

## **Social and Cognitive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication: Introduction and Overview**

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Any utterance, from a simple “uh huh” to an hour-long lecture, is the complex output of a variety of psychological processes—formulating what to say, selecting the right words, monitoring the effects of the message on the audience, and so forth (Levelt, 1989). Likewise, any act of message interpretation is based on both psycholinguistic processes (e.g., lexical retrieval, syntactic processing) and social-interactive factors such as beliefs about what a speaker is trying to achieve by his or her message (Gernsbacher, 1994). Historically, the social aspects of language use have fallen in the domain of social psychology, and the underlying psycholinguistic mechanisms have been the purview of cognitive psychology. In recent years, however, it has become increasingly clear that these components of language use are highly interrelated: Cognitive mechanisms underlying speech production and comprehension interact with social psychological factors—such as beliefs about interlocutors and politeness norms—and with the dynamics of the conversation itself, to produce shared meaning. This realization has led to an exciting body of research examining how social and cognitive aspects of language use interact to affect interpersonal communication and to substantial progress in understanding the content and processes underlying language use.

This volume aims to show that the cross-fertilization of theories and findings from social and cognitive psychology has proved extremely fruitful for understanding many aspects of human language use. Each of the four sections of the book illustrates this theme as it applies to such topics as people’s intentions or goals when using language, the role of language in research settings, indirect and figurative language, perspective-taking and conversational interaction, and the relationship between language and cognition.

In this chapter, we first discuss the scope and aims of the book. Then, we outline some basic themes and historical influences on the work presented in the ensuing chapters. As will be seen, many of these influences arise from fields other than psychology—ordinary language philosophy, conversational analysis,

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and sociolinguistics—and much research can be viewed as an attempt to empirically test ideas and findings from other fields in an experimentally rigorous fashion. Finally, we provide a brief overview of each chapter with an emphasis on how it embodies the book's goal of integrating social and cognitive approaches to interpersonal communication.

### THE SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The field of interpersonal communication is clearly immense, and comprehensive coverage of all approaches to this topic would far exceed the page limitations of this book. The decision to select contributors for such a volume is difficult and necessarily entails a focus on some aspects of communication at the expense of others. In this section we briefly describe the ways in which we have limited the content of this volume and the motivations behind our decisions.

#### Verbal Communication

Collecting contributions from psychologists whose theories and research focus on the production and comprehension of *verbal* language was our obvious way of limiting the scope of this volume. Although individual chapters discuss the relationship between verbal communication and closely aligned disciplines, such as nonverbal communication, paralinguistics, decision making, memory, and norms of social interaction, all contributions share a primary focus on spoken or written language. It should be emphasized that this limitation is not meant to imply that we consider nonverbal and paralinguistic phenomena to be of lesser importance to interpersonal communication; rather, it reflects our goal of illustrating the many ways a joint social–cognitive approach can be usefully applied to a relatively narrow set of research problems

#### Experimental Research Paradigms

A second way we limited the scope of this volume was to solicit contributions that discuss *experimental research* on language use and understanding, as opposed to case studies, observational research, or purely theoretical discussions. This decision was motivated by our desire to provide a body of work illustrating the strengths of experimental psychological research for answering key questions regarding human communication. Thus, this volume makes an excellent companion for recent volumes that focus on alternative approaches to communication (e.g., Carter & Presnell, 1994; Coulthard, 1992; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995; Markova & Foppa, 1990) and fleshes out other volumes that contain a variety of approaches (e.g., Hewes, 1995; Slobin, Gerhardt, Kyratzis & Guo, 1996).

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Although all contributors use experimental methods, the topics they address and thus the research paradigms they have developed are by no means identical. An understanding of any complex process, of which interpersonal communication is an example *par excellence*, requires a variety of converging methodologies. The studies described in the chapters of this book differ in their focus on conversational roles (message initiator, recipient, or both), modality of communications (written, spoken, computer-mediated), level of analysis (words, sentences, conversational exchanges), and research strategies (audio- and video-taped conversations, vignette studies, on-line reaction time studies, and so forth). Readers can glean insight into both common and novel experimental approaches to communication by glancing through the methodological descriptions in each chapter.

### **THEMES AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES**

Krauss and Fussell (1996) identified four basic models or sets of theoretical assumptions that have guided much of the research on interpersonal communication: *Encoder–Decoder* models, *Intentionalist* models, *Perspective-taking* models, and *Dialogic* models. These models differ in their assumptions about how meaning arises from language use: For Encoder–Decoder models, meaning is a property of messages; for Intentionalist models it resides in speakers' intentions; for Perspective-taking models it derives from an addressee's point of view; and for Dialogic models it is an emergent property of the participants' joint activity. Each contribution to this volume, although perhaps more closely aligned to some models than to others, can be viewed as an effort toward a hybrid theory of interpersonal communication that takes into account what has been learned from all these approaches. Although the contributors address different topics from different theoretical angles, it is possible to identify several interrelated themes or assumptions that run through most if not all chapters. We outline these themes briefly in this section.

#### **Communication Involves the Exchange of Communicative Intentions**

Most contributions to this volume can each be viewed as stemming, either directly or indirectly, from the view that successful communication entails the exchange of *communicative intentions* (Grice, 1957, 1969). In this view, words do not have a one-to-one relationship to the ideas a speaker is attempting to express; rather, a single utterance, such as "It's cold in here," can convey a range of meanings (e.g., a statement about weather conditions or a request to close the door), and a single meaning can be expressed in a potentially infinite number of ways. Consequently, listeners must go beyond the literal meaning of a message

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to derive the speaker's intended meaning. Clarification of when, why and how they do so is a goal of chapters throughout this volume.

### **Communication is Goal-Directed**

Austin (1975) observed that many utterances can be described as *acts* on a speaker's part (e.g., questions, promises, demands). Similarly, Searle's *Speech Act Theory* (Searle, 1969, 1975) distinguished between three rather different types of acts that an utterance can be designed to achieve: a *locutionary* act (the act of uttering a specific sentence with a specific conventional meaning), an *illocutionary* act (the act of demanding, promising, etc. through the use of a specific locution), and a *perlocutionary* act (an attempt to achieve a verbal or behavioral response from the addressee). For example, "It's cold in here" is a locutionary act that is a statement about the weather; but as an illocutionary act, it might be a request to close the door, and as a perlocutionary act, it might be an attempt to get the listener to close the door. Why speakers decide to create one type of speech act versus another and the mechanisms underlying listeners' understanding of these speech acts is a topic of several chapters.

### **Communication is a Cooperative Endeavor**

Grice (1975) proposed that conversation be viewed as a cooperative endeavor. Even when their purpose is to dispute, criticize, or insult, communicators must shape their messages to be meaningful to their addressees. To do so, Grice proposed, they follow a general *Cooperative Principle* comprised of four basic rules. Grice termed these rules *Conversational Maxims*: Messages should be consistent with the maxims of *quality* (be truthful), *quantity* (contain neither more nor less information than is required); *relation* (be relevant to the ongoing discussion); and *manner* (be brief and unambiguous). Grice argued that even in the face of apparent violations, communicators typically assume that the cooperative principle holds and seek to interpret messages in a way that resolves these apparent violations. The various chapters in this volume address such issues as what motivates speakers to create utterances that on the surface violate the Cooperative Principle and how listeners understand these violations in both conversational settings and special circumstances such as laboratory settings and human-computer interaction.

### **Communication Consists of Ordered Exchanges Between Speaker and Listener**

A fourth major influence on the work presented in this volume stems from *conversational analysis*, a branch of ethnomethodology that focuses on the

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structure of conversation (e.g., Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Jefferson, 1975; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1982; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977). Conversational analysts have demonstrated that conversations consist of orderly sequences of utterances (such as question–answer pairs); others have argued that alternative forms of communication, such as writing, follow the same orderly organization (Bakhtin, 1981). Many of the conversation analysts' theoretical ideas have been formulated in psychological terms by Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986, Wilkes-Gibbs & Clark, 1992) in their influential *Collaborative Theory* of communication, which assumes that speakers and hearers work jointly to ensure that a message is understood. The influence of this model on current research and theory in the psychology of interpersonal communication can be seen throughout this volume.

### **Communication is Socially-Situated**

Finally, in keeping with the overall theme of this volume, contributors' chapters illustrate the many ways in which language use is socially-situated. For example, Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, which states that the indirectness of a message is a function of the relative status and social distance of communicators, plays a strong role in Holtgraves' contribution (Chap. 4). In addition, the assumption that communicators tailor speech to their addressees (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Brown, 1965; Clark & Marshall, 1981; Coupland, Coupland, Giles & Henwood, 1988; Krauss & Fussell, 1991; Mead, 1934; Rommetveit, 1974; Volosinov, 1986) is the subject of an entire section of this book. Many of the contributions can be viewed as attempts to delineate precisely *how* social factors, such as to whom one is speaking, influence language production and comprehension.

## **OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

Although all contributors to this book combine elements of both social and cognitive psychology in their studies and theories of interpersonal communication, the particular ways they do so and the types language phenomena on which they concentrate vary substantially. The grouping of the chapters into four sections is meant to reflect these differences in approach; however, it should be noted that there is much overlap between sections and many chapters could have been placed in more than one part of the book. Below, we briefly describe these four sections and the chapters they contain.

Section I, *Introduction and Background*, includes two chapters, in addition to this introductory one, which form a foundation for later sections of the book. Both are sophisticated extensions of Grice's (1957, 1969, 1975) seminal

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formulations of speaker intentions and the Cooperative Principle, one with respect to the concept of intentionality itself and the other with respect to how speaker intentions and the cooperative principle influence research participants' responses in experimental and survey settings.

In Chapter 2, *The Varieties of Intentions in Interpersonal Communication*, Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. analyzes in detail the concept of *intention* in communication. As Gibbs points out, intentionality plays an important role in many discussions of interpersonal communication, including those in this volume, and a person's knowledge that he or she is interacting with an intentional agent affects how a message is understood (Gibbs, Kushner & Mills, 1991). Yet, he argues, our present understanding of intentions, especially communicative intentions, is rather limited. Gibbs stresses that speakers can have both different levels and different kinds of intentions when they create a message, and he carefully delineates several types. He also tackles other thorny issues, including the role of intentions in nonverbal communication and in art and cultural and medium differences in identifying speaker intentions. Of particular interest is his discussion of collective intentions, or *we-intentions* (Searle, 1990)—communicative intentions that are created through collaborative interaction between speaker and listener. Gibbs stresses the need for new research paradigms to study these and other issues concerning the role(s) of intentions in communication.

In Chapter 3, *Communication in Standardized Research Situations: A Gricean Perspective*, Norbert Schwarz draws important implications from Grice's (1975) theory of cooperative discourse for laboratory and survey research procedures and for interpretation of results. Schwarz argues that despite the standardization of research procedures, which minimizes the extent to which experimenters and participants can negotiate meaning, subjects rely on the same comprehension and interpretation strategies that they use in ordinary conversation to infer how they should respond. Specifically, participants assume (often erroneously) that experimenters' messages will follow Grice's Cooperative Principle and be informative, relevant, truthful, and succinct. Schwarz then details how subjects' reliance on the Cooperative Principle influences their responses to surveys and experimental materials. Schwarz convincingly demonstrates that Gricean implicatures are at least partially responsible for findings that seemingly reflect human errors in judgment, such as the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) and under-reliance on base-rate information (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

The chapters in Section II, *Indirect Speech and Figurative Language*, address how people produce and understand messages in which the actual words uttered do not directly reflect speakers' intentions. The original claim (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1975) that indirect meanings are derived in part from literal meaning has been examined in a number of studies, the results of which clearly indicate that

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in many circumstances nonliteral language requires no more time or effort to understand than does literal language (Gibbs, 1983, 1986; Glucksberg, Gildea & Bookin, 1982). In recent years, research has focused on social and cognitive factors underlying specific types of indirect speech, such as indirect requests (e.g., Gibbs, 1979, 1983; Holtgraves, 1986, 1994), metaphor (e.g., Gibbs, 1987; Gibbs et al., 1991; Glucksberg, 1989; Glucksberg et al., 1982; Keysar, 1989) and idioms (e.g., Gibbs, 1980, 1986; Gibbs & Gonzales, 1985; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990; for recent reviews see Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1994; Gibbs, 1994a, 1994b; Kreuz & Roberts, 1993). The focus, however, has typically remained on message comprehension rather than message production; many types of indirect speech have been neglected (e.g., indirect disagreements, exaggeration, understatement); and most research has ignored the ways in which social and contextual factors affect the production and comprehension of nonliteral language. The chapters in this section attempt to redress the previous dearth of research in one or more of these areas.

Chapter 4, *Interpersonal Foundations of Conversational Indirectness*, by Thomas M. Holtgraves, addresses the role of social context and politeness conventions in the production and comprehension of indirect speech (e.g., "It's cold in here" versus "Shut the door"). Holtgraves observes that Grice's (1975) classic discussion on understanding indirect speech in light of the conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner is limited in that it neglects the reasons *why* speakers choose to violate these maxims. In the first half of his chapter, Holtgraves discusses how social goals, particularly face management concerns (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967) determine decisions about when, why, and how to speak indirectly. He then reviews research on two types of indirect speech: requests and disagreements. In the second half of his chapter, Holtgraves explores the intriguing two-sided relationship between social-interpersonal factors and the comprehension of indirect speech acts. On the one hand, knowledge of social and contextual variables such as speaker status influences both the speed at which indirect speech acts are understood (Holtgraves, 1994) and how they are interpreted. On the other hand, listeners draw inferences about others' status, personality, motives, goals, and so forth from indirect messages themselves (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990).

In Chapter 5, *The Use of Exaggeration in Discourse: Cognitive and Social Facets*, Roger J. Kreuz, Max A. Kassler, and Lori Coppenrath discuss how hyperbolic statements in discourse may be constrained by pragmatic influences. As they point out, there has been little or no empirical research on hyperbole despite its frequency in conversation and in written language (Kreuz, Roberts, Johnson, & Bertus, 1996) and its role in the interpretation of other forms of indirect speech such as irony (Roberts & Kreuz, 1994). Kreuz et al. observe that speakers can choose from a wide range of values to complete a hyperbolic statement (e.g., "I've been waiting in line for [hours, days, weeks, months,

years].” ). They evaluate three hypotheses about the choice of value in an exaggerated statement: the “more is better” hypothesis, in which the more extreme the value, the better the expression; the “optimal level” theory, in which more is better to a point, after which the goodness of the expression declines; and the “threshold” model, in which a certain degree of extremity must be achieved but after that no further improvements in goodness are found. Kreuz et al. describe a series of studies evaluating these three hypotheses by comparing ratings of statement sense, appropriateness, likelihood of use, and other message characteristics as a function of value extremity.

In the last chapter in this section, *Figurative Language in Emotional Communication* (Chap. 6), Susan R. Fussell and Mallie M. Moss examine the production of figurative language, particularly metaphors and idioms, in the communication of emotional states. They first review literature on the use of figurative language in descriptions of autobiographic affective experiences that shows that the production of figurative expressions varies as a function of the intensity and type of emotion. Then, they discuss some limitations of experimental designs in which participants describe their own personal affective experiences and argue that this method may lead researchers to overlook important generalizations about how people use metaphors, idioms, and the like to express emotional states. Fussell and Moss review a series of studies in which speakers described movie characters’ emotions to an addressee; studies that demonstrate surprising consistency in the metaphors and idioms people use to describe emotional states. They demonstrate how this research technique can be used to examine the effects of stimulus properties and social-contextual factors such as gender on figurative language use.

Section III, *Perspective-Taking and Conversational Collaboration*, focuses on how speakers and hearers take one each other’s perspectives into account when formulating and interpreting messages and on how they coordinate their conversational contributions to ensure that messages are mutually understood (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986). The idea that communicators tailor speech to their addressees’ characteristics (physical vantage point, background knowledge, attitudes, etc.) has been widely expressed (Bakhtin, 1981; Brown, 1965; Clark & Marshall, 1981; Graumann, 1989; Krauss & Fussell, 1991; Mead, 1934; Rommetveit, 1974; Volosinov, 1986), and supported in a growing number of empirical studies (e.g., Clark, Schreuder & Buttrick, 1983; Fussell & Krauss, 1992; Hupet, Chantraine & Neff, 1993; Isaacs & Clark, 1987; Krauss, Weinheimer & Vivekananthan, 1968; Schober, 1993). As Krauss and Fussell (1996) observe in their review of this literature, however, theoretical development in this area has been hampered by the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a perspective and by a limited understanding of when and how people assess and use perspective during message production and comprehension.

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The three chapters in this section attempt to redress this lack of theoretical refinement.

In the first chapter in this section, *Different Kinds of Conversational Perspective-Taking* (Chap. 7), Michael F. Schober analyzes and organizes the diverse ways in which the term *perspective* has been used in the field of human communication. He first presents a classification system that distinguishes among four interrelated types of speaker perspective: (1) time, place, and identity, (2) conceptualizations of the topic of discussion, (3) conversational agenda, and (4) background knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and so forth. Then, he discusses the different sources of information or *grounds* people use to infer each kind of speaker perspective—physical context, utterances themselves, conversational history, beliefs about others' social category memberships, and direct knowledge of another person—and points out that these sources of information vary in how direct or observable they are. Schober argues that forms of speaker perspective that rest on indirect evidence, such as conversational agendas, may be more problematic for listeners to identify as well as more difficult to study empirically.

In Chapter 8, *Language Users as Problem Solvers: Just what Ambiguity Problem do they Solve?*, Boaz Keysar analyzes *how* perspective-taking occurs in message production and comprehension. He focuses on the issue of ambiguity, and asks how, in view of the many possible interpretations for a single message, does a listener identify the speaker's intended meaning? Keysar presents arguments against the traditional view that addressees first compute a literal, perspective-free interpretation of a message and then revise their interpretations in light of conversational principles (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1975). He then describes several studies that support an alternative model, the *Perspectival Adjustment Model* (Keysar, Barr, Balin, & Paek, 1997) that proposes that listeners first rapidly and perhaps automatically interpret messages from their own perspectives and then perform the more effortful and time-consuming process of adjusting their interpretations to take into account the speakers' perspectives. This adjustment process is sensitive to factors such as cognitive load, and frequently, listeners are unable to fully correct their original interpretations. Keysar argues that speakers perform a similar process: They design their utterances in light of their own perspectives and then monitor and adjust them as necessary to accommodate the listeners' viewpoints.

In Chapter 9, *The Grounding Problem in Conversations With and Through Computers*, Susan E. Brennan discusses how fundamental principles of collaborative theory (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986)—communication as coordinated activity, grounding, and so forth—apply to both human–computer interaction (conversations *with* computers) and computer-mediated interpersonal communication (conversations *through* computers). She observes that although grounding occurs in all forms of communication, it takes different forms and

requires varying degrees of effort depending on such factors as the amount and timeliness of a partner's feedback. Brennan first provides a brief review of the history of human-computer interaction and then discusses how the grounding process works in different types of human-computer interfaces (e.g., language-based, graphical). She points out how interface design limitations—particularly, the dearth of system feedback—can lead to problems in the grounding process and hence undesirable consequences for a user. Brennan proposes a new model of human-computer interaction in which interactions with a system are viewed as incremental conversational contributions that are grounded through feedback from the system, coordination of knowledge states, and other basic elements of collaborative theory.

Finally, Section IV, *Cognition, Language and Social Interaction*, contains of two chapters that focus on the complicated relationships among cognitive processes, language, and social interaction. As opposed to recent discussions of the Whorfian hypothesis, which focus on the cognitive effects of *specific* native languages (e.g., Hoffman, Lau & Johnson, 1986; Hunt & Agnoli, 1991; Kay & Kempton, 1984), these chapters address the more fundamental relationship between language itself and cognition.

In Chapter 10, *Cognition, Language, and Communication*, Gün R. Semin distinguishes between language and language use by analogy with tools and tool use. According to Semin, words, like tools, have a limited set of invariant properties and a potentially limitless set of *affordances* (Gibson, 1979), purposes to which they lend themselves in communicative contexts. Semin begins by describing the fundamental principles of *his Tool and Tool Use Model* (TATUM) and poses four key question derived from this model: (a) What are the tools of language use and how can they be classified? (b) What are the properties of these linguistic tools? (c) What are the affordances of linguistic tools (i.e., how are they realized in communicative contexts)? (d) What are the relationships between cognition, tools and tool use in communicative contexts? Next, Semin discusses research he and his colleagues have done on the Linguistic Category Model (Semin & Fiedler, 1991), a model of word and word use within one tool domain—terms for interpersonal relations (descriptive action verbs, interpretative action verbs, state action verbs, state verbs, and adjectives). He demonstrates how TATUM can be used to separate the properties of these terms from their affordances in particular communicative contexts. Semin concludes by discussing how his model helps clarify the relationships among culture, cognition, language, and communication.

Finally, in Chapter 11, *Some Cognitive Consequences of Communication*, Chi-Yue Chiu, Robert M. Krauss, and Ivy Y-M Lau, address the relationship between language and cognition. They argue that although recent research has, for the most part, disproved Whorf's (1956) hypothesis that a person's native language affects how he or she experiences the world, language use *per se* can

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and does affect cognitive processes. In support of their argument, Chiu et al. review research showing, among other things, that when people formulate a description of a stimulus it affects their memory for that stimulus (e.g., Carmichael, Hogan, & Walter, 1932; Schooler & Engstler-Schooler, 1990; Wilkes-Gibbs & Kim, 1991). Similarly, research indicates that when speakers verbalizing arguments for or against one's beliefs, these verbalizations can create attitude change (e.g., Higgins & Rholes, 1978; McCann, Higgins & Fondacaro, 1991). A noteworthy contribution of this chapter is the authors' integration of these findings with the perspective-taking literature to illustrate their hypothesis that any factor affecting language use, such as adjusting a message to a partner's perspective, can potentially affect basic cognitive processes.

### CONCLUSION

Through our cursory description of the themes and content of this book, we hope to have illustrated the potential fruitfulness of approaching human language use from a joint social and cognitive psychological perspective. The remainder of this volume expands in detail on this theme as it applies to such topics as people's intentions or goals when using language, the role of language in research settings, indirect and figurative language, perspective-taking and conversational interaction, and the relationship between language and cognition.

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