

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: What Child Language Can Contribute to Pragmatics

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#### Language in Context

A key concept in pragmatic approaches to language is "context." Pragmatics itself addresses the many ways in which context enters into the expression and understanding of propositions by language users in a particular community. Pragmatics has been seen as the relation between signs and their users (Morris, 1938), as the relation uniting "(i) linguistic forms and (ii) the communicative functions these forms are capable of serving, with (iii) contexts or settings in which given forms have given functions [Fillmore, 1974, p. V-1]," as the manner in which "speakers use the sentences of a language to effect successful communications [Kempson, 1975, p. 84]."

The scope of context is not easy to assess and define. One difficulty is that relevant context is not always directly available to the researcher. The researcher may have access to the **immediate physical environment** in which communication takes place (including speaker, hearer, co-present others, location in time and space, activity, etc.), and may have access to the **verbal environment** in which a given verbal act is couched (e.g., prior and subsequent discourse). However, although these dimensions of context are significant, they do not exhaust the range of utterance-external variables that affect the use and interpretation of verbal behavior. To assess the import of a language

user's behavior, one must consider the **social and psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time**. This world is shaped both by culture-specific values and expectations, and by cognitive and interactional processes that affect language users across cultures and languages.

### The Notion of Setting

There is no direct access to such a world. The physical environment of an utterance, for example, is filtered by the world views of language users. Not all entities in a physical space constitute context. Rather, context consists of environmental features that form part of the language user's universe. Certain environmental features are part of many world views (cross-culturally); for example, the concept of speaker (*ego*) and addressee (*recipient*). Most languages are sensitive to these concepts. For example, many languages have reference terms (e.g., personal pronouns) for speaker and hearer.

While speaker and hearer may be common concepts across languages and cultures, other dimensions of the environment are not shared so widely. For example, the location of an entity with respect to speaker and hearer may be considered differently in different speech communities. Degrees of distance, the perspective of the hearer or speaker may or may not be distinguished or may be distinguished in different ways. Speakers of Malagasy (a Malayo-Polynesian language), for example, distinguish approximately eight degrees of distance between speaker, hearer, and a referent. Speakers of English, on the other hand, encode only two distinctions of relative location. Speakers of Malagasy will take only the perspective of the addressee under certain conditions in encoding location. For example, in letter writing, members of the culture will take the perspective of the reader and ask, "How are things here?" (*Man' anona aty?*). Speakers of English, under these conditions, consider their location rather than the reader's ("How are things there?").

### The Notion of Behavioral Environment

The kind of cultural filtering that transforms individuals into speakers and hearers, and physical points into locations also turns physical behavior into conventional acts and events. These conventional acts and events are part of the context in which language participates. Language users rely on mutual recognition of these acts and the conventions that underlie them in their day-to-day communication. For example, a speaker who utters *here* in the course of transferring an object from himself to another relies on the expectation that that behavior will be recognized by the recipient as a particular type of social act, for example, an offer, a giving. Indeed, we would not want to say that the recipient understood the utterance unless he understood the intended social act of the speaker.

Similarly, language users rely on each other's knowledge and recognition of **procedures for entering into and sustaining a state of mutual involvement** (Goffman, 1963), that is, of **focused social interaction**. In several societies, eye contact is employed to these ends. Eye contact is used to secure the attention of another and to evidence that one is attending to the actions of another (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976; Stern, 1977; Schaffer, 1977a). **This conventional use of eye gaze is relevant to language; it is a piece of its context.** Language users will adjust their speech behavior according to whether or not their interactional partners are gazing at them. For example, speakers may elicit attention from a nongazing partner through requests to notice, requests for confirmation, rhetorical or information questions, vocatives, repetitions of prior utterances, increased pitch or loudness, and the like. If other potential partners are present the speaker may redirect the utterance to another recipient who is providing eye gaze. As Goodwin (1975) notes, this redirecting may take place in the course of a single utterance. The speaker may change terms of reference and/or the nature of the intended speech act as shifts in recipient occur.

### Language as Context

Thus far, we have considered mainly cases in which language encoded interacted with, or responded to some nonverbal dimension of the speaking situation. We do not wish to draw a line between language and context. On the contrary, we wish to demonstrate that **language itself can count as context**. Sociolinguistic literature tells us that the choice of code (language, dialect, register, etc.), for example, may effect the interpretation of a speaker's intentions. The selection of a standard rather than a nonstandard dialect, for example, may signal the speaker's intention to increase distance between himself and the addressee, to shift the topic, and so on (Blom and Gumperz, 1972; Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 1976).

Similarly, the language event or speech genre in which an utterance is expressed (Hymes, 1974) is considered by interlocutors in day-to-day communication. Interlocutors take into account whether an utterance is part of a joke, a personal narrative, an interview, a sermon, a marriage ceremony, a set of instructions, a political speech, and the like in conveying and interpreting intended messages.

For example, the utterance *Do you know what happened next?* may be used and interpreted differently in an interview and in a sermon. In an interview, the utterance may be understood as a sincere request for information. The speaker may be seen as eliciting from the addressee knowledge that he does not yet have. On the other hand, in a sermon, the same utterance may not be heard as a sincere information request. Rather, the speaker may be seen as posing a question to which he knows the answer. Rather than expecting the addressee to provide the relevant response, the speaker expects himself to

respond to the question posed (Burke, 1945; Holzman, 1974; Labov, 1972a; Ochs, Schieffelin, and Platt, Chapter 11 of this volume).

Not only the event or genre as a whole but **parts of the event or genre** as well can count as relevant context and affect the use of language. Language users may be sensitive to the location of a particular utterance with respect to "the overall structure" of a discourse (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977). For example, in day-to-day conversation, interlocutors are sensitive to whether an utterance occurs in the opening or closing portions of the conversation. Utterances that occur in these two environments are interpreted as expressing certain intentions in part on the basis of their occurrences in these environments. So, for example, the utterance of a conversational partner's name in the opening portion of a conversational interaction will probably be heard as part of a greeting in American society. Utterance of the same name elsewhere in the course of the interaction, on the other hand, will not be understood as a greeting. Similarly, an utterance such as *I just wanted to see how you were feeling* may be understood as initiating a closing (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) to the conversation if it occurs subsequent to talk about that topic (how the addressee was feeling). The same utterance may be understood as a topic opener if the topic has not been discussed in the conversation at hand (speech act).

Interlocutors bring into each communicative situation an awareness and sensitivity to culturally relevant communicative contexts of the sort mentioned above. They do not typically make explicit the social and communicative work they are carrying out; they rely on one another's background knowledge of contexts and their ability to relate verbal expression to these contexts. The sharing of such knowledge is part of what it means to participate in the same culture.

### The Notion of Extrasituational Context

Thus far, we have been discussing primarily those aspects of context that are manifest in the **local** environment of an utterance. Culturally relevant features of the immediate nonverbal and verbal setting have been a primary focus, that is, location, interlocutor status, code, speech event. As noted above, knowledge of these local features is essential to successful verbal interaction. However, knowledge and beliefs about the world held by interlocutors are not limited to entities and behaviors that are part of the local utterance environment. Interlocutors have awareness of and assumptions about objects, events, and states of affairs outside the interactional setting, and these affect how language is used and understood.

Let us consider one way in which such speaker-hearer knowledge and beliefs affect language: In using language, speakers may be sensitive to whether or not intended hearers can identify a particular entity specified in an utterance. Speakers will shape their utterances differently according to whether or not

they **believe** the hearer knows the referent in question. The selection of particular terms of reference, the use of ellipsis, word order, and sentential stress are, in many languages, affected by the speaker's assumption about the hearer's knowledge.

For example, adult speakers of English will usually use the definite article (*the*) as a nominal modifier when the entity specified is already known to or identifiable by the speaker and assumed by the speaker to be known to or identifiable by the hearer (Chafe, 1976; Hawkins, 1977; Searle, 1969; Strawson 1950). The speaker can use the expression *the car*, for example, to refer to a specific car that he or she knows and assumes the hearer knows and can identify. If the speaker were to use the referring expression *a car*, using an indefinite article, it would not necessarily indicate the same assumptions about the referent. In the latter case, the speaker may or may not be referring to a specific car. Furthermore, the speaker does not assume the hearer knows or can identify the referent of *a car*.

Interlocutors' knowledge of and beliefs about the state of the world influence not only the way in which an idea is expressed, they influence the **interpretation** of linguistic expressions as well. For example, understanding utterances such as *Do you see the car?* or *The car is in the driveway* involves assuming that the speaker is referring to some particular car known to the speaker and assumed by the speaker to be known to the hearer. If the speaker were to say *A car is in the driveway* or *A truck ran into a car today*, the hearer may assume that the speaker is referring to a specific car, but not one that the speaker assumes the hearer knows or can identify (Grice, 1975).

### The Role of Context in the Organization of Language

The brief discussion presented here indicates the breadth of the concept of context. It includes, minimally, language users' beliefs and assumptions about temporal, spatial, and social settings; prior, ongoing, and future actions (verbal, nonverbal), and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those participating in the social interaction at hand.

The set of shared background assumptions that speaker-hearers bring into and develop in the course of a communicative situation affects every dimension of language—its syntactic structure, its semantic structure, its lexicon, its phonological structure. Indeed we could say that a universal design feature of language is that it is context-sensitive. For example, the tense-aspect system of many languages encodes the time a written, spoken, or signed construction is produced. Pronominal systems may encode speakers, hearers, and other participants (e.g., audience) in a social situation. They may also encode referents that have been specified in prior discourse (anaphora), are part of the perceptual environment or are in some other way known or attended to by speaker and hearer. We have previously mentioned the sensitivity of articles, demonstratives, and locatives to features of the communicative

situation. Phonological sensitivity to context has been described by sociolinguists such as Labov (1966) and Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley (1969). The choice of phonological variant is constrained by the speaker's perception of a situation as relatively formal (selection of more prestigious variant), by his intention to maximize or minimize social distance (solidarity) with an addressee, by the social roles of speaker and hearer (e.g., register), by the genre of discourse produced, and so on. Similarly, prosodic patterns are sensitive to these contextual features. Intonation, for example, may be systematically sensitive to sex of speaker (Andersen, 1977; Brown, 1975; Lakoff, 1973a), to genre (Crystal and Davy, 1969), or to formality of setting (Crystal and Davy, 1969).

The assignment of primary stress in sentences also is constrained by context. Recent studies (Chafe, 1976) indicate that stress is sensitive to whether or not a piece of information is assumed by the speaker to be known to or knowable by a hearer, whether or not the speaker assumes the hearer is currently attending to that information, whether or not the speaker intends to focus on that information in subsequent discourse, and so on.

In short, few features of language are untouched by context; the effects of context are pervasive. It cannot be ignored by language users; to be competent, a language user must know the multitude of norms for adapting language to the situation at hand (cf. Hymes, 1974, for an extended discussion of such competence). Integral to competence itself, context commands the attention and research involvement of those interested in the nature of language structure and behavior.

### Pragmatics and Child Language

What can child language contribute to an understanding of language in context? The study of child language provides at least the following five resources:

1. A multidisciplinary research base
2. A methodology strongly grounded in empirical observation
3. The opportunity to observe the emergence of contextual sensitivity
4. The opportunity to observe the transition from context to syntax (contextual precursors of syntax, syntactic encoding of context)
5. The opportunity to observe the socialization of background knowledge essential to the use of language (i.e., the role of the caregiver).

### The Multidisciplinary Nature of Child-Language Studies

The reader has been briefly exposed to the scope of what can serve as context. We have repeatedly commented that context is the product of language users' beliefs and assumptions. It is that part of the world of objects and

behaviors (verbal and nonverbal, situational and extrasituational, physical and social) that has significance for the language user and is relevant to competent verbal performance. In this sense, context is invisible. It can be inferred from experience but not directly perceived.

The breadth and invisibility of context accounts for the difficulty that researchers have experienced in developing a comprehensive account of the concept. The concept itself lies outside the scope of any one field. It draws on insights achieved in several fields, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and philosophy. Accounting for context is an awesome task, and researchers are reluctant to attend to levels of context that the methodology of their field excludes. A consequence of this, in turn, is that researchers have been unable to develop a unified theory of pragmatics.

Child language is not quite like any other focus in the study of language. It shares with adult-language study a wide spectrum of research workers from a diversity of fields. However, unlike adult language, child language is considered a special theoretical focus. One can specialize in child language, and this specialization is legitimized and sustained through journals (e.g., *Journal of Child Language*), conferences (e.g., Stanford Child Language Forum, Boston Child Language Conference), and books sharing this focus. Whereas for adult language, one typically finds journals, conferences, and readers on one area of language behavior, generally, child-language gatherings and materials include a wider spectrum of research concerns. This volume, for example, includes the work of anthropologists (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, Ochs, Schieffelin), sociologists (e.g., Corsaro), cognitive psychologists (e.g., Greenfield, Bates, Brislin, Ervin-Tripp, Camaioni, Volterra, Antinucci, Braunwald, Carter, and Garvey), and linguists (e.g., Atkinson, Keller-Cohen, Hatch, Peck, Wagner-Gough, Garvey, and Scollon).

More important than mere participation in a conference or volume is the fact that those who participate are **audience** to the research of each of these fields. Notice that the names of several contributors to this volume are placed under several theoretical concerns. Indeed, the assignment of most contributors to one or another field is not clearcut. It is characteristic of child language researchers to attend and contribute to the research interests of several fields.

This experience makes child-language researchers excellent candidates for the exploration of pragmatics—the systematic use of language in context. Exposed to, indeed working within, several fields, these researchers, more than other groups, are sensitive to the range of knowledge that appropriate language use demands. The contents of this volume reflect the scope of these scholars. The volume examines the competence underlying a wide range of language functions. It deals with the language acquirer's capacity to successfully refer to and make assertions about entities (cf. Atkinson; Bates and MacWhinney; Greenfield; Ochs, Schieffelin, and Platt; and Scollon, for example). It examines the capacity of the acquirer to ask information questions; request some future action; disconfirm, deny, and reject; tease, offer, and greet (cf. Carter; Bates,

Camaioni, and Volterra; Dore; Garvey; Keller-Cohen; Schieffelin; Volterra and Antinucci, for example). Furthermore, the reader will find considerable discussion of discourse or conversational competence. That is, researchers represented here have examined the capacity to initiate and sustain a discourse or conversation. For example, the work underlying initiating a topic of conversation is discussed by Atkinson; Corsaro; Gough, Hatch, and Peck; Ochs, Schieffelin, and Platt; Scollon; and Schieffelin, among others. The work underlying sustaining a coherent conversation or discourse is discussed by Camaioni, Corsaro, Ervin-Tripp, and Garvey. Ervin-Tripp points out that this work involves not only the ability to "Be Relevant" (Grice, 1975), but also the ability to manage the system of turn-taking appropriate to a particular society. The volume attends as well to the use of language to express and or manipulate the social relationship obtaining between speaker and hearer (e.g., parent-child, peers, siblings, teacher-student). Here the use of language is related to culture-specific norms governing the interactional conduct of individuals. Discussion of such norms can be found in the work of Schieffelin (for a New Guinea society) and in the work of Corsaro and Dore for Anglo-American middle-class society.

The multidisciplinary scope of the researchers here is evident in the treatment of some of these functions. Typically, more than one dimension of context is incorporated into a discussion. There is, on the one hand, a treatment of the social conventions for producing and understanding propositions, discourses, speech acts, and conversational sequences. On the other hand, there is often treatment of the cognitive processes underlying these conventions. In examining these two dimensions, the child-language researcher exposes the relative complexity of particular communicative tasks, contributing to our understanding of the developmental accomplishment of these tasks across languages and cultures. Developmental accomplishment is sensitive to the cognitive, linguistic, and social complexity of the verbal behavior under consideration.

### The Empirical Bias in Child-Language Studies

One of the most striking differences between research on adult language and research on child language lies in the methods that can be successfully employed. A large proportion of research on adult language relies on native speaker judgments of acceptable linguistic structures. In the case of their own language, the linguists themselves may act as informants; in the case of other languages, native-speaker informants are engaged in a dialogue with the linguist in a series of speech events typically referred to as "informant sessions." With some exceptions (de Villiers and de Villiers, 1972), this type of activity is inappropriate for achieving an understanding of child language. The investigator cannot rely on intuitions about how children structure language. Further, children tend to be unreliable as, and in some cases, cognitively and socially incapable (Brown, 1973) of, acting as "informants."

Confronted with these restrictions, the investigator of child-language competence has relied on other methods to assess patterns of language development. Among the most commonly employed are observations of spontaneous language use with caregivers, investigators, peers, and siblings (cf. Bloom, 1970, 1973; Bowerman, 1973a; Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Leopold, 1939-1949, for example), and observation of elicited verbal and/or nonverbal behavior in home or laboratory setting (cf. Bever, 1970; Clark and Garnica, 1974; Smith, 1970, for example). While both of these methods are heavily relied upon, the first gives a unique character to child-language research. In studies of adult-language behavior, it is expected that linguists will draw on judgmental procedures, psychologists on experimental procedures, and sociologists on recordings of naturally occurring language behavior. **In child-language research, on the other hand, linguists, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists very often rely on the same procedure for obtaining data, that is, recording spontaneous language use in naturalistic or seminaturalistic settings.**

The use of this methodology by such a diversity of researchers has shaped the direction of child language interests (see Braunwald and Brislin, Chapter 2 of this volume; Ochs, Chapter 3; Schieffelin, Chapter 4). Most important to the interests addressed here, the recording of ongoing language use has led to an interest in the "context" of children's utterances. Context has become a major focus of attention on a number of levels for a variety of reasons. **First, context has become a basis for the interpretation of utterance meaning by the child-language researcher.** "Cut off" from the child's own interpretation (judgmental data), the researcher has very often turned to the context of situation to validate an assigned intention or meaning. This use of context is employed by Bloom (1970) in her analysis of the child utterance *Mommy sock*. Bloom argues that this utterance has different meanings according to the situation in which it is produced by the child. The child may intend the utterance to mean "Mommy puts on her sock" in one context in which this event is witnessed; yet in another context, the child may intend the utterance to mean "This is mommy's sock." The extent to which the immediate situation at hand can justify syntactic-semantic interpretations of this sort has been a source of controversy (cf. Bowerman, 1973b; Brown, 1973; Schlesinger, 1974).

**Second, researchers have attended to context because it clearly is attended to by the language-acquiring child.** It is now a commonplace observation that children tend to talk about the here-and-now. Transcriptions of naturally occurring behavior indicate that very often children not only attend to and talk about the here-and-now, they direct the attention of a conversational partner to such here-and-now items as well. That is, here-and-now items become a shared focus of attention (topics) and orientations for verbal and nonverbal behavior. This process is treated in several articles in the present volume, including those by Atkinson; Ochs, Schieffelin, and Platt; and Scollon.

**Third, context has become a concern, because caregivers rely on context in interacting with young children.** They rely on context in trying to disambiguate

what the child is trying to express, and they rely on context in conveying their own intentions to the child. Observations of child-caregiver interaction indicate that (at least for certain societies) caregivers interpret children's utterances taking into consideration what the child is doing or has been doing, what the child is attending to, and the like (Greenfield and Smith, 1976; Schaffer, 1977a; Snow and Ferguson, 1977). Similarly, caregivers often use the here-and-now situation as a resource for their own talk. They may use a here-and-now item to attract the attention of the child (e.g., holding up, shaking, pointing to, or verbally calling attention to an item). Once the child's attention is gained, the caregiver may produce talk around that item (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976).

**The process of recording and transcribing in itself has provided a fourth stimulus to understanding context.** We have mentioned that the researcher at the point of analysis, and the child and the caregiver in the course of the social situation all turn to context as a resource. However, every transcriber of child language knows that context is critical to an intelligible transcript. To document at the most basic level what is taking place, the transcriber must note what activity the child and/or other participant(s) are engaged in; where they are looking, facing, pointing, reaching, moving; what they are touching, holding, holding up, manipulating, etc. Without these observations, the intentions of the child and the other participants in a situation are very often impossible to assess. An awareness of what a transcript should encode has led researchers to attend to situational detail, well beyond what is typically noted in adult language study.

### Contextual Sensitivity in Child Language

The repeated message in this discussion is that context is critical to appropriate and communicatively successful verbal interactions. Beliefs and assumptions about the social universe (including language) constitute a resource for interpreting and expressing speakers' intentions. An essential part of becoming communicatively competent is acquiring background knowledge that interlocutors (in one's speech community) take for granted.

Nowhere is the importance of an item more noticeable than in its absence. **Child language is valuable to a study of pragmatics in part because it demonstrates gaps in competence.** In many cases, communication breaks down as a result of these gaps. It is by studying distressed situations such as these that valuable information concerning context is isolated (Keenan, Schieffelin, and Platt, 1978; Sabsay and Bennett, 1977).

Much has been said about the role of egocentrism, the inability of the speaker to take the perspective of the listener, in creating distressed or at least qualitatively different interactions with young children (Piaget, 1926; Vygotsky, 1962). This inability can lead to unsuccessful communication of ideas, as when the child does not take into account the listener's lack of awareness of an item under discussion (Greenfield and Smith, 1976; Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976;

Piaget, 1926). In many cases, the child in fact is not attempting to communicate. In these cases, the distress is from the adult's point of view, not the child's (see the last section of this chapter).

A major contribution of child language lies not only in observing what is missing, but in observing as well **the filling in and expansion of background knowledge underlying language use.** Several developmental trends have been documented.

First, **there has been documentation of the child's increasing sensitivity to the perspective of the listener** (the move away from egocentric to a more socio-centric perspective). This transition is fundamental to the capacity to "presuppose." When we speak of a speaker presupposing certain information, we generally mean that the speaker assumes something to be the case and assumes the listener does or does not share this assumption (Stalnaker, 1974; Thomason, 1974).

A child who does not consider the listener's knowledge at all is not presupposing but is rather simply taking for granted that something is the case. Several chapters of this book consider this transition. Greenfield discusses the notion of "certainty" as a precursor to and a basis for "presupposition" in language development. The choice of what to express at the single-word stage is tied to information that is or is not certain for the child; the listener's knowledge is not as important a consideration at this stage. Bates and MacWhinney argue that the concept of presupposition influences children's language at the time they begin producing two-word utterances. In particular, they argue that children at this developmental point express within one utterance new information before old, presupposed information. Several articles, including those by Atkinson; Ochs, Schieffelin, and Platt; and Scollon discuss the work that is involved in getting a piece of information to be shared or presupposed. In each study, the child is seen as actively requesting the attention of a conversational partner or directing the attention of a conversational partner to a particular entity. In many cases, the entity does not become a piece of shared knowledge until the completion of several conversational exchanges between the child and the conversational partner; shared knowledge is an interactional achievement.

A second trend documented is **the child's move away from reliance on the immediate situational context toward greater reliance on nonsituated knowledge.** As noted earlier, children and adults alike use entities in the immediate physical environment as topical items in talk. As Greenfield points out, in many cases such items may be the focus of some predication but they may not be expressed in the predication itself. Utterances using physically present items are often successfully communicated (even if they are not intended to be), because the co-present individual is able to link what the child is saying with some item the child is attending to in the environment. Talk that is related to the non-here-and-now is very often not as successful at an early stage in the child's language development. Where the child has not developed a tense system,

appropriate use of definite articles and/or relative clauses, reference to entities in the past, future, or in the imaginary world is difficult to achieve. Adults will try to link these attempts to something occurring in the here-and-now; if that fails, the utterance may be heard as "out-of-the-blue" (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976).

A third trend can be seen in **the child's expanding knowledge of conventions for carrying out particular social acts (speech acts)**. Such knowledge involves not only the linguistic structures for carrying out these acts, but the conditions under which these acts are appropriate, e.g., needs, wants, beliefs of speaker and hearer, status of speaker and hearer, temporal and spatial setting, the likelihood that a particular act will be or has been already carried out, and so on (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). We have already mentioned the child's expanding knowledge of one act—that of referring. Over time the child comes to understand the conditions appropriate for using a definite mode of reference. The conditions for carrying out this and other social acts are discussed within this collection. For example, Bates, Camaioni, and Volterra discuss the Italian child's increasing capacity to produce directive acts (imperatives), such competence beginning well before the child is using words. Keller-Cohen, Chalmer, and Remler, as well as Volterra and Antinucci, discuss how young children acquire competence in the act of denying or disagreeing.

This latter work on negation brings to our attention that particular social acts are very often parts of larger sequences of events (Hymes, 1974). Denials, for example, are responses to some prior expression. Becoming competent in the use of language involves knowing how to engage in these larger speech events. In addition to the studies of negation, several chapters in this book attend to the language acquirer's capacity to sustain a coherent and appropriate verbal interaction. Camaioni, for example, notes that child-child interactions among Italian 2-year-olds are qualitatively distinct from the interactions of older children and adults. These early interactions tend to be dominated by imitative or mirrorlike (specular) sequences of action. Child A does X and Child B does X subsequently or simultaneously. The interactions of more mature children or even of younger children if interacting with an adult tend to be based on reciprocity, where the action of one party is not mirrored but is complemented or responded to by the action of another party. Garvey's study of English-speaking preschool children indicates that by the time children are 3 years old they are able to engage in quite complex discourses. At this point, children can generate discourse around a single topic through the use of a "contingent query." Such a query not only attends to the prior utterance of a co-present interlocutor, it generates further talk about that utterance in the subsequent turn. (As a query, it elicits a response.)

Ervin-Tripp and Corsaro attend closely to the social relationship between child and conversational partner in their assessment of children's discourse competence. The lower status of the child in interactions with an older child or an adult is manifest in the nature of the conversation. Ervin-Tripp documents

the dominance of others by noting the frequency of unsuccessful bids for the floor by the young child; interruptions tend to be overridden and heard as irrelevant by older conversational partners. Corsaro sees the influence of caretakers in the extent to which they control the topics to be attended to in interactions with young children. These studies demonstrate that as children are learning language, they are learning social structure. They are learning that social statuses are linked to particular rights and obligations, and they are learning just how these rights and obligations are manifested in verbal behavior. These rights and obligations are part of the background knowledge underlying appropriate language use; they are conditions that every child must attend to in producing and interpreting language.

### Contextual Alternatives to Syntax in Child Language

As already discussed, child language provides a wealth of information concerning the use of context in conveying an intention. Witnessing an 18-month-old child's interactions with an adult or peer will provide the observer with an impressive list of communicative strategies that precede or cooccur with morphosyntactic means for accomplishing the same task. **A developmental pragmatic study will document when and how these communicative alternatives emerge and their relation to the acquisition of particular morphosyntactic structures in language.**

Child language data reveal pragmatic alternatives that are available to young children even before single words emerge. For example, reference is achieved through touching, pointing, and eye gaze before it is achieved through linguistic means (Atkinson, Chapter 10 of this book; Bates, Camaioni, and Volterra, Chapter 5 of this book; Werner and Kaplan, 1963). Similarly requests, offers, noticings, greetings, rejections, and denials can be carried out through reaching, holding up, waving, touching the addressee, pushing away, head shaking, and the like (Bates, Camaioni, and Volterra, Chapter 5 of this book; Carter, Chapter 6; Keller-Cohen, Chalmer, and Remler, Chapter 14).

Not only nonverbal, but verbal alternatives as well to syntactic encoding have been documented in child-language studies. In particular, the use of previous discourse of the child or conversational partner is a common strategy among English-speaking children in communicating an intention (cf. Dore, Chapter 16 of this book; Ochs, Schieffelin, and Platt, Chapter 11; Scollon, Chapter 9). Just as the child may use some piece of the nonverbal environment in conveying what is to be communicated, so the child may use a piece of the verbal environment, that is, the prior discourse, in carrying out the same end. The child often builds on what was previously expressed; indeed, the expression of a single proposition, the carrying out of a single social act, may cover the span of several utterances. Bloom has referred to the resulting constructions as "holistic" sequences (1973); Scollon (Chapter 9 of this book) as "vertical constructions."

example illustrates (Bloom, 1973, p. 194):

*Mother*

*Do you know what else I think is in the bag?*

[child turns away from chair, toward bag]

*I think we have some juice and some cookies in the bag.*

The most pervasive and fundamental speech act of all is that of reference. As noted earlier, reference is successfully accomplished only when the speaker believes the hearer can identify what is being referred to: "The second condition . . . requires that the hearer be able to identify the object from the speaker's utterance of the expression. By 'identify' here I mean that there should no longer be any doubt or ambiguity about what exactly is being talked about [Searle, 1969, p. 85]." Over and over in child-caregiver interactions in our society, we find this condition an object of concern. We find caregivers making certain that this condition holds. Typically the child is asked or told to look at, listen to, or remember some entity. Only when identification is confirmed does the caregiver use that entity as a referent in a predication. The securing of identification and the subsequent predication produces sequences such as the following (Bloom, 1973, p. 173):

*Mother*

*Look what I have.*

[mother picks up cow and calf]

[child points to cow]

*I have a—baby cow.*

*Child*

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The expression of such conditions in anticipation of or in the course of carrying out particular speech acts is discussed in several studies included in this volume, including those by Atkinson, Corsaro, and Ochs, Schieffelin, and Platt.

The displaying of essential background knowledge by caregivers goes well beyond the articulation of speech-act conditions. For example, we find caregivers supplying the appropriate conversational move on behalf of the child, where the child herself does not produce the appropriate behavior. This behavior is striking in the speech of New Guinea (Kaluli) caregivers as reported by Schieffelin in this volume. Mothers in this society will explicitly instruct young children what they are to say in particular interactional situations. The mother will produce the utterance herself and then command the child to repeat the utterance. In the case of very young infants, the mother will hold the infant in front of her, facing the intended addressee, and produce the appropriate utterance on behalf of the child. Keller-Cohen, Chalmer, and Remler show how the articulation of appropriate conversational behavior is evident in Anglo English-speaking communities as well. They observed responses of

an adult to a child's negation of a proposition. In interacting with the child, the adult supplied or elicited appropriate use of negation. For example, the adult would elicit an explanation behind the child's negation (if none was forthcoming), indicating that denials, disagreements, etc. require some accounting. In this way, adults display norms for the sequential organization of conversation.

The richness of context to be found in child-language data has been lightly touched in this introduction. However, the facets of child language that have been brought to attention should convince one that this particular research area offers valuable insights into how context enters into everyday language behavior. The wealth of contextual detail needed for an interpretable transcript, the heavy reliance on the immediate context by the child, the explicit expression of background knowledge by caregivers, all bring out the shared understandings that make communication and social interaction possible.

There is a tradition in studies of child language to look upon child language as a somewhat abbreviated form of adult language, hence such notions as "telegraphic" speech (Brown, 1973), "reduction transformation" (Bloom, 1970), "holophrastic speech" (deLaguna, 1927), and the like. This perspective is based on a comparison of only the morphosyntactic structure of adult and child language. Looking at the pragmatic dimension of language, this perspective is not adequate. The employment of pragmatic alternatives to morphosyntactic structures is rich and frequent in the language behavior of young children. Expanding the study of child language to include pragmatic dimensions enables us to see the variety of communicative skills the young child uses in everyday social situations. This, in turn, provides a richer and more accurate account of the child's linguistic and social knowledge.