Research Article

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Inferences and Indirectness in Interaction

Abstract: I explore some of the interconnections between inferences that participants make about one another's (verbal) conduct, the implications they attribute to prior turns at talk, and the indirectness with which recipients may respond to enquiries – in short, the interconnections between inference, implication and indirectness. These are explored in the context of naturally occurring conversations (UK and US), from the methodological perspective of Conversation Analysis. Because inference has come to be associated closely with Grice's concept of implicature, I begin by setting out my reasons for not following Grice's path, preferring instead to revert to 'implication', namely the implication that a recipient finds in and attributes to a prior turn. My purpose here is to avoid the cognitive conceptualisation of speakers' intentions that Grice supposed are associated with implicature. I argue that inference features in the understanding of and response to all turns at talk; it is not restricted to some special kind of utterance, as seems to be conveyed in Grice's conceptualisation. The inferences that recipients make are evident in cases in which they respond not to what the prior speaker asked 'literally,' but to the inferred agenda of an enquiry. Moreover, recipients may respond indirectly to prior enquiries, thereby 'side-stepping' implications they attribute to those enquiries. In various ways, inference and indirection may on occasions be associated with practices for avoidance in conversation.

Keywords: inference, implicature, conversation analysis

1 Introduction

I am concerned here with *inference* in social interactions, with inferences that are made about the possible *implications* of a turn at talk, and with the associations between inference /implication and the possible *indirectness* of action. To set the scene, and to make clear at the outset the nature of these connections and associations, it will be worth considering briefly this excerpt from a telephone conversation between two students (US).

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(1)    [Trip to Syracuse] (Charlie had been going to give Ilene a ride in his car up to Syracuse )
1      Charlie:    And u:m:: (·) ih wz rea:lly ba:d because she decided of a:ll
2                  weekends fuh this one tih go awa:y
3                  (0.6)
4      Ilene:      Wha:t?
5                  (0.4)
6      Charlie:    She decidih tih go away this weekend.
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7     Ilene:      Yea:h,
8     Charlie:    .hhhh=
9     (Ilene):    =.kh[h
10    Charlie:        [So tha:[:t
11    (Ilene):             [k-khhh
12    Charlie:    Yihknow I really don't have a place tuh sta:y.
13    Ilene:      .hh Oh:::::.hh
14                (0.2)
15    Ilene:      .hhh So yih not g'nna go up this weeken'?
16                (0.2)
17    Charlie:    Nu::h I don't think so.
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Charlie had previously arranged to give Ilene a ride (in English English, a lift) up to Syracuse, where he was planning to go at the weekend. His account that the person he had been going to stay with will be out of town ends with the report that 'So that I really don't have a place to stay'. When in response Ilene draws the *inference* that he will 'not (be) going up this weekend', it is evident that she has treated the *implication* of his report as being that he is not after all going up to Syracuse at the weekend (see the highlighted turns in lines 12 and 15). In drawing that implication, Ilene is further attributing to Charlie's report an action – that he is cancelling their arrangement (note her disappointed realisation in line 13); he has not done so explicitly, but she attributes that action (cancelling) as what he is doing *indirectly* when he says that he does not have a place to stay. In response to which, Charlie confirms the inference Ilene has drawn (line 17), and thereby is indeed cancelling their arrangement, though again, only indirectly – he does not say so in so many words (i.e literally), so that the action, cancellation, remains unspoken, an implication of his news, her response, and his confirmation.

I have laboured this a little in order to highlight, not only the connections illustrated in this excerpt between inference, implication and indirectness, but two further themes. One is that inference and implication are bound up with *action*, with the [cancellation] of their arrangement to drive up together to Syracuse. The other theme is that in making this inference (line 15), the speaker (Ilene) is *attributing* to the prior speaker's turn the implication that he is not driving up to Syracuse and therefore that their arrangement is cancelled. There is no reference here to what Charlie may or may not have intended. We cannot know, for certain, what he intended when he said that he did not have a place to stay; he might, for instance, have been fishing for an offer to stay with Ilene's friends – 'fishing' being another indirect action (Pomerantz 1980), albeit different from 'cancelling'. Ilene may or may not have recognised that possible implication in Charlie's report; if she did, she set that aside and ignored it. Whatever Charlie's intentions may or may not have been, our analytic vantage point focuses only on the inference that Ilene drew, and the (action) implication she *attributed* to Charlie's report. There is no place here for cognitive attributions, other than those that Ilene might have made about Charlie's intentions, in the way that we ordinarily attribute intentions to one another's actions and speech, in making sense of their conduct towards us. As analysts of speech and interaction, we focus on participants' attributions of cognition, for example, in order to understand their unfolding conduct in interaction; we do not, and cannot, substitute some external and putatively more objective version of cognition, speaker intentions and the like. Thus, we are not considering intentionality as lying behind the implication(s) of talk; we view [implication] as being attributed to talk, as manifest in the inferences that participants make about what another has said.

2 Implicature

I have taken this trouble to detach [implication] from intentionality, from what any implication that a speaker might intend, in order to create some open water between what I want to explore in this paper, and what will be familiar to readers as the closest relative to inference, implication and indirectness in pragmatics – namely Grice's concept of *implicature*. Therefore, before exploring further some connections

and associations between inference, implication and indirectness, it will be worth saying something about implicature, to clarify why I am *not* relying on Grice's concept or the definition of his concept. Certainly implicature is close to what I shall be expounding, so it is relevant to consider what motivated Grice's account of, and his conceptualisation of, implicature.

Let's begin with two examples from the literature on Grice and implicature, both illustrating the same important insight that more may be communicated by an utterance than what is actually said, or rather the semantics of what is said

(2)   [From Davis 2014: 2]
       Alan: Are you going to Paul's party?
       Barb: I have to work.

(3)   [from Levinson 1983: 102]
       A: Where's Bill
       B: There's a yellow VW outside Sue's house

Davis notes that Grice was the first systematically to study "cases in which what a *speaker* means" differs from what the *sentence* used by a speaker means (Davis 2014: 2; emphasis in original). His (Davis's) observation about (2) is that ordinarily we might say that Barb 'meant' that she was not going to Paul's party, though her sentence 'I have to work' did not literally or explicitly 'say' that she was not going – she implied that. Implicature refers to "what the speaker thereby meant or implied. Thus, Barb implicated that she is not going; that she is not going was her implicature" (Davis 2014: 2). Levinson similarly observes that, though taken literally, B's response in (3) fails to address A's question; nevertheless, B may be understood to suggest that Bill is at Sue's. I have cited these examples from Davis and Levinson because the examples Grice himself uses (at least in Grice 1975: 43-45) are more complex, opaque, and rely on a range of rather arcane, inferential pathways that are more slippery than they need to be. The principal insight from Grice is that in a conversation between two participants, A and B, "whatever B implied, suggested, meant etc, ... is distinct from what B said"; what is 'meant' is what is implicated by the words spoken, not by the literal 'meaning' of the words/sentence spoken (Grice 1975: 43-44).

Grice provides a cognitivist account of implicature, in two respects. First, 'meaning' is what the speaker intended to imply (implicature) by the words spoken, rather than the (meaning of) the words themselves. Second, recipients/next speakers have to decode (we might say nowadays) or interpret what the speaker intended to imply, and Grice "sought to describe how such implicatures are understood" (Davis 2014: 8). He famously proposed an underlying principle, the *co-operative principle*, consisting of four maxims (of quality, quantity, relation and manner), that we follow in the production and understanding of talk, and that enable us to be understood in the way that we intend to be understood.

These maxims – the apparatus underlying the co-operative principle and therefore underlying implicature - are too well known to bear repetition here; though about (3) Levinson notes that whilst, as I mentioned, B's utterance failed to answer A's question, thereby transgressing some of Grice's maxims, nevertheless B's response is understood to be co-operative and therefore can be interpreted as suggesting that Bill is at Sue's (supposing that Bill has a yellow VW, which may either be known or supposed to be known or can be inferred by A) (Levinson 1983:102). The implicature in this example, as in (2), is what Grice termed a *conversational implicature* (Grice 1975, 45; Davis 2014, 1; and about (3) Levinson 1983, 103) insofar as the implication that Bill is at Sue's is derived from the conversational context, including what each knows, or supposes they know, about e.g. Bill's car. This is distinct from *conventional implicature*, in which a form of words quite conventionally or even idiomatically can be taken to imply some particular meaning, as for instance *Why do you always do that?* can conventionally be understood to be complaining (though I should admit that this is not the kind of example that Grice himself would use – it's far too informal). We shall see cases of each of what might be regarded as conversational and conventional implications in the examples that follow.

There is, of course, an extensive literature concerning what are regarded as shortcomings and difficulties in Grice's (1975) account of implicature,[1] including Levinson's revisions of some aspects of Grice's account of implicature, such as his observation that implicature may be derived by reference to what has *not* been said (Levinson 1983: 135). Moreover several theories have been proposed in the years since, that attempt to provide what their authors suggest are more cogent accounts of the pragmatics of meaning, and in particular provide answers to Grice's original puzzle about how is it possible to 'mean' more than is said (i.e. more than the words/sentences mean 'literally')? This is not the place to review those difficulties and the alternative theories and approaches that have been proposed (for an excellent overview see Davis 2014). My purpose in sketching an outline of (some aspects of) Grice's account of implicature is to clarify the respects in which I am *not* adopting his theory of 'meaning' nor his terminology. Whilst implicature is perhaps adjacent to what I am investigating here, and whilst what I am exploring has resonances with Grice's concepts, the way in which I conceptualise *implication* differs considerably from implicature. In very broad terms my perspective is closer to the argument that pragmatic meaning derives from properties of utterances in context, rather than being a property of speakers (Sanders 2015), which indeed is congruent with Bilmes's useful and important account of what he terms 'empirical pragmatics': "I want to further develop the notion of an interactionally based, or at least interactionally sensitive, pragmatics. In some of my examples . . . I have emphasized the importance of subsequent utterances (responses) in revealing the presence of implicature in a prior utterance" (Bilmes 1993: 397). Although I would have phrased that last point a little differently, as ' . . . the implicature *to be found in or attributed to* a prior utterance", my line of enquiry follows a similar path to that suggested by Bilmes. Likewise there are strong resonances between my enquiry here and that of Pomerantz's study of the inferences that may be drawn about the speaker's purpose in making an enquiry, as evidenced in the recipient's response to that enquiry (Pomerantz 2017). In each of these enquiries into implicature and inference, the focus shifts from speakers' intentions – the implication(s) that a speaker may (putatively) have intended in uttering a sentence – to the implications that recipients find in or attribute to a speaker's utterance in an empirical – i.e. sequential – context.

In order that there should be no misunderstanding, here is an abbreviated version of the key respects in which my treatment of inference and *implication* will diverge from Grice's conceptualisation of implicature:

– Grice's conceptualisation of implicature necessarily relies upon speakers' meanings being determined by speakers' intentions, or as Davis expresses it, "Given that speaker meaning is a matter of speaker intention, it follows that speaker implicatures can be recognized or predicted by any of the methods we use to infer intentions from behavior" (Davis 2014: 26). In my analysis 'speaker meaning or intention' is replaced by the meaning or intention attributed to an utterance or turn at talk by the recipient(s) of that utterance. At the core of my analysis is the understandings arrived at or attributions made by recipients of a turn at talk, and the *implications for recipients*.

– Reason for not adhering to a 'speaker intention' based account of implicature are that i) speakers and recipients may sometimes differ as to what was 'meant' by a turn at talk, the recipient attributing some 'meaning' to a turn, a meaning that is evident in their response; the speaker may, though, deny that that is what she meant/intended. Since there is no way to settle such differences or disputes, once again we focus on participants' attributions of meaning and implication. And ii) in multi-party (i.e. more than two party) interactions, recipient B may make a different inference than recipient C about what was 'meant' by the same turn or utterance by speaker A. Therefore, B and C understand the implications of A's prior turn differently, and attribute different intentions to the speaker (A) of that turn.

– Grice was primarily interested in identifying *how* inferences could be drawn from utterances – through the principles or mechanisms that enable speaker and recipient to share a common understanding of what the speaker means ("Since speakers tend to observe the Cooperative Principle, and hearers know this in a vague and tacit sort of way, hearers tend to assume that particular speakers are cooperating,

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1 And for a rigorous critical appraisal of Grice's earlier and related theory of meaning, see MacKay 1972. MacKay's account of the shortcomings of Grice's approach to intentionality that he supposes underlies meaning is compatible with a conversation analytic perspective, e.g. "The point is, we want to be sure that intentions which we attribute to utterers have a function not only for the meaning theorist but for the utterer as well" (MacKay 1972:58), though in CA we would talk rather about participants' orientations to and attributions of intentionality.

in the absence of evidence to the contrary" Davis 2014: 27). My investigation here is only tangentially interested in how participants draw inferences about and attribute 'meaning' to one another's (verbal) conduct; my focus throughout is not 'meaning' at all, but with action – for example, the actions that are being managed indirectly in and are inferred from turns at talk. This action-focused analysis is perhaps close to Haugh's account of implicature, Haugh 2015, 2017.

– For Grice 'inference' inhabits a restricted type or class of utterances: "The kind of inferences that are called implicatures are always of this special intended kind" (Levinson 1983: 101), i.e. a class of utterance in which the implicature is intended, in which what is not said is intended to be understood in a certain way (inference). From the perspective adopted here, implication and inference are not restricted to a certain class of utterance, but rather inhabit all turns at talk.

– Grice, along with most of those enquiring into inference and implicature, took the sentence or the utterance as the object of analysis, either being viewed in isolation, out of any interactional context. This has the consequence that inferences to be drawn from 'implicative' utterances are not shown in his examples because examples are not taken from (real) interactions; inferences and implicatures are therefore stipulated. However, my (Conversation Analytic) approach will be *sequential* – utterances or turns at talk are shown and analysed in their sequential context/environment, from which we can see the inferences that participants make, the meanings and implications they attribute to one another's conduct.

– Grice quite explicitly chose the verb 'implicate', and the noun 'implicature' to denote speakers' intentions to mean or imply "one thing by saying something else" (David 2014: 1) (see Grice 1975: 43-44 on his choice of this terminology). In order to detach the analysis here from the cognitive assumptions of actual rather than attributed speaker intentionality, I am reverting to the entirely non-technical sense of imply or implication, as that which may be drawn from or attributed to a turn at talk, as manifest in the inferences participants make about one another's talk.

It should therefore be clear that I am exploring the inferences participants in interaction draw about the implications they attribute to one another's turns at talk; I am not referring to implicature in its formal (Gricean) sense, because the implications in my analysis are evidently not speaker-intended, or whether or not they are speaker-intended is moot.

In what follows I will first consider some examples in which inferences are made about the implications of turns, in the context of social actions; I consider also some of the ways in which 'making an inference' is marked in turn design. Second, I will explore cases resembling the examples from Davis and Levinson shown above, examples 2 and 3, in which recipients respond to enquiries indirectly – my purpose being to explore the interactional uses of inference.

3 Inference is ubiquitous in talk

Whatever merits Grice's account of implicature may have for pragmatic theory, it is in certain respects too restrictive or too narrow if our purpose is to investigate 'inference' in naturally occurring interactions. Recall that inference/implicature are, in Grice's account, and as Levinson makes clear (Levinson 1983, ch.3) locked together in a special kind of utterance in which implicatures are always intended. This cognitive perspective unduly restricts inference, especially as inference features in the understanding of every and all turns at talk. There is insufficient space to set out that argument in full, so I will rely on just one demonstration of 'inference in (inter)-action'. I have selected this example because the inference drawn by at least one of the participants turns out to be incorrect (cf. Levinson 1983: 114, on the defeasibility of inferences), suggesting that (the possibly intended) implication and inference might be pulled apart. This is the beginning of a phone call made by Linda to her husband, Jerry, who is at work ("Wichitaw Blueprint", line 1).

(4)   [Telephone call] (Linda and Jerry are married. She's called him at work)
1   Jerry: Wichitaw' Bluepri:nt
2   Linda: Hey Jerry?
3   (.)
4   Linda: .h[h
5   Jerry: [Ye:[s.
6   Linda: [hHi:. .h[h
7   Jerry: [HI:[:.
8   Linda: [He:y- you don'haftuh bring any paper plates
9   I think I'll jus:t use the plates I've go::t,
10   Jerry: Who's thi:s.
11   Linda: ↑Linda.ehh[hhhkhhh
12   Jerry: [↑OH(h):.
13   Linda: ˚henh˚
14   Jerry: H[i::.

Only the briefest sketch of an analysis of this excerpt is necessary; I have given a fuller account in Drew 2002, and here we need focus only on the inferences that Jerry makes from Linda's turn/greeting in line 2, "Hey Jerry?" and then from her *Hi* in line 6. As the interaction proceeds it emerges that Jerry has not recognised that the caller is Linda, his wife. This is evident first in his response *Yes* (line 5), confirming his identity, but without greeting or naming her. His subsequent greeting *HI* (line 7) claims recognition, but does not 'prove' it, for instance by adding her name, as in *HI Linda*. In his next turn he admits to not recognising her, asking *Who's this?* (line 10). In her response to Jerry's answer to the telephone summons (line 1), Linda uses a form - her try-marked *Hey Jerry?* (line 2) - that indicates she thinks she recognises the voice of the person who has picked up the phone but is not certain (Sacks and Schegloff 1979, Schegloff 1986). That is perhaps the implication to be made from her try-marked greeting. It is quite standard that in response to try-marked greetings, recipients will simply confirm that they are the person thus named (or disconfirm, if the recipient is not the person so named). Jerry's simple confirmation *Yes* (line 5) displays his inference that the caller is someone who knows him well enough to (possibly) recognise his voice, but is not sufficiently close to him to be certain. That inference lies behind or is embedded in his reciprocal non-intimates confirmation in line 5. However her greeting *Hi* (line 6) claims recognition (Schegloff 1986), the implicature of which is that they are well enough known to one another for him to be able to recognise her. Based on this inference, he does a reciprocal recognitional greeting, *HI* (line7), the implication of which, again, is that he (now) recognises Linda. She proceeds on the basis of that inference, referring to some event they are holding that evening (lines 8/9). Linda has inferred, therefore, from Jerry's recognitional and familiars greeting that he has recognised her – whereas it turns out that he has not.

This example demonstrates that an implication is to be found in or inferred from each turn at talk, as is manifest in a recipient's response. Responsive and reciprocal conduct is informed by the speaker's inferences about what was unspoken but implied in the prior speaker's prior turn. Any turn at talk can convey or communicate more than its literal semantics; whilst being semantically a greeting, *Hi* claims to recognise the other, who thereby infers that they have been recognised. Accordingly, inferences about the implications of what was said are not restricted to a special class of utterance; they are unrestricted properties of turns at talk, any of which may convey more than their literal sense. It should by now be clear that by 'inference' I mean a co-participant's understanding of the 'fullness' of the prior speaker's turn and conduct – 'fullness' suggesting that a recipient's reciprocal conduct is premised on and displays their understanding of what more was implied than was (literally) said.

4 Implication and action

The implications to be found in or attributed to try-marked identifications (*Hey Jerry?*) and recognitional forms of greeting (*Hi*) rest on normative and conventional properties of these forms of the actions they constitute. I want to develop this a little, to focus specifically on implication, inference and action recognition. In this next example, Emma and Lottie are middle-aged sisters; Lottie lives in a neighbourhood by the ocean, whilst Emma lives in the city but has a weekend house in the same neighbourhood (Lottie refers in line 1 to riding her bike in the neighbourhood). Emma seems to begin closing the call with a conventional form of pre-closing, a *well*-prefaced turn in which reference is made to an 'arrangement' for getting together in the future ('arrangement' is a pretty loose term covering such non-specific references as *See you later* as well as the more specific *Well I'll see you on Wednesday at 6*) (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 317).

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(5)   [NB:1:6:4] (Emma and Lottie are sisters, each has a house by the ocean)
1     Lot:    °Oh I love tuh gee I ride mine all [th' ti:me.°
2     Emm:                                       [°Ye:ah.°
3     Lot:    I love it.
4     Emm:    .hhh WELL honey? ( ) Ah:ll (.) pob'ly SEE yih
5             one a' these da:y[s,
6     Lot:                     [Oh: Go:d yeah [(ah wish)]=
7     Emm:                                   [ehh huh  ]=
8     Lot:    =But I c- I jis [couldn' git do:w[n (    )
9     Emm:                    [Oh-u            [Oh I know=
10    Emm:    =I'm not as[kin yih tih] c'm dow-]
11    Lot:               [Je e : z i z]  I  m e an ]  I jis
12            (0.2)
13    Lot:    I didn' have five minutes yesterday.
14    Emm:    I don' know how yih do i:t.
15            (0.3)
16    Lot:    I don' kno:w. nh huh
17    Emm:    You wuh: work all day tihda:y.
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We focused in the previous example (4) on the inference to be drawn by Jerry that the caller was someone known to him, but not sufficiently well known to be sure of recognising him from his voice, certainly not a close or intimate friend; that inference was based on the implication derived from Linda's try-marked opening. In example (5) one participant, Lottie makes an inference from the prior speaker's, Emma's, prior turn – but here specifically about the action in Emma's prior turn. When in lines 6 and 8 Lottie responds defensively to Emma's prior turn, she is treating that turn as having implied a complaint. That is, she infers from Emma's *I'll probably see you one of these days* (lines 4/5) that Emma is complaining about their not having gotten together (see e.g. Lottie's explanation/excuse in line 13 that *I didn't have five minutes yesterday*). There is of course a basis for Lottie's inference that Emma is complaining, in the conventionally-based implication to be made of *I'll probably see you one of these days*, which is that there has been an 'absence', a gap of time since they last got together, and an implication also that the fault lies with the other's unavailability. Hence Lottie's excuse about not having had *five minutes yesterday*. The matter of whether or not Emma designed her turn to complain is moot; at any rate Emma seems in her disclaimer (line 10) to deny that was her intention. The inference Lottie draws may *attribute* an intention to Emma, to complain; but that is not to say that Emma intended to complain – she used a form which was consistent with two kinds of conventions, one for closing a call with a reference to a future meeting, the other alluding to a complainable matter. This then does not support the Gricean position that "The kind of inferences that are called implicatures are always of this special intended kind"; there are no grounds here for supposing that a complaint was 'intended' nor any need to splash around in such murky waters – complaining was certainly attributed by Lottie to Emma's construction, on the basis of an inference arising from an implication (note the indefinite pronoun) of Emma's formulation.

The following example (6) is particularly instructive because two recipients make quite different inferences from the same initial turn. A health visitor is visiting the home of a newly born baby, and both the mother and father are present. The health visitor's remark that the baby is *enjoying that isn't he* (line 1) refers to the fact that the baby is audibly sucking on something; sucking and slurping sounds can be heard on the tape, immediately before this.

(6)   [Health visitor:4A1:1] (HV=health visitor, F=father, M=mother)
1   HV: He's enjoying th<u>a</u>t [isn't he.
2   F: [Y̲es he certainly is=
3   M: =He's <u>not</u> hungry 'cuz (h)he's ju(h)st (h)had 'iz
4   bo:ttle .hhh
5   (0.5)
6   HV: You're feeding him on (.) Cow and Gate Premium.

The father and mother respond separately and independently; the father agrees with or confirms the health visitor's remark, whilst the mother responds defensively, that her baby is not sucking on whatever it is because he's hungry – he can't be hungry because *he's just had his bottle* (lines 3/4) (the mother's aspirations shown in line 3 are light chuckling, not quite laughter). The father has understood the health visitor's remark as benign; he draws no further inference from her remark than that the baby seems content. By contrast, the mother attributes to that remark a much less benign implication, in which the health visitor is drawing attention to the possibility that the baby is sucking on something because he's hungry, and has not been fed. The inference the mother draws from the health visitor's remark is that she may be finding fault with the way the baby is being cared for (on which see Heritage and Sefi 1992). That two quite different implications may be found in or attributed to the same turn at talk, and different inferences drawn from that same turn, surely compromises the claim that inferential implicature is a 'special intended kind'; implications are to be found in the design or construction of a turn, understood from a particular viewpoint in a given context. (Levinson discusses the role of context in making inferences about meaning from the surface form of an utterance: but his account runs foul of his stipulation about cognition and intentionality, as when he concludes that ". . . most importantly, implicatures can just disappear when it is clear from the context of utterance that such an inference *could not have been intended* as part of the utterance's full communicative import", Levinson 1983: 115, my italics).

These two examples demonstrate how inferences may be drawn about the implications of what the speaker was 'doing' in a prior turn – that is, attributing an action to the prior turn. The possibility that different inferences may be made on the basis of implications to be found in prior turns further supports my proposal that in drawing inferences from prior turns, recipients are attributing (action) implications to those prior turns - implications that do not arise from or reside in a speaker's putative intentionality.

5 Marking a turn as being an inference

I have suggested that any turn at talk, any utterance viewed sequentially, may be constructed on the basis of inferences the speaker makes about the prior speaker's prior turn; in making those inferences, a speaker attributes a certain implication to the prior turn. In some cases speakers can (linguistically) mark their turn as making an inference from what the prior speaker said, as in *You don't have to go to them then* or *So you're not going to go up this weekend*, the inferential marking indicated through the turn final *then* and turn initial *so* respectively.[2] Given that, as I have been arguing, any turn can be inferential, marking a turn as

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2 It should be noted that in his contribution here, Depperman gives extensive coverage to similar inferential markers in German, namely *dann* [then/so] and *also* [so], which he shows have different functions. *Dann* marks an inference as being unilateral, as belonging to or made by the speaker, with no suggestion that that is what the speaker 'meant'. By contrast, *also* "projects an intersubjective inference which is expected to be confirmed by the co-participant as having been meant": Depperman this volume.

inferentially based on the implications attributed to a prior turn is doing something rather special. The clue to that 'something special' lies in the implication being attributed to the prior speaker's prior turn. Speakers are finding an implication in what the prior speaker just said, and attributing this formulation to the prior speaker. To begin with here is an example, in which the attribution to the other speaker is rather explicit.

(7)   [JGII(b):8:14]
1   John: So who'r the boyfriends for the week.
2   (0.2)
3   Mary: .k.hhhhh- Oh: go::d e-yih this one'n that one yihknow,
4   I jist, yihknow keep busy en go out when I wanna go
5   out John it's nothing .hhh I don' have anybody serious on the string,
6   John: So in other words you'd go out if I:: askedche out one a' these times.
7   Mary: Yeah. Why not.

It is unnecessary to go into the ethnographic information that can be gleaned from this call, to see that in line 6 John asks Mary for a date; it is perhaps rather a conditional (*if I asked you out . . .*) invitation (Drew 2018), but the most notable feature of its construction is the turn-initial conjunction *So* prefacing a formulation of Mary's prior turn (on formulating the upshot of a prior speaker's turn, see Heritage 1985). His formulation *in other words* explicitly attributes to Mary's response to his enquiry about whether she's 'seeing' anyone (line 1), the implication that she'd be free to go out with him.

Phrases such as 'in other words', that directly or explicitly attribute an inference to (i.e. the implication attributed to) the prior speaker's prior turn, are not so often used, or at least less often used than a more 'restricted' attribution through the simple turn-initial conjunction *So*.

(8)   [Trip to Syracuse] (expansion of example 1)
1   Charlie: And u:m:: (·) ih wz rea:lly ba:d because she decided of a:ll
2   weekends fuh this one tih go awa:y
3   (0.6)
4   Ilene: Wha:t?
5   (0.4)
6   Charlie: She decidih tih go away this weekend.
7   Ilene: Yea:h,
8   Charlie: .hhhh=
9   (Ilene):   =.kh[h
10   Charlie: [So tha:[:t
11   (Ilene):   [k-khhh
12   Charlie: Yihknow I really don't have a place tuh sta:y.
13   Ilene: .hh Oh:::::.hh
14   (0.2)
15   Ilene: .hhh So yih not g'nna go up this weeken'?
16   (0.2)
17   Charlie: Nu::h I don't think so.

When Ilene asks *So you're not going up this weekend?* (line 15), she is drawing out, formulating and putting on record an implication she attributes to what Charlie has reported concerning his plans to drive to Syracuse this coming weekend (lines 1-12). It is clear that he had been going to stay with a friend, who now won't be in town at the weekend, *so* he does not have anywhere to stay. In this and in the other examples shown here of inference marking, *so* is a conjunction indicating an inferred consequence, in contrast to the kind of *so* that prefaces sequence-initiating actions (Bolden 2009, Raymond 2004). In the turn she begins with her inferential *So*, Ilene makes explicit what Charlie has *not* said (recalling Levinson's point quoted above that "they derive an implicature by reference to what has *not* been said"). Ilene goes on record in

making explicit the misfortune, that Charlie is not now going to drive up to Syracuse, which he confirms in line 17 and which of course in turn deprives her of a ride there. Charlie has thereby managed the sequential unfolding of his telling Ilene about the news in such a way that the recipient, Ilene, is the one to articulate the bad news, which she does in her inferential turn in line 15 (on bad news deliveries being managed to put the news recipient in the position of 'announcing' the news, see Schegloff 1988).

The turn-final adverb *then* is also used to mark the inferential character of the turn which it brings to a close; here are two examples, the first from the same visit by a health visitor to the home of a newly-born baby as was example (6), the second from a telephone conversation between friends.

(9)   [Health visitor:4A1:20] (HV=health visitor, F=father, M=mother)
1   HV: Lovely.=Will you be going back to the hospital for
2   you:r (.) post-natal.
3   M: Yes. (.) I wi:ll.=
4   HV: =Oh you won't forget to go will you.
5   M: No:. hhheh ([   )
6   HV: [I think that's v̲ery- v̲ery important.
7   M: Ye:h.
8   HV: U̲h:::m: to make sure everything is- is back together
9   in its rightful place.
10   M: You don't have to go to them then.
11   (0.7)
12   M: Y'know I- I thought you h̲ad to go:.
13   (1.5)
14   HV: Well none'v- nothing: I mean n:- noth̲i̲ngs compulsory,
15   It's obviously very sens[ible
16   M: [Oh I'm- I a̲m going.

(10) [NB:II:2:5] (Emma and Nancy are friends; Nancy is taking a class at a local university)
1   Emm: I TH̲I̲NK S̲O̲ME a'these k̲ids need a good J̲O:B though
2   to̲o:
3   (0.5)
4   Emm: Get ou:t'n: d̲o̲ a l̲iddle w̲o̲r:k.
5   (.)
6   Nan: Well of course a̲ll the kids in th̲i̲s: p'ticular class
7   yi̲hknow,h are e̲i:ther f̲ull time stu̲d'nts or they wo̲rk
8   during th'day en go tuh school et ni̲:ght,
9   Emm: °M[m h m , °]
10   Nan: [L̲o̲t'v'm w]ork p̲ar'ti:me u- [a:nd
11   Emm: [°Mm h̲[m,°
12   Nan: [go: p̲art day
13   en p̲art ni̲:ght? .hhhhh uh̲::m
14   Emm: Ther not real k̲ookie then,=
15   Nan: =S̲ev'ral of th'm are married,h O̲h no̲:.h

When in example (7) the mother asks *You don't have to go to them then* (line 10, 'them' being post-natal check-ups), she is drawing out and making explicit an inference from the health visitor's (HV's) enquiry about whether the mother will be *going back to the hospital for your post-natal* (lines 1-2), her encouragement to the mother not to forget (line 4) and her emphasising the importance of having a post-natal check (lines 6 and 8-9). The mother attributes to the HV's turns the implication that attendance at the post-natal clinic for a check is not mandatory (*you don't have to go to them then*, line 10), which she believed it to be (*I thought you*

had to go, line 12). This generates some awkwardness between them; the HV admits that it's not compulsory (line 14) and therefore being in the position of having to persuade the mother to go (line 15), whilst in overlap the mother attempts to reassure the HV that nevertheless she is going to the clinic (line 16). This to-and-fro between the HV's attempts to impress on the mother how important it is to go, that is persuading the mother to go, and the mother's assurances that she fully intends to go continues for some little while longer. It is evident therefore that in making the inference that attendance is not mandatory, based on the implication she attributed to the HV's enquiry, the mother has made explicit something that the HV might have preferred to have remained hidden, or at least unstated, because it might compromise the chances that the mother will attend (which in turn would not serve the interests of the HV's organisation).

Turning to example (10), Emma and Nancy are middle-aged friends; their age is relevant to them in the interaction insofar as they refer to Nancy's fellow students – she is taking a class as an external student at a local university – as *kids* (lines 1 and 6). Emma has criticised them for something like their youthful irresponsibility (*some of these kids need a good job though too*, line 1, then *get out and do a little work*, line 4). In response to Emma's criticism Nancy defends them on the ground that some do work, either full-time or part-time (lines 6-12); she subsequently adds that several are married (line 15), the implications of which regarding their being irresponsible young people I think I'll leave for another time. Emma's inference in line 14, marked by the turn-final *then*, *They're not real kookie then*, is attributed to the implication of Nancy's defence of the 'kids';[3] it is again a formulation of the upshot of Nancy's account in lines 6-12. In coming to this more positive assessment of the kids, albeit an assessment expressed in a negative construction, *not real kookie*, Emma attributes this assessment to Nancy, thereby maintaining a certain reserve about what she (Emma) might think.

At the beginning of this section I suggested that by marking a turn as inferential, a speaker was doing 'something special'. Whatever that 'special' might be, it is achieved through making an inference from a prior speaker's prior turn. Speakers are attributing a position, an upshot, a proposal to the other, on the basis of finding an implication in what the other just said. So marking something as an inference in this way is a device for attributing the responsibility for saying it, or saying it in a certain way, to the other. It may be noticed that in each case there is something conflictual or awkward about the interaction – a disagreement, making explicit what the other might have preferred not to be acknowledged, the awkwardness of asking for a date (a little after example (5) they discuss John's relationship with his wife, with whom he is still living), the awkwardness of giving bad news and reneging on an arrangement/commitment. In such circumstances, it can serve a speaker's interests to attribute what is being told or claimed, to the other – so that 'inference' may be a device for shedding responsibility or perhaps sharing it with the other.

6 Responding indirectly

One further general point arising from what we have considered so far is worth highlighting: inference and (attribution) implications are visible in the work that participants do in the interaction, visible in the moves they make, and sometimes signal they are making – which is to say that participants orient to implication in talk (Levinson 1983:102). When we examine inference-making and marking in naturally occurring interactions - taking inference out of the realm of suppositional analysis bordering on a form of logical analysis in which the analyst supposes forms of words and (two part) exchanges in supposed contexts - we find that inference (and the possible implication(s) to be drawn from the other has said) matters for participants. Participants orient to implication, and inference is an interactional device that may be deployed in circumstances and with the interactional effects such as those we have seen in the previous section. The use of inferences as an interactional device is developed in this last section, in cases in which speakers respond indirectly to enquiries.

Stemming largely from Searle's famous explication of 'indirect speech acts' (Searle 1975, published in the

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3 It should be noted that, as Haselow 2011 and 2012 has shown, the turn-final particle *then* is not always associated with disaffiliative environments in which participants disagree with one another.

same volume and immediately following Grice's Logic and Conversation), there is a plethora of different ways of theorising, conceptualising and operationalising 'indirectness'. In my analysis here, 'indirectness' is associated principally with responses to enquiries, such as this from example 16 below, and a continuation from (1) above.

(11) [From example (16) below]
    Ile: H̲ow about the fo̲llowing weekend.
        (0.8)
    Cha: .hh D̲at's the vac̲ation isn'it?

Charlie answers Ilene's polar question in a manner that does not conform to the grammatical constraints set by polar questions; that is, he does not answer either 'yes' or 'no', but instead answers in such a way as to enable Ilene – as we shall see a little later – to infer that he can't make the following week either. Hence, by 'indirectness' I am referring – as in Walker, Drew and Local 2011 - to non-type conforming responses to polar questions (Raymond 2003. See also Haugh 2015); which is to say "responses that apparently address the inferred purpose of the query" (Pomerantz 2017: 63).

    Cases of responding indirectly reported in a previous paper (Walker, Drew and Local 2011) likewise rely on the other inferring something from the response. Here is a first such example.

(12) [MDE:MTRAC: 60-1:2] (Tony and Marsha are an ex-couple, who now live in different cities some distance away. Their son, Joey, drove up to visit Marsha, and is traveling back to his father's)

1	Marsha:	Hello̲?
2	Tony:	H̲i: Marsh̲a?
3	Marsha:	Y̲e:ah.
4	Tony:	How a̲re you.
5	Marsha:	F̲i::ne.
6		(0.2)
7	Marsha:	Did J̲oey get home y̲et?
8	Tony:	Well I wz w̲ondering w̲hen 'e left.
9		(0.2)
10	Marsha:	˙hhh Uh:(d) did O̲h: .h Yer not i̲n on what h̲a:ppen'.
11	Tony:	N̲o(h)o=
12	Marsha:	=He's f̲lying

Whilst it is more usual for the caller to initiate first topic in telephone calls (e.g. Schegloff 1986), in this instance Marsha takes that first topic position when she asks the caller, her ex-husband Tony, whether their son Joey, who had been staying with Marsha, has arrived back at Tony's (line 7). The inference to be drawn from Tony's response, *Well I was wondering when he left* (line 8) is evidently that Joey has not arrived back. Tony's response is indirect; he does not say explicitly that Joey has not arrived, but rather gives some evidence from which Marsha will be able to tell (infer) that he hasn't. This is a relatively benign case, by which I mean that by citing as evidence some circumstance that might reasonably have delayed Joey's arrival back – a delay in leaving Marsha's – he is not being alarmist or perhaps even seeming to complain about his not having arrived. Other examples become successively less benign.

(13) [Heritage:I:11:4] (Minx is a dog)
1   Nor: °Because (ode) um° (0.5) may- Mi:nx is (most ahk-) she's
2   such a funny little thing,hhh hh most o:dd (.) little
3   creature rea::lly,=
4   Ile: =Is she?
5   Nor: iWe:ll yes she i::s. She's a funny- she is a funny little
6   thing. ‹B't she's (0.2) gih- al:tering et th'moment=
7   Nor: =(not[th't] I ca:n't- wo:rk it ou:t b't she still hasn't=
8   Ile: [°Oh:°
9   Nor: =uh hh £had anything y'know come on or anything li:ke
10   [that£ et the mo:ment,]
11   Ile: [No well she's still a bit] young though isn't [she<ah me]an:=
12   Nor: [S h e : :]
13   Ile: =uh[:
14   Nor: [She wz a year: la:st wee:k.
15   Ile: Ah yes. Oh well any time now: then.

Norma and Ilene are discussing their respective dogs (bitches); Ilene's bitch is due to whelp shortly, but Norma is uncertain whether Minx is ready to be mated (e.g. *she still hasn't had anything come on or anything like that at the moment*, lines 9-10) (i.e come on heat). Ilene suggests that she (Minx) is *still a bit young though isn't she* (line 11), thereby constructing this as an enquiry. Norma did not answer that directly, but instead gave just the evidence *She was a year last week* (line 14) – the implication of which is that Minx is not 'too young', an inference that Ilene plainly draws when in her next turn she conceded that it might be *any time now then* (line 15). I am depicting this as less benign because the exchange involved correcting Ilene's claim, managed indirectly through an implication (note Ilene's response in line 15) of Norma's account of Minx's age. Correction, or disagreement about whether Minx is too young, is disaffiliative.

In another example, a speaker seems similarly to contest or push back against the other's claim, indirectly.

(14) [ENT Oncology:306/102]   (This is a follow-up visit by a patient who's had a tracheotomy)
1   Doc   Have a seat (0.5) you're looking very well
2   (.)
3   Pat: Feelin' very well
4   Doc: Any problems
5   (.)
6   Pat: Err: only o:ver the last couple of weeks it's been a little bit
7   'arder to swallow
8   (.)
9   Doc: Ri:ght
10   (.)
11   Pat: Err no pain or anythin'=
12   Doc: =Ri:[ght]
13   Pat: [°jus°] takin' a little bit more geddin' down
14   (.)
15   Doc: Ri:ght
16   Pat: I don't know if it's just that my saliva's sticky .hhh or a- me
17   oesophagus is beginnin' to shrink a little bit I don't know=
18   Doc: =It maybe the LATTer (0.5) °but uh° 'cause you had radiotherapy
19   didn't you
20   Pat: Finished in December

The patient, who has had a tracheotomy as treatment for his throat cancer, reports generally feeling well (line 3), except that he's finding it *harder to swallow* (lines 6-7) then *a bit more getting down* (line 13). The patient then suggests two possible causes for this difficulty, the second of which is that his oesophagus has begun to shrink (line 17). The doctor tentatively supports that suggestion, explaining that the patient had radiotherapy (line 18), constructing that as an enquiry through a tag question (line 19) as Ilene did in the previous example (ex.13 line 11). The implication of the patient's response, *Finished in December* (line 20), is that the treatment finished some months ago and therefore might not be the reason for this shrinkage now. Again, the indirectness with which the patient contests the doctor's explanation leaves it to the doctor to infer how that evidence (that the radio treatment finished in December) brings into question his explanation.

In this next example from the visit of a health visitor (HV) (not the same visit as was excerpted in examples 6 and 9) there is a similarly indirect correction.

(15) [HV:1:A:] (HV has asked the father whether he watched the delivery; he did, and said it was
         like watching births on the TV)
1   HV: (An') then did you feel (.) thrilled or=
2   F: =Oh yeh o'course.
3   M: Yeah.=
4   F: ='specially as it (w-) a girl 'cos that's what we wanted.
5   (.)
6   HV: °Oh good.°
7   (1.0)
8   HV: I u:h (w's) quite alarmed the first baby I saw delivered (0.2)
9   it looked (0.7) uhm:: (0.7) 'cos you don't a through- (.) uh- a
10   full frontal view do you? (.) (fath[ers).
11   F: [W'll I was holding 'er leg see?]
12   M: Ye:s.
13   HV: So [you- in fact you did see [the head
14   F: [°Yeh   [Oh: yeh every[think
15   M: [Oh 'e [w's-
16   F: [Oh yeh.
17   M: 'E watched it all 'e was telling me:.

The health visitor's response that you (fathers) *don't get a full frontal view do you?* (lines 9-10) seems somewhat to deflate the father's account that watching the birth was like watching TV (data not show). This response is, as in previous cases, constructed as an enquiry through the turn-final tag question (line 10). The father's answer to that, *Well I was holding her leg see?* (line 11) indirectly contests or corrects HV's supposition about not getting a full-frontal view - the implicature of which is of course that he did have a full-frontal view. The inference from that is readily drawn by the HV, in a *so*-prefaced turn (*So you in fact did see the head*, line 13), a preface which as we have seen above may be used in conflictual interactional environments. It is worth adding that the turn-initial *well*-preface of the turn in which the father indirectly contests HV's 'deflation' (beginning line 11) contributes to the implicature of this turn, by alerting the recipient (HV) to "the turn it prefaces will privilege the speaker's perspective"; Heritage 2015, 88).

The next example follows the exchange shown in (8) above; it will be remembered that Charlie has called with the news that he won't be driving up to Syracuse that weekend – except that it was Ilene who actually articulated that news (ex.16 line 1). Ilene then suggests an alternative, in her enquiry *How about the following weekend* (line 4).

(16) [Trip to Syracuse] (Overlaps with and follows ex.4) (Charlie had been going to drive up to Syracuse at the weekend, and evidently was going to give Ilene a lift - a ride in US English! But the person he was visiting/staying with will now be out-of-town so he's not going)

```
1    Ile:   .hhh So yih not g'nna go up this weeken'?
2    ( ):   (hhh)/(0.2)
3    Cha:   Nu::h I don't think so.
4    Ile:   How about the following weekend.
5           (0.8)
6    Cha:   .hh Dat's the vacation isn'it?
7    Ile:   .hhhhh Oh:. .hh ALright so:- no ha:ssle,
8           (·)
9    Ile:   S[o-
10   Cha:    [Ye:h,
11   Ile:   Yihkno:w::
12   ( ):   .hhh
13   Ile:   So we'll make it for another ti:me then.
```

It is left to Ilene to recognise and determine the implication of the information in Charlie's response *That's the vacation isn't it* (line 6). She evidently drew the inference that it will not be possible to go the following weekend, when in line 7 and conclusively in line 13 she abandoned that possibility. Again, the sequence consists of Ilene's enquiry (line 4), to which Charlie responded indirectly (line 6); the inference from Charlie's response is one that 'contests' Ilene's alternative proposal, in some respects by 'correcting' her (along the lines that she might have forgotten that next weekend is vacation, and therefore they won't be in town).

In the next example Nancy has been complaining at length about her ex-husband's conduct, and particularly that he has not been in touch with her, their son or even with his own mother on Mother's Day; so the complainable matter has very much been his uncommunicativeness, which is relevant to her account here of responding in kind, by sending him payments and forwarding his mail without ever writing a letter or note to him (*haven't written a word*, line 4; for the moral implicativeness of extreme case formulations, see Pomerantz 1986).

(17) [NB:II:2:10] (Nancy is complaining about her ex, who doesn't communicate with her))
```
1    Nan:   So: I js took th'sekint page u th'letter? 'n (.) stuck th'fifty dollars: check innit?
2           'n .hhhhh (0.2) mailed it t' Ro:l.
3           (0.3)
4    Nan:   No note no eh I haven't written a word to im.
5           (0.3)
6    Nan:   I [jst uh,h for'd iz mai:l stick it in th'onvelope'n
7    Emm:     [°Mm:°
8           (0.4)
9    Nan:   send it all on up to im en .hhh[hhh
10   Emm:                                  [Yih know wher'e is the:n,
11          (0.8)
12   Nan:   I have never had any of it retu:rned Emma,h
13   Emm:   Oh::.
14   Nan:   At a:ll, so: [I jist assoom thet the notice the e: the=
15   Emm:                [°(   )°
16   Nan:   =telegram thet went fr'm th'bank w'ss return' becuz he didn't w:ant to accept it.
17          (0.4)
18   Emm:   OH:.h
```

The target exchange here is Emma's enquiry in line 10, *You know where he is then*, and Nancy's (delayed) reply in line 12. Her turn-final *then* marks Emma's enquiry as being based on an inference, and as we have seen above marked inferences are associated with conflictual interactional environments; the 'conflict' here seems to be that whilst Nancy has conveyed emphatically the lack of communication between her and her ex, to the point of her being quite detached from him, Emma's inference that Nancy (at least knows where he is (where he lives) pushes against the impression Nancy's is giving of distance, detachment. Nancy does not directly confirm that she knows where he lives (*Yes I do*, or *Yes, he lives over in such-and-such*); indeed she avoids confirming that by making an indirect response, in which she gives only the evidence for supposing that she knows where he is because the mail she sends to a certain address is not returned to her (i.e. as undelivered). (In an increment to her completed turn in line 12, Nancy adds another extreme case formulation, *at all* (line14), with which she further advances the moral case against him.) Through this indirect response, Nancy enables Emma to infer that she (Nancy) knows where her ex-husband lives, but without having to directly confirm that she does – hence maintaining the stance of detachment or 'distance' from him.

At the beginning of this section I characterised the examples of indirect responses as beginning with a quite benign example but becoming less so; even in the first of these,

[from (12)]
```
7    Marsha:    Did J̲oey get home y̲et?
8    Tony:      Well I wz w̲ondering w̲hen 'e left.
9               (0.2)
10   Marsha:    ˙hhh Uh:(d) did O̲h: .h Yer not i̲n on what h̲a:ppen'.
```

when in line 10 Marsha acknowledges that *You're not in on what happen(ed)* she is tacitly recognising, if not quite acknowledging, that Tony was not told their son would be arriving late. She uses an agentless construction that elides the matter that she (Marsha) is the one who might have/ought to have told him (on agentless constructions used to avoid self-attributions of responsibility and blame, see Pomerantz 1978). In subsequent examples ((13), (14) and (15)) the one responding indirectly was correcting the other (in example (15), correcting a professional, the health visitor); in example (16) Ilene is responding to Charlie reneging on a commitment to give her a ride up to Syracuse; and in example (17) Nancy is responding to an enquiry in which Emma is bringing to the surface information that runs counter to the account Nancy has been giving of her detachment from her ex-husband. There is, then, something conflictual in responding to an enquiry indirectly, or perhaps more accurately the indirect response is responding to a conflictual or disaffiliative aspect of the enquiry itself. At any rate, in this next and final example, the conflictual aspects of both the enquiry and the response are more transparent.

(18) [Rape trial] (Witness is alleged victim, cross-examined by defence lawyer) (Drew 1992)
      (W=witness, DA=defense attorney)

```
1    DC:   (W'l) d̲idn' he:: a:sk you (.) uh on that night that=uh
2          (.) he wanted you to be his g̲i:rl,
3          (0.3)
4    DC:   Didn' he ask you that,
5          (2.5)
6    Wit:  I̲ don't rem̲em̲ber what he said to me that night.
7          (1.2)
8    DC:   Well ya had=uh some uh (.) uh fairly lengthy convers̲ations?
9          with the defendant uh: didn' you (0.7) on that evening u' F̲ebruary
10         f̲ourteenth?
11         (1.0)
12   Wit:  Well we were all talkin'
```

```
13        (0.8)
14   DC:  B't you kne:w at that ti:me, that the defendant was in:terested in you (.)
15        didn' you?
16        (1.3)
17   Wit: He: asked me how I' bin: en (1.1) (j-) just stuff like that,
18   DC:  Just asked you how (0.5) you'd bi:n (0.3) but he kissed you goodni:ght? (0.5)
19        Izzat righ:t.
```

Example (18) is from the cross-examination of a witness, the alleged victim, in a rape trial; in this excerpt it is clear that the defence attorney's line of questioning is to imply that the witness had grounds for knowing that the defendant wanted to have some kind of relationship with the witness (lines 1-2), and/or that they had been talking together when they happened to meet somewhere on the evening of February 14th (Valentine's Day) (lines 8-10). The attorney then uses a declarative construction to put it to the witness that she *knew at that time that the defendant was interested* in her (line 14), turning that into an enquiry through the tag question *didn't you* (line 15). After a pause that was long enough to implicate some trouble emerging in the interaction (Jefferson 1988), the witness responds indirectly, with an account of a greeting from which it can be inferred that they were not on intimate terms; they knew one another but were not close friends or in other ways especially close (line 17). The non-intimacy of the greeting she describes contrasts with the implication of intimacy that was conveyed in the attorney's suggestion that the defendant was 'interested' in her (on which see Drew 1992); through that contrast she is indirectly challenging or contesting the implication she attributes to his 'question'. In responding indirectly, the witness avoids confirming and thereby contests the attorney's version, thereby designed to deflect the inferences that might be drawn from the attorney's descriptions. The indirectness here begins to look like a practice for contesting; indeed, in all these examples – and they are all that space allows – the responses are indirect insofar as the inferences they support push back again, correct, challenge or contest in some fashion the prior enquiry.

7 Conclusion

I have been exploring inference, implication and indirectness in naturally occurring interactions. I began from the position that any and all turns at talk are inferential, insofar as an understanding of what a speaker has 'done' in a turn-at-talk rests on an implication that the recipient attributes to that turn, and that therefore an inference/inferences may be drawn from that turn and its (ascribed) implication. What I am suggesting, therefore, is that an implication is not an intrinsic property of a turn/utterance, inherent in the words and the syntactic composition; rather, the implications of a prior turn are attributed to it by the recipient/next speaker, albeit in part on the basis of the turn's lexical, syntactic and other linguistic properties. Participants *orient to* a turn's implication in the inferences they make. To a great extent, then, I am questioning the familiar distinction between the putatively 'literal' meaning of what is said, and what is "non-naturally meant" (Levinson 1983: 101). My point – which I could illustrate only very briefly – is that *any* turn in interaction is understood to 'mean' more than is said, i.e. inferences may be drawn from a form of words, which 'go beyond' or are not limited by those words (and syntax and the rest). The upshot is, then, that inference is ubiquitous in naturally occurring interactions.

Whilst it is perhaps more usual in pragmatic enquiry to investigate *how* speakers make inferences from another's talk, I have not addressed that here; instead I have explored what speakers do interactionally when they draw inferences from another's talk, and especially what speakers do when they overtly signal or *mark* that what they are about to say/have said as an inference. In many cases there is a conflictual aspect to speakers' inferential work, for instance when speakers mark a turn as inferential (*So in other words . . .*). The conflictual, disaffiliative character of inference is more especially apparent in the actions conducted through indirect responses to enquiries; the inferences conveyed in indirectness are associated with *pushing back against the other,* which is to say pushing back against the implication of the prior speaker's prior turn, in such a way as to *avoid* some action, such as avoiding explicitly or officially correcting the prior

speaker, avoiding admitting and so forth. Hence what is to be inferred from an indirect response to enquiry is a means or a *strategy for avoiding* being explicit or going on record, in what are essentially *disaffiliative environments* where disagreement, or worse, may be involved.

A final point is worth making, although it is not one discussed above, in part because it is outside the scope of this enquiry; it concerns the matter of how participants may attribute an implication to and draw inferences from one another's talk, which as I mentioned in the previous paragraph was not my focus here. It is apparent in the examples shown above that speaker identities play a significant role in implication and inference. For instance, we saw in example 6 that two different speakers, a mother and a father, attributed quite different implications to the same utterance/turn by the health visitor, and thereby drew quite different inferences about what the health visitor was 'doing' when she observed about the baby that *He's enjoying that isn't he?* Whatever may be the differences in the responsibilities of mothers and fathers for the care of their children, or their different orientations to their familial roles and so on, it is clear that the same utterance/turn is susceptible to being understood quite differently by speakers with different identities (or 'belonging to' different categories). Their categories/identities are closely bound up with the inferences they make about the actions being conducted in talk. Again, implication cannot be an intrinsic property of (the words, syntax etc. in) a turn at talk; instead it is an ascribed property.

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<u>Transcription conventions</u>

These are the main transcription symbols used in the examples above.

=	Links talk produced very closely together (latched talk), no discernible gap but not overlapping
° °	Encloses talk which is produced quietly
underline	Underlining used to mark words or syllables which are given special emphasis (intonationally stressed)
CAPS	Amplitude: words or parts of words spoken loudly marked in capital letters
s::::	Sustained or stretched sound; the more colons, the longer the sound
.hhh	Inbreath: the length of the inbreath is indicated by the number of *h*s
[ ]	Encloses talk produced in overlap i.e. when more than one speaker is speaking simultaneously
(word)	Parentheses around word, phrases etc. indicate transcriber's uncertainty
( )	Parentheses with no words etc. indicate transcriber hears something being said, but cannot make out what
(this/that)	Alternative hearings
cu-	Cut-off word or sound
(0.6)	Silence in seconds
(.)	Silence of less than two tenths of a second
^ or ↑	Marks high pitch (sometimes shown as arrows, thus
> <	Marks speeding up delivery (in talk between the facing arrows
(h)	Indicates laughter while speaking (aspiration)
£	Said with a 'smiley' voice