour there are intertwined, in enormously complex patterns, isolable patterns of two distinct orders. These may be roughly defined as patterns of reference and patterns of expression". Drawing on Halliday (1973.22), I understand that "one cannot draw a sharp line between the expression of meanings on the one hand and the expression of attitudes and emotions on the other". Nevertheless, I do admit that in certain utterances the emotive component prevails over informativeness, and vice versa.

Example 10: prevalent emotiveness

I should think you either love him or hate him it worried her terribly because she used to come in late in the morning and he'd say good afternoon Beryl which used to make her terribly worried (S.1.5.135-141)

Example 11: prevalent informativeness

she's doing some research of her own at the same time and she has submitted a thesis already she's done an MA and is now on I think I'm not sure if she's doing a PhD she's certainly trying to produce a book on words (S.1.5.428-434)

In my understanding, **emotiveness** is a carrier of socio-expressive meaning. Emotive information carried by intonation is superimposed on the wording of the message. In Daneš's conception "intonation represents a steady subjective commentary on the utterance" (1987.19-20)

In extreme cases, the meaning carried by intonation is not a mere modification of the illocutionary force of the lexico-grammatical structure, it can even contradict the meaning carried by this structure. Thus the actual meaning of the utterance *It is **interesting*** modulated with the fall-rise can be the opposite of what it says: *It is boring*, or *It is strange*, depending on the context.

The semantic interpretation of the **fall** is associated with definiteness and completeness of the message. Utterances containing falling nuclear tones are comparatively self-contained. Both matter-of-factness and emotiveness tend to coexist in the content of the message.

According to Halliday (1970.23), "a falling contour means **certainty with regard to yes or no**" and "we go down when we know the polarity of what we are saying". O'Connor and Arnold (1973) lay stress on the **completeness of the message** expressed by means of a falling contour.

In the following examples the word carrying the nuclear tone will be printed in bold type.

Example 12:

now I shall see you ten o'clock on Wednesday ***morning*** (S.1.1.1209)

O'Connor and Arnold (1973) see the difference between a matter-of-fact, impersonal and unbiased utterance on the one hand and an emotive, personal, biased utterance content on the other in the difference between the **low drop** and the **high drop**.

The **low drop** sounds detached, reserved and impersonal. In a certain context it can, however, express negative attitudes such as lack of understanding, abruptness and annoyance.

Example 13:

and then I can get straight on to the papers ***again*** (S.1.1.214)
I'll be right ***along*** (S.1.2a.958)
and you took something from a side ***table*** (S.1.3.527)

The **high drop** sounds engaged and interested, giving the impression of relaxation and creating an atmosphere of solidarity.

Example 14:

I was surprised that it changed so much so ***quickly*** (S.1.2.464)
I'll get it on ***Tuesday*** (S.1.3.38)
you'll never be in that happy ***position*** (S.1.5.334)

The **rise** carries **polarity unknown** expressing uncertainty (Halliday 1970.23). Formal incompleteness of the utterance gives the opportunity to the hearer to take his/her standpoint. Semantically speaking, there is an oscillation of meaning on the axis negative vs. positive: the rise may convey doubt, uncertainty and disagreement on the one hand, as well as assurance and appeasement on the other. The actual meaning of the message is context- and situation-dependent. The degree of subjectivity implied in the rise is high.

Example 15:

I'll just do the miracles this ***time*** (S.1.4.962)
I don't know whether I'll drink coffee at this time of ***day*** (S.1.4.17)
and does a little bit of ***work*** *on the* ***tape*** *machines or something* (S.1.5.772)
do we have to get ***nails*** *and stick them in our* ***wall*** (S.1.4.455)

The **fall-rise** simultaneously implies contrast and the intention of the speaker to continue his message. The fall-rise can also express agreement with some reservations. Further possible implications are self-defence, correction of the previous statement, reproach, objection and contradiction. Generally speaking, the fall-rise expresses a standpoint which is usually **negative** or **partly negative**. The ultimate disambiguation depends on the context of situation.

Example 16:

it may have come from the same ***source*** *again* (S.1.1.255)
it's got the continuous history for him ***here*** (S.1.2a.1082)
but I came up on ***Friday*** *you know* (S.1.4.175)
but I think he gets so involved in this ***computer*** *business* (S.1.6.69)

4.6 Question Phrases

A special category of declarative questions is represented by question phrases. The term **question phrase** indicates the use of a lexical verb which has the function of an embedded interrogative (Karttunen 1977.165-210).

Question embedding verbs (*I suppose, wonder, expect, think, guess, do not know, presume, assume* etc.) imply a high degree of indeterminacy on the part of the speaker, and consequently implicate the necessity of confirmation on the hearer's part. In general, the question phrase is highly interactive, although the individual verbs show varying degrees of elicitative force. Some verbs tend to be particularly frequent and show a marked tendency to function as **question qualifiers** (question markers).

Stenström (1984) does not delimit question phrases as a special category of questions. It seems, however, that such a category is fully justified not only by its frequency of occurrence, but also by its specific impact on the hearer: the question phrase reinforces the sense of mutuality.

Bolinger (1957) distinguishes "**tentations**", i.e. lexical markers which "underscore the assumptiveness of the assertion" and "**imputations**", i.e. markers that "involve presumptions" (see Weber 1993.61-62).

Let me introduce the survey of question markers presented by Bolinger (1957.61-62).

Tentations

hypothetical verbs (*I suppose, assume, imagine, hope, believe, guess, bet, say*)
hearsay verbs (*I understand, am told, am informed, hear*)
inferential adverbs (*then, so, therefore*)
potential adverbs (*perhaps, probably, maybe, possibly*)
adverbs of assurance (*doubtless, no doubt, undoubtedly, of course, surely*)
impersonal expressions (*it must be that, it is certain that, it is to be supposed, it is to be hoped, it is to be expected*)

Imputations

verbs that imply convictions (*tell, claim, think, ask, believe, imagine*)

In everyday conversation, the verbs occurring in question phrases mentioned above are very common. Compared with other types of declarative questions (especially those attended by adverbials and intonation markers), the question phrase emphasizes **mutuality** and **involvement**, whilst the latter two types sound more like distant comments showing **detachment** and **impersonality**.

The personal pronoun ***I*** stresses involvement and simultaneously implicates a requirement for a response, standpoint or opinion from the interlocutor.

Example 17:

I should think it's university (S.1.7.572)
university stuff I would think yeah (S.1.5.573-574)
I think that's one of the most valuable things that I've thought was being done (S.1.5.545-546)
I don't suppose you need Old English and Anglo-Saxon (S.1.5.25)
I don't mind getting pin money for typing someone's thesis but they might tell me so beforehand (S.1.5.244-247)
I think I'm not sure if she's doing a PhD she's certainly trying to produce a book (S.1.5.431-432)
I don't know I can't help looking at these things as a scientist and I think it's all rather hopeless (S.1.5.641-643)
I mean language is always dating (S.1.5.661)

In the corpus texts S.1.5, S.1.6, S.1.7, S.1.8, indirect ways of asking represented by question phrases endowed with a high degree of elicitative force are particularly frequent.

Categories of declarative questions typically used in everyday English conversation are those of declarative questions with **a tag or prompter** (*you know, you see*), declarative questions with an **intonation marker** (fall-rise, rise, or even a fall, depending also on the sequential position in the talk), and declarative questions with a special **adverbial marker**, e.g. *obviously, perhaps, possibly*, and similar hesitant or doubtful overtones.

Example 18:

Hart sees a lot of Professor Birdwood obviously (S.1.5.867)
they're probably teaching elsewhere (S.1.5.781)
very probably you'll find the same it's not as trivial as it looks (S.1.6.803-805)

Worthy of specific mention are **if-clauses** used as afterthoughts carrying hypothetical meanings of transparently interrogative nature, such as if you like, if necessary, if you remember, if you see what I mean, correct me if I am wrong, if any, if need be etc.

Example 19:

listen if you feel like a film tomorrow night Mike Saint John's school film show (S.1.7.1207-1212)
I mean the normal attitude to jobs Brenda unless you're a professional is you leave it when it suits you (S.1.8.313-315)

I would argue that the idea of **introductory signals** expressed by Poldauf (1964) is only partly tenable. Though there is a marked tendency to place evaluative phrases at the beginning of the English sentence, there is also a general trend in casual English conversation to place these signals medially or finally, especially in their function of **additional remarks** and **afterthoughts**.

It is evident that both the initial and the final positions in an utterance are used for the purpose of testing and questioning the validity of a statement by means of inserting expressions of hesitation, disbelief and uncertainty. This discourse tactic supports the process of negotiating subjective stances between the participants in conversation. Neither of these stances is necessarily "true"; one of them is **more acceptable** than the other in the given context.

Example 20:

elicitation: *you can you can quite get lost in that I think you see* (S.1.8.645)
response: *it was utterly trivial I don't know* (S.1.6.829-830)

4.7 Criteria for the Evaluation of Indirectness

My claim is that indirectness is prevalent in the act of inquiry. The findings expressed by Crystal and Davy (1969.112) in the statement "interrogative sentence types are particularly frequent" have not been verified in the texts from the London-Lund Corpus. There is a strikingly high frequency of occurrence of **indirect elicitations expressing the act of inquiry**.

The evaluation of direct versus indirect elicitations in this monograph is based on the criteria of **elicitative force, conduciveness** and **assumption.**

(1) **Elicitative force**, which helps to bring the response to light, is strong in direct elicitations and weak in indirect elicitations.

(2) **Conduciveness**, which is based on a low probability of getting the desired response in direct elicitations, and a high probability of getting the desired response in indirect elicitations.

(3) **Assumption**, reflecting a low degree of shared knowledge in direct elicitations, and a high degree of shared knowledge in indirect elicitations.

All the three above-mentioned criteria are interrelated and are determined by discourse factors such as the communicative intention of the speaker, the topic of discussion, the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, the overall context of the communicative situation and the degree of cooperation and politeness in discourse.

The **direct versus indirect** scale represents two extremes on the continuum. Various degrees of **semi-directness** can be identified in informal conversation (Leech 1983.43). The degree of shared knowledge and experience and the common field of discourse reflecting involvement and expectations of the interlocutors are the key factors influencing the disambiguation of meaning of the message. In my opinion, the speaker's choice of the type of elicitation leading to a direct or an indirect speech act, depends largely on the accessibility of the message and on the closeness of the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, i.e. the degree of intimacy and the level of formality.

In my view, **indirectness** is understood as a complex phenomenon which is not primarily connected with politeness, but rather with a high degree of **familiarity** and **intimacy** between the interlocutors. In the hierarchy of factors leading to indirectness, **appropriateness** embraces **intimacy**, **politeness** and **uncertainty**.

Chart 2: Hierarchy of Indirectness Factors

APPROPRIATENESS

INTIMACY POLITENESS UNCERTAINTY

4.8 Semantic and Pragmatic Aspects of Indirectness

Wilson and Sperber (1988) assume that declarative sentences express thoughts related to states of affairs, while non-declarative sentences represent **desirable thoughts**. Desirability plays a significant role in the expression of pragmatic meaning. Grice's Cooperative Principle and Leech's Politeness Principle are based on desirability, namely the desirability for interaction by means of verbal and non-verbal communication. In conversation sentence patterns expressing desirable thoughts prevail over assertions.

Phatic communion, defined as a "type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" which serve "to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need for companionship" (Malinowski 1972.151) is based on the exchange of desirable thoughts requiring confirmation and agreement.

It has been proved that **indirect elicitations** represent the most frequent ways of eliciting in informal authentic English conversation. Question phrases, declarative sentences followed by an afterthought or tag, or declarative sentences proper abound in everyday exchanges.

In informal conversation, the most frequently used, and at the same time the most appropriate, way of eliciting is that of **confirmation** (for *appropriateness* see Hymes 1974.79). In Hymes' dichotomy **structural v. functional** one of the issues mentioned in the column "functional approach" is "elements and structures *ethnographically* appropriate". Confirmation is **ethnographically appropriate**, since it helps to establish "rapport" as part of the cultural norm and sharing goals. Schiffrin (1994) gives a similar explanation of the confirmation function. The basic pre-requisite for the elicitation of confirmation is the existence of a firm common ground of mutually shared knowledge and mutual interest in developing the conversational topic (for symmetric participant roles and knowledge of communicative norms and understanding see Schiffrin 1994.159-160 and Hymes 1972 SPEAKING grid).

Stenström (1984.152) presents a classification of questions with regard to their form and function in English conversation. Her approach is based on the analysis of interaction, dealing both with questions and the responses to them. In addition to traditional types of questions (according to their form), her classification also includes two specific types of declarative questions followed by amendments having a conative function (tag or prompter):

wh questions

Example 21:

what's happening (S.1.7.1213)

alternative questions

Example 22:

do nurses tend to be aggressive or does one just think that nurses are aggressive (S.1.8.1059-1060)

yes/no questions

Example 23:

do you lock your room when you leave it (S.1.8.431)

tag questions
Example 24:
quite a nice room to sit in actually isn't it (S.1.8.153-154)

declarative questions
Example 25:
you want a big room for those (S.1.8.185-186)

declarative + tag
Example 26:
I suppose Peel is pretty well known isn't he (S.1.6.1164-1165)

declarative + prompter
Example 27:
and this we poured this in slowly to make it up you see (S.1.7.416-417)

The typology of questions in conversation is rather complex, due to the variety of formal means utilized in asking situations. There is considerable formal variation within declarative questions caused by the high frequency of their occurrence. The use of a wide range of **pragmatic markers** in the act of inquiry is a noticeable feature of informal English conversation.

In my analysis of the acts of inquiry, Stenström's classification of question functions in English conversation has been applied. The following functions can be identified:

identify
Example 28:
how long does he mean to keep one lot (S.1.8.912)

polar
Example 29:
do pictures like that take you anywhere that has that aspect (S.1.8.772-774)

confirm
Example 30:
his portraits are very static by comparison aren't they (S.1.8.755-757)
you're not left with anything afterwards though whereas you are if you [m]paint (S.1.8.808-809)

acknowledge
Example 31:
and I couldn't do with that heavy weight you know that way (S.1.8.679-682)

Tsui (1992) applies a different functional description of questions, claiming that elicitations are targeted towards:

information
Example 32:
where do you come from (S.1.6.1)

confirmation
Example 33:
he's not he's not easy to guess actually (S.1.6.55-56)

agreement
Example 34:
ah oh dear me it's starting to rain again (S.1.7.491-493)

commitment
Example 35:
so are you going to leave him a message or shall I say something (S.1.8.357-359)

repetition
Example 36:
some of them are rather large
some of them are rather large (S.1.8.9-11)

clarification
Example 37:
I think you find that what you need in college is a sense of rest cos that's the one thing you hope to get in a picture really there's always something to do in London do you rest in London at all (S.1.8.603-605)

Some of Tsui's categories mentioned above have the tendency to co-occur. In particular, confirmation and agreement can be blended, while repetition can occur for the sake of clarification. In my view, **confirmation, agreement and commitment** represent a **cline**; the same applies to **repetition and clarification.**

In this regard I propose **a new classification of question functions** due to their compatibility with discourse functions based on symmetry or asymmetry of participant relations in the communicative event:

Chart 3: Classification of Question Types Based on Tenor

ASYMMETRY	SYMMETRY	ASYMMETRY
information	**confirmation, agreement, commitment**	**repetition clarification**

Pragmatically speaking, the functions representing extremes on the continuum, i.e. information and clarification on the one hand and repetition on the other, represent **asymmetrical relations** in conversation: the participants are "not sharing the same ground", whereas the functions in the middle of the continuum, i.e. confirmation, agreement and commitment, reflect **mutuality** and are thus symmetrical.

This interpretation of question functions is supported by Schiffrin (1994), who distinguishes between **information-seeking** and **information-checking questions**. Her explanation of the difference between the two stresses reciprocity: "The main quality differentiating information-checking from information-seeking questions is the scope of what is being questioned and the type of response sought: the information being sought is not the completion of a proposition, but reception of a referent or proposition" (1994.169-170).

From the formal point of view, I have delimited a special category of questions labelled question phrases. **Question phrases**, together with other types of declarative questions, are the most frequent instances of the act of inquiry in the analysed material. Question phrases suit the purpose of **confirmation**; consequently they are most appropriate in a spontaneous exchange of views.

Similarly, **declarative questions** with or without intonation or lexical markers, as well as declarative questions accompanied by tags or prompters, reinforce the effect of **confirmation and agreement**, including commitment.

Indirectness is most frequently touched upon in relation to questions expressing **polite requests** of the type *Can you pass me the salt, please.* Contrary to the current understanding of indirectness, my research focuses particularly on **indirectness in the expression of inquiry** in authentic conversation. A close observation of conversational behaviour in the texts reveals the fact that the question types used differ from the interrogative sentence types. This observation is in contradiction with Crystal and Davy's finding (1969.112) "Interrogative sentence types are particularly frequent".

Postulates governing the use of indirectness can be summarized as follows:

(1) **predilection for indirectness in informal English conversation:**

Direct inquiries are dispreferred in spontaneous English conversation. From the pragmatic viewpoint, direct inquiries are considered to be impositions. Indirect inquiries are prevalent, since they are found to be more appropriate and acceptable when negotiating meaning in conversation. Indirectness

should not be equated with politeness, since politeness is only one of the issues determining indirectness. Indirectness also complies with modesty, self-protection and self-defence.

(2) **interrelation between the conversation genre and the degree of indirectness:**

My hypothesis is based on the assumption that there is a difference between conversation genres as to the degree of indirectness. This pragmatic difference seems to be connected with **differences in the setting, context of the situation, tenor and domain of discourse**.

Informal face-to-face conversation tends to be conspicuously **indirect**. Indirectness in the act of inquiry has been identified as prevalent. In the analysed texts question phrases and declarative questions tend to exceed all the remaining types of questioning. The preponderance of indirect questions over direct questions results from the essence of informal conversation in establishing **rapport**, i.e. close understanding, by means of **elicitations of confirmation**.

Telephone conversation, on the other hand, tends to be more **straightforward**. It has been found out that directness prevails over indirectness in eliciting in this conversation genre. I assume that the difference between face-to-face conversation and telephone conversation is primarily due to the **setting and context**: in a telephone conversation the **setting and the context are split for the interlocutors**, thus the absence of togetherness has to be compensated for by more straightforward ways of inquiring. This type of conversation sounds less relaxed.

In a telephone conversation the **tenor** becomes modified by the absence of body language. Asking situations are frequently represented by **explicit interrogative patterns** (wh-questions and yes/no questions). The domain of telephone conversation underlines the **information-seeking** rather than confirmation-seeking function. This type of discourse is relevant in situations when the distribution of knowledge between the participants is **asymmetrical**.

Another distinction worth mentioning is the increasing frequency of occurrence of **polite requests** in telephone conversation as compared with face-to-face conversation. These requests are presented as inquiries contributing to an increase in the number of asking situations, their function being that of **commitment**.

Interviews differ from face-to-face conversation and telephone conversation by a greater balance with regard to the degree of indirectness, the balance depending partly on their level of formality. The **informal interview** shows similarity to informal conversation. It tends to be fairly indirect. Structures similar to face-to-face conversation are found very frequently. The **formal interview** is evidently balanced with regard to the share of directness versus indirectness. Essentially, the language of interviews is highly **institutionalized**, conforming to established patterns and **lacking overt spontaneity**.

Table 1: Types of Elicitations in English Conversation as to Form

Text	WhQ	AltQ	YNQ	QT	Qph	DeclQ	if-cl	chain	Total	%
S.1.5	13	2	12	5	25	20	3	5	85	13.0
S.1.6	12	0	5	8	17	16	0	11	69	10.6
S.1.7	12	1	11	21	37	48	3	30	163	25.0
S.1.8	7	2	15	17	31	55	5	19	151	23.1
S.8.1	24	1	41	5	19	12	8	8	118	18.1
S.6.3	7	1	6	1	7	4	0	3	29	4.4
S.6.4	7	0	2	3	8	11	1	6	38	5.8
Total	82	7	92	60	144	166	20	82	653	100
%	12.5	1.1	14.1	9.2	22.1	25.4	3.1	12.5	100	

Seven texts of authentic conversation from the London-Lund Corpus have been compared with regard to **the degree of indirectness in the act of inquiry.**

S.1.5, S.1.6, S.1.7, S.1.8 are recordings of face-to-face conversation;
S.8.1 is a recording of 11 telephone conversations;
S.6.3, S.6.4 are recordings of radio interviews (S.6.3 is formal, S.6.4 is informal).
The total number of words analysed is 35,000.

The findings in Table 1 show that the number of direct elicitations (including wh-questions, yes/no questions and alternative questions) is considerably lower than the number of semi-direct elicitations (question-tags) and indirect elicitations (question phrases, declarative questions and if-clauses in the question function).

A **chain** is represented by a cluster of questions, since there is a tendency in informal conversation to elicit clause complexes. This finding corresponds to Halliday's claim that ideas expressed in conversation are represented as processes (1990.86).

Example 38: chain

he's got a very distinctive accent as well being an Irishman hasn't he with a not very distinctive but a distinctive what's the word regional snatch hasn't he (S.1.7.103-109)

Nevertheless, the total number of inquiries in the texts and their degree of indirectness may vary according to the particular conversation genre. The above results show that **face-to-face conversation** (texts S.1.5, S.1.6, S.1.7 and S.1.8) displays the occurrence of the widest range of question types. **Indirect questions**, especially **question phrases and declarative questions,** unequivocally have the greatest proportion in the exchanges.

Telephone conversation (S.8.1) tends to be more straightforward and explicit in the elicitation process than face-to-face conversation. This tendency

can be seen in the high proportion of **direct questions**, which outnumbers semi-direct and indirect ones in the analysed texts.

Interviews (S.6.3 and S.6.4) vary with regard to the degree of indirectness in eliciting. The findings show that the **level of formality** has a direct impact on the degree of indirectness. A formal interview is much less indirect than an informal interview, the latter resembling face-to-face conversation.

The adopted classification of question functions (Tsui 1992.89-110) shows a striking density in the patterning of questions in the **confirmation** category in the majority of texts. With the exception of the formal interview (S.6.3), in which the information function prevails, all the other conversational texts display a predilection for **confirmation seeking**. The function of commitment is stronger in telephone conversations (S.8.1).

As has been mentioned above, in Hymes's terms an inquiry eliciting confirmation is "**ethnographically appropriate**", being a manifestation of cultural routines.

Table 2: Types of Elicitations in English Conversation as to Function

Text	Inform	Confirm	Agree	Commit	Repeat	Clarify	Cluster	Total	%
S.1.5	17	50	9	0	1	3	5	**85**	**13.0**
S.1.6	8	38	0	0	2	10	11	**69**	**10.6**
S.1.7	13	89	2	0	1	28	30	**163**	**25.0**
S.1.8	5	95	2	10	2	18	19	**151**	**23.1**
S.8.1	54	48	0	15	0	0	1	**118**	**18.1**
S.6.3	14	12	0	1	0	0	2	**29**	**4.4**
S.6.4	10	25	0	1	0	0	2	**38**	**5.8**
Total	**121**	**357**	**13**	**27**	**6**	**59**	**70**	**653**	**100**
%	**18.5**	**54.7**	**2.0**	**4.2**	**0.9**	**9.0**	**10.7**	100	

4.9 Indirectness as an Expression of Locutionary Subjectivity

My research results presented in Table 1 and Table 2 allow me to conclude that in English informal face-to-face conversation **in asking situations indirect speech acts tend to prevail.**

In general, it is predominantly **the declarative question** which is a typical lexico-grammatical structure ready to fulfil **the function** of inquiring. English is a language in which locutionary subjectivity is not distinctly grammaticalized. Besides, intonation is a unique device capable of expressing subjective evaluative signals in English. In this respect English utilizes intonation as a means of expressing subtle nuances of subjective meaning in conversation very frequently. Ways of rendering subjective socio-expressive meanings are culture-specific.