

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

As the objective of this study is to determine if conversational implicature is used in children's spoken language, there is a need to consider closely the elements of contexts, speaker meaning and intention and listener understanding. Pertinent to the discussion will be whether children are competent enough to manage conversation to enhance meaning and make their unstated intentions known.

Due to the intersubjective nature of CI, it was difficult to make empirical sense of analyzing the data in this study - one which lays particular emphasis on communicative competence. Since the samples have already undergone preliminary analysis by the observers themselves (Chapter 3.6), a discussion as to whether they constitute manifestations of CIs thus seems unnecessary. Faced with a pool of discourse data containing CIs, the problem confronting the researcher had been the determination of a method of presentation and analysis which would exploit the data to the fullest potential: how it might provide insight to the nature of implicature, and how it is used by children to enhance their intentions and possibly to suggest how it may have been acquired.

#### 4.1 Framework for Analysis

The proposed framework for analysis will rest on the premise that the generation of CI requires competence. As mentioned in Chapter 1, communicative competence encompasses both linguistic and pragmatic competence. The linguistic aspect of competence has been widely established through acquisition and developmental studies. This study will thus assume Bloom's stance ( Chapter 2.4) that by the time children are about four they would have mastered just about all there is to know about the phonology, syntax and morphology they are ever going to know, at least for their first language (English, for the subjects in this study). This frees the researcher to focus on the pragmatic aspects of communicative competence influencing the generation of CI, namely, those discussed in Chapter 2.

It must be acknowledged that the analysis of CI in this study is likely to produce an open-endedness of interpretation as is to be expected of intuitive data. Grice's idea of value notion will be central to the way analysis is approached. His argument for such an approach has been:

... something has been left out... in the analyses, definitions, expansions and so on of semantics notions, and particularly various notions of meaning. What has been left out has been left out because it is something which everyone regards with horror, at least when in a scientific or theoretical frame of mind: the notion of value.

(Smith ed.1982:237)

With this in mind, the study will adopt his suggestion to 'relax this prohibition' (i.e. that of keeping value notion out of philosophical and scientific enquiries) to admit open-ended interpretations.

Another challenge to data analysis has been the determination of the elementary unit of discourse for analysis. It was discovered during the early stages of data collection that the spontaneous and unplanned nature of discourse containing CI made a static, hierarchical analysis implausible. In advocating a dialogistic (basically functional) approach to discourse analysis, Linell (1998) spelt out that actions and interactions in social and cultural contexts are more basic than the resulting units of discourse. This means that the unit of analysis can range from single utterances (sentence/partial sentence level) to elementary contributions (e.g. an exchange in Conversational Analysis) to larger units (as found in ethnographic studies). The implication of this for the researcher is that she can focus on episodes, topics or even whole activities which are reflexively related to their contexts without being constrained by considerations of conversational structure. This is valuable for the study of CI because of the random and unpredictable ways in which CI can be embedded in discourse. In addition, an initial survey of the data collected seemed to show that the data mainly fell into patterns of topical episodes or idea units. Based on what Linell argues below, the researcher will deal with units of analysis consisting of either single or multiple utterances representing topical episodes or idea units to draw insights concerning the phenomenon of CI:

What kind of unit should be regarded as the elementary unit of discourse may depend on the purpose of analysis and the nature of one's empirical data.

(Linell 1998:161)

Each unit of analysis will be labelled a situation and every situation captures at least one instance of CI. The data presented will remain as noted verbatim and no attempt will be made to correct ungrammatical utterances.

The greatest challenge posed by the data has been the need to arrive at some form of categorization for the presentation of data which are so varied. Having looked at the way adult discourse samples have been categorized by Broersma (1993) in terms of overstated/understated criticisms, irony and others, it was decided that the same thing could not be done to the present samples. His categories reflected 'informed' strategies in the sense that they were conditioned by formal learning and a more complex understanding of the way language works, particularly in the literary sphere. Hence, the researcher felt that it was more relevant to attempt a presentation of data under categories of possible kinds of strategies used by the speaker to enhance uptake of an intention. These are data-driven strategies and do not represent an exhaustive list of indirect ways to imply meaning. To facilitate analysis, data presented will also include a description of the setting or context, a brief explanation of previous experience and shared knowledge, and an assessment of speaker meaning or intention by the observers as this would



provide the necessary background knowledge for the understanding of each situation. As for the analysis of data, interpretations will carry an openness that reflects the "indeterminacy of human utterances". (Jucker 1995)

As these utterances are essentially indeterminate in meaning, the actual interpretations cannot be predicted but only recreated by the analyst.

(ibid:140)

To reiterate, the proposed framework above must remain tentative subject to further corroborative study. In view of the limited authentic data provided by Grice, the proponent of this phenomenon, and scant studies on CI using children's discourse, this is deemed a viable approach to the data collected.

## 4.2 Data Presentation & Analysis

### 4.2.1 Strategy: Using Leading Questions

#### Situation 1

G: Mummy, have you bathed?

Mum: Yes.

G: Daddy also?

Dad: Yes.

G: Goody, we can go to A & W.

*Age of child G: 3 years*

#### Setting/Physical Context

G was riding in the car with mum and dad on the way home, having been picked up from the baby sitter's.

#### Previous experience/ shared knowledge

"We haven't bathed yet" or "We've not had dinner" were often used by the parents as an excuse not to go out after work.

#### Intention

To find a way to make parents agree to the suggestion of an outing.

## ***Situation 2***

K: Mummy, you going Alor Setar?

Mum: Yeap.

K: You going aeroplane?

Mum: Yes, sweetie.

K: We go church?

Mum: Yes, Papa will take you.

K: We go Pati's house?

Mum: Yes, after that.

K: Yeh!

*Age of child K: 3 years*

### **Setting/physical Context**

K was watching her mother pack her bags to go outstation for work over the weekend.

### **Previous experience/shared knowledge**

The family has a regular weekend itinerary. Mummy and Daddy are key participants.

### **Intention**

To confirm if there is any change in the family's regular weekend itinerary.

### *Situation 3*

D: Wah, so nice. Where you buy?

Maid: In townlah!

D: How much?

Maid: Cheap only. One ringgit.

D: This Sunday you going out ah?

Maid: Yeah, if I see, I buy for you.

D: I want blue colour one.

*Age of child D: 6 years*

#### Setting/Physical Context

The maid is sporting a new hair clip. Child D is admiring it.

#### Previous experience/shared knowledge

The maid has sometimes bought the child clips, hair bands and lollipops when she goes out on her day off. The parents have discouraged the child from asking the maid to buy things for her.

#### Intention

To get the maid to buy her a similar clip.

### **Analysis**

From the evidence in Situation 1, Subject G seems to know enough of the context to use it to her advantage. It may be said that the child is recreating an earlier context by fitting it into the present. She has surmised that if the 2 excuses were

eliminated, the chances of her wish (to go to A & W's) being granted would be good. Previous experience and mutual knowledge may have helped her decide on the strategy to use. Asking 2 leading questions in a row before making a declaration is also an indication that she is aware of the importance of assuming control of the conversation by 'cornering' the parents.

Subject K in Situation 2 also employs the strategy of asking leading questions. Only this time, they appear to arise out of her concern about a possible disruption in her weekly routine. The first two questions seem to hint of a concern over the mother's imminent absence but the following sequence of questions reveals her actual worry – that she may not be able to do the things she looks forward to on weekends. The "Yeh!" at the end of the dialogue seems to confirm this.

Situation 3 provides an insight into the unplanned and joint constructional nature of conversation clearly evident here. Child D enters the conversation spontaneously at the beginning not knowing how it will end. But we see the vague becoming clearer as the dialogue progresses. The child probably had no intentions to begin with but when she sees the opportunity for making a request indirectly she seizes it. The pragmatic knowledge demonstrated here points towards a recognition of the social camaraderie shared between them and an attempt on the child's part to exploit it. The child also shows the awareness that adults can be counted on to read between the lines. From the notes on previous knowledge and shared experience, we know that she is constrained by a certain 'house rule' or 'home culture' (not asking the maid to buy things) but she demonstrates the ability

to work around it. From a discourse analysis perspective, this reflects an understanding of the joint constructional nature of talk and that meaning often takes shape as conversation progresses. From a CI perspective, it seems to point to a chance-taking and risk-taking entity when a speaker allows a vague intention to emerge as dialogue progresses. As Jucker (1995) says, at the beginning of a conversation, it is very often not clear to any of its participants how long it is going to last and what its final result will be, if indeed there is one.

#### **Strategy 4.2.2: Name Dropping**

##### ***Situation 4***

G: Mummy, Matthew wants to eat the sweet.

Mum: No, you are not getting it.

G: Matthew likes the sweet.

Mum: No

*Age of child: 5 years*

##### **Setting/Physical Context**

G sees some sweets on the shelf at home.

##### **Previous experience/shared knowledge**

Mum is always fair. If little brother is given a sweet, G will get one too.

##### **Intention**

G wants a sweet for herself.

***Situation 5***

D: Mummy, Stesha wants a chocolate.

Mum: Not now. After lunch.

D: O.K.

*Age of child D: 6 years*

Setting/Physical Context

D sees some chocolates in the fridge.

Previous experience/shared knowledge

When the younger sibling gets a sweet/chocolate, the older one will not be left out. Sometimes mother gives in to requests by younger sibling more readily.

Intention

D wants to get mum to give her a chocolate.

***Situation 6***

H : Ma, please put this on.

Mum: Why? Why don't you read your book?

H : But *che-che* wants to watch.

*Age of child H: 4 years*

Setting/Physical Context

H is showing a VCD to his mother.

Previous experience/shared knowledge

Watching VCD is a shared activity with his sister. Mum will not allow H to watch a show if he has some reading to finish.

Intention

H wants to watch the VCD.

. *che che* (Chinese) – elder sister

***Situation 7***

C : Can I have some please?

D : No, cannot.

C : But Puan Molly says you must share.

D : You got cough. (finishes *Vitagen* quickly)

C : Who says? No more already.

D : See. Finished. (shows empty bottle)

*Age of Child C: 7 years, Child D: 6 years*

Setting/Physical Context

D had kept her bottle of *Vitagen* for recess to be consumed at home.

As D was drinking it in the kitchen, C was looking longingly at it.



Previous experience/shared knowledge

Puan Molly is well-respected by D and is her favourite teacher. Mummy does not allow anyone to share any food or drink if one has a cough or cold.

Intention

C hopes to name drop to coerce D into sharing the *Vitagen*. D intends to keep her drink to herself.

**Analysis**

The subjects in Situations 4 and 5 initiate a conversation inspired by the availability and desirability of a confectionary item. However, they do not wish to give the impression of their desire. Instead they disguise it by name dropping, attributing the desire to a sibling. This has the effect of making the child look good (a face consideration) in the eyes of the listener because she seems to be asking on someone's behalf. The mention of a third party makes the utterance seem impersonal. In addition, previous experience tells them when the younger brother or sister gets the confectionary, they will not be left out. They are confident that mum will be able to understand their intent and respond accordingly. The interesting similarity here is that in both Situations 4 and 5, the initiators (G and D) cite a younger sibling. One reason could be that the social and cultural conditioning of sibling position roles ( i.e. big sister looks after the younger or big sister's word has more weight) has influenced the use of this

implicature. The younger sibling usually gets more sympathy and attention, thus, desires are indirectly achieved via the younger sibling.

In Situation 6, Child H initiates the conversation with the aim of changing the physical context (having to read) that he is stuck in. His citing of the sister's intention is probably done to lend more weight to his request and to avoid answering the mother's question. This could be another aspect of social and cultural conditioning quite the reverse of the perception of sibling birth order influence in Situations 4 and 5. (The wishes of an older sister or brother is to be respected.) This same strategy is used by Child C in Situation 7 although the citing of authority (Puan Molly) here functions as a form of coercion. Her implicature is that C should practise what is taught by her favourite teacher and it is indicative of the psychological undermining involved in this dialogue, resulting in a manifestation of what adults familiarly know as a battle of wits. To show that Child C is not the only one who can implicate with a goal in mind, Child D matches her implicature with another, "You got cough".

### Strategy 4.2.3 : Negotiating

#### *Situation 8*

Mother: Like I told you over the phone, Ryan has been a naughty boy today.

Father: Well, what shall we do with him?

Mother: Send him to bed early.

E : But it's so dark.

Mother: Well, then you'll have to sleep in the hall.

E: But I want my bed.

Father: Since you've been so naughty, you'll just have to sleep on the floor.

E: But it's so cold.

Father: Well, maybe you'll learn to be a good boy next time.

E: Yeah, I won't do it again.

Father: Now, go and stand in the corner.

E: (complies)

*Age of child E: 4 years*

#### Setting/Physical Context

Child E's father has just come home from work. His parents are discussing his punishment for behaving badly earlier in the day when he was playing with his friends.

#### Previous experience/shared knowledge

His parents have always shown consideration for him in the past. They have always read to him and tucked him in bed, sometimes allowing him to have the night light on when he is afraid.

### Intention

E wants to escape punishment.

### **Analysis**

The interplay of knowledge of context(s) and previous knowledge is apparent in this situation. A rapid change of mental contexts is initiated by the child. As his mind shifts focus from the physical setting to the darkness of room and the cold floor in the hall, he seems to be making an attempt to steer his parents' minds to focus on the things that trouble him. The way he waxes lyrical in his utterances, contributes towards constructing a discourse which embodies an implicature that is emotional in appeal – that of invoking sympathy from the parents and he succeeds to the extent of lightening the punishment.

#### **4.2.4 Strategy: Making Matter-of-fact Statements.**

##### ***Situation 9***

C: Mummy, we haven't watched this VCD.

Mum: Today is a weekday.

C: Can we watch it this Sunday?

Mum: We'll see.

*Age of child: 7 years*

#### Setting/Physical Context

Mummy is going off to work after bringing the children home from kindergarten. C shows her a VCD she picked up from the rack as Mummy was stepping out of the door.

#### Previous experience/shared knowledge

Mummy has allowed them to watch a VCD, especially a new one, sometimes in the afternoon. Mummy is often more agreeable when she is in a hurry.

#### Intention

To get permission to watch a movie that afternoon.

### **Analysis**

The situation demonstrates the child's knowledge of how to imply meaning using direct language. The child starts out with a matter-of-fact statement but she is confident that her listener is competent enough to extricate the meaning of her utterance. She is, as Shotter (1993) says, talking with an active expectation of a response with the right uptake of the force intended. Her anticipation is realized in her mother's response. The direct request which follows shows a very accurate reading of the context because the child has inferred from her mother's utterance (Today is a weekday) that it is not an outright 'No'. In fact the child appears to be exploiting the situation by making a further attempt to get her mother to commit to a time when they can watch the movie. She does this by asking a direct question. This way of generating CI is a contrast to what is commonly perceived

of CI - that CIs are mainly accomplished through indirect linguistic means. The linguistic choice made by C adds another dimension to our understanding of the nature of CI, that is, utterances may be matter-of-fact and direct but the meaning intended need not be so.

#### 4.2.5 Using Humour

##### ***Situation 10***

Mum: Ryan, Auntie Sharon is going home now.

Aunty: Yeah, it's getting dark. We better get back before it rains.

E: Look! The sun is so bright, it's hurting my eyes.

Aunty: (laughs)

Mum: It's not funny, son. They have to go.

*Age of child: 4 years*

##### Setting/Physical Context

E is having fun playing in the garden with Auntie Sharon's daughters.  
He does not want them to leave as yet.

##### Previous experience/shared knowledge

Good weather prolongs playtime. Humour can sometimes work in favour of him.

##### Intention

To get Aunty Sharon to reassess her decision.

### ***Situation 11***

Dad: Look at you, Sonia (C). Why are you so skinny?

D: Could be worse. Could be worse. (laughs)

(Everyone at the table joins in)

*Age of child D: 6 years*

#### **Setting/Physical Context**

It's lunch time and daddy is voicing concern about C's weight.

#### **Previous experience/shared knowledge**

Daddy often lectures about the importance of eating vegetables and finishing up whatever is on the plate at mealtimes.

#### **Intention**

To distract Daddy from giving a serious talk on eating habits at the dining table.

### ***Situation 12***

A: Say "F".

Brother: "Ffff"

Child: Ha! Ha! Ha! No tooth!

*Age of child A: 7 years*

#### **Setting/physical context**

Child has just returned from the dentist with his mother. Shows his sister the gap in his front teeth.

Previous experience/shared knowledge

Child A knows from experience in kindergarten that those with no front teeth have difficulty articulating the consonant F.

Intention

To have a good laugh at the brother's expense.

***Situation 13***

K: Ei! What you eating?

Dad: What Ei? Who is Ei?

K: A... B...C (laughs)

Age of child: 3 years

Setting

Dad emerges from the kitchen with something in his mouth. K is curious to know what it is and perhaps get a share too.

Previous knowledge/shared knowledge

Daddy will usually let her have whatever he is having. To call an older person or a parent Ei! is not socially acceptable and the child and her siblings have been admonished for it in the past.

Intention

To get out of a tricky situation.



## Analysis

The verbal behaviour of the four children ( E,D,A & K )in Situations 10 to 13 seem to exemplify Eastman's (ed. Norrick 1993) observation that children's conversation and play often involve a fun element. The children here are aware that it is within their powers to turn a serious context into one of playfulness. E in Situation 10 is negotiating a face-threatening act (Goffman 1955 ) by saying the opposite of a fact. More than a manifestation of candidness, the utterance shows H's awareness of the rapport-creating attribute of humour and he uses it to his advantage, in the hope of making his friends' mother change her mind. Since he is asking in jest (and hope), an unfavourable reply will not be face-threatening. The strategy also reflects a confidence in his real intention being understood as is demonstrated by the way Aunty Sharon laughed and what his mother said at the end.

In situation 11, mutual knowledge plays an important part. The phrase 'could be worse' was borrowed from a scene in the local sitcom, *Kopitiam*. Laughter evoked involves the linking of the present situation with that in the comedy. Child D has capitalized on this shared knowledge to turn the context into one of humour. Both children A, in Situation 11 and D, in Situation 12 are eager to test out their newly acquired notions of humour in new contexts and it worked. They seem to understand the involvement of group dynamics and the kind of freedom to laugh among family members in naturalistic settings. There is no fear of being offensive and creating tension. Personal and social functions are served. For D, it

was the avoidance of another lecture on vegetables while for A, it was an occasion for fun too hard to resist. What is most striking is the natural way in which opportunity is seized.

It has been documented that young children between ages two and three years enjoy playing with the sounds of words. Child K in situation 13 seems to do more than that. She exploits the fact that 'Ei' sounds like the consonant A to find a way out of a sticky situation i.e she has said something socially and culturally unacceptable.

These situations suggest that the spontaneous and unplanned nature of CI can best be captured if data is collected in naturalistic settings. The researcher of discourse studies on CI will have to bear this in mind if he or she does not want to miss out on the emergent variety and diversity of this phenomenon.

#### 4.2.6 Strategy : Hypothesizing

##### *Situation 14*

Friends' mother: Girls, we've got to go.

E : It would be nice if they can stay here until night time.

(Speaks to himself, but aloud)

Friends' mother: Yes, but we have a long way to go.

E : They have to go, son.

*Age of child E: 3 years*

##### Setting/Physical Context

It is almost 5 pm. and E's friends are about to go home.

##### Previous experience/shared knowledge

It is the school holidays and his friends are not in a hurry to go anywhere. In the past, his mother has sent his friends home when they stayed behind to play with him.

##### Intention

E wants both the mothers to look into the possibility of his friends staying longer.

### ***Situation 15***

Grandfather: Can let me try?

A : What if you spill it?

Grandfather: No I won't.

A : Better don't.

*Age of child: 7 years*

#### **Setting/physical context**

Child has a bottle of *Vitagen* in his hand. (This conversation was conducted in the mother tongue - Cantonese)

#### **Previous experience/shared knowledge**

Adults do not always ask to share food or drinks in jest. They may mean it.

#### **Intention**

Child does not want to part with his drink.

### **Analysis**

In Situation 14, Child E demonstrates his awareness of two different audiences : the friends' mother and his own. His soliloquy-like hypothetical utterance is listener-oriented. The wish is an indirect way of asking the friends' mother for permission to let his friends stay back. This carries with it the hope that his mother will pitch in to change Aunty's mind by volunteering to send them back later as she has done with his other friends in the past.

Child A in Situation 15 is faced with the difficulty of having to say no outright. She appears to recognize the need for a face-saving strategy for she does not want to be labeled selfish, which is not a socially acceptable behaviour both at home and at kindergarten. Thus she presents a hypothetical context (What if...?) and uses it as a basis for refusing the grandfather's request. Like the children in the earlier situations, she has acquired the knowledge that in communication, context need not remain a pre-determined reality. It can be created and re-created to forward a purpose or intention.

#### **4.2.7 Strategy: Dropping Hints**

##### ***Situation 16***

C: Daddy, you know, when I look at this (pointing to an item in the Makro catalogue), I feel like drinking it.

Dad: (Smiles) Ya, ah?

C: Ya, so nice. Got ice, even better.

*Age of child C: 7 years*

##### **Setting/Physical Context**

Child C is looking at the Makro catalogue and is eyeing a canned drink on offer. ^

##### **Previous experience/shared knowledge**

Daddy has taken the cue in the past and has bought her something she had pointed out in the catalogue.

Intention

Child C wants father to buy the item for her.

**Analysis**

The child C in this exchange does not intend the conversation to be final. She is sending the message to her father that he does not have to commit himself to any answer as yet, merely to consider the suggestion. Contrary to approaches to discourse where exchanges and sequences are looked at in determinate ways, this exchange seems to indicate otherwise. The initiator of the conversation is content to live with indeterminacy for now by allowing the power of suggestion to work out a favourable response at a future time.

**4.2.8 Strategy: Using Flattery**

*Situation 17*

J: Your hair nice already.

Mother: Mmm.(continues looking)

*Age of child J: 4 years*

Setting/physical context

Mother is looking at the price list displayed on the glass panel outside  
A hairdressing salon.

Previous experience/shared knowledge

The child had gone with the mother for a hairdressing session which

lasted three whole hours. He had been upset then and he was afraid that he would have to go through the ordeal again.

Intention

To prevent mother from going for a hair dressing session in the shop.

**Analysis**

Child J in this case is determined to find a way to escape an unpleasant experience similar to one which he had experienced in the past. A child at this age (4 years) can actually throw a tantrum or misbehave physically to get out of such a situation but he chooses the way of language. In doing so, he demonstrates his recognition of the anticipatory and prospective function of an utterance. His choice of verbal behaviour, a compliment, resting on the presumption of his mother's intention to get her hair done, carries an impact which can influence any decision she is about to make concerning her hair in the next few moments. The implicature is clear: if she already looks good, she does not need another hairdressing session.

#### 4.2.9 Strategy: Evasion

##### *Situation 18*

Aunty: You can sing any song?

K: Yeah, I learn so many.

Aunty: Can sing one for me?

K: (grins but remains silent for a moment)

You want to talk to mummy? (runs off)

*Age of child K: 3 years*

##### Setting/physical context

The child K was heard having a conversation with her aunt over the phone. (What was said by the aunt at the other end was verified by the mother-observer when the child handed the phone over to her.)

##### Previous experience/shared knowledge

Adults will ask for more if she obliges. A live audience in the form of her sisters will be beside her if she sings and they would usually laugh.

##### Intention

Child hopes to avoid singing over the phone by changing the topic.

#### Analysis

Child K has made up her mind not to sing over the phone but does not want to turn down the request directly. We can only guess the reason behind her not complying with the request but the evasive utterance she chooses (You want to speak to mummy?) leads us to conclude that the child understands what he



can do with words and there are alternatives available to the conventional answers “Yes” and “No”. In this sense, she is quite a skilful strategist.

#### 4.2.10 Strategy: Getting Consensus

##### *Situation 19*

H: Who wants to eat potato bread, put up their hands.

(Walks round to inspect. No response.)

H: Who wants to eat potato bread, put down their hands.

(Hands of parents and sister go up. He laughs.)

H: Who wants to eat potato bread, put down their hands.

(The same hands go up again.)

H: I want to eat potato bread.

*Age of child: 4 years*

##### Setting/Physical context

Everyone in the house is busy doing his or her own thing in the house.

##### Previous Experience/shared knowledge

Consensus will help materialize a suggestion.

##### Intention

H wants to eat potato bread.

#### Analysis

The game-like approach adopted by Child H is a clear indication of his perception

of language as an adaptable tool and his understanding of context as an avenue of opportunity. His understanding of what language can do for him is reflected first of all in the way he has framed the opening question. It is a loaded question because it has a dual function. To his parents who are within earshot, he is essentially saying, "I want to eat potato bread but I need permission to do so." To his sister, who is also nearby, he is making the suggestion, "Let's eat potato bread" to garner her support. Although he knows that ultimately, it is his parents who can grant his desire, a vote from his elder sister can lend the needed weight particularly if his parents should return an unfavourable vote. The child's sizing up of the situation and his manipulation of the context is demonstrated in the repetition of the question with a variation in the instruction for response. While it is not possible to pinpoint the reason for reversing the mode of response ("put down their hands"), the first repetition seems to indicate the child's wish to confirm that his first utterance has been understood correctly since the lack of response in the first instance may be the result of them not hearing him clearly. When he repeats the question a second time, the child is either hoping to 'trap' the respondents through an 'up-down-up' sequence of hand response or he may be making a ditch effort to gain a consensus to his suggestion. Whatever the real reason may be, it is clear from the final utterance that the child is abandoning the indirect strategy to state his intention explicitly. This example shows that when conversational implicature fails to work in one's favour, direct approaches will be resorted to.

#### 4.2.11 Strategy: Absconding Responsibility/Blaming Others

##### *Situation 20*

K: Daddy, See!

Daddy: Wow! Did you colour this?

K: Yeah.

Daddy: All by yourself?

K: Yeah but teacher June always do for me.

Daddy: Then you must tell her you can do it yourself.

K: O.K., but she always want to do for me.

*Age of Child K: 3 years*

##### Setting/physical context

Child is showing Daddy a piece of artwork brought back from Sunday School.

##### Previous experience/knowledge

Her sisters have always told on her about letting other people do her colouring for her.

##### Intention

To stress that it was not her fault that the teacher had coloured for her.

#### **Analysis**

The child in this situation demonstrates the ability to size up an utterance or utterances and respond to it in a way that makes her look good. The child surmises the father's suspicion from his questions ( Did you colour this? All by

yourself?) but she is quick to address the suspicion with a blaming strategy. This strategy makes admission less face threatening as it does not downplay her ability to colour a picture well.

#### **4.2.12 Strategy: Showing Apparent Compliance**

##### ***Situation 21***

Grandma: Ryan, eat your vegetables. They're good for you.

E: O.K. I'll eat them when I get married.

*Age of child E: 5 years*

##### **Setting/physical context**

E has not touched the vegetables on his plate at dinner time. Grandma is trying to coax him to eat them.

##### **Previous experience/shared knowledge**

If E makes a fuss about eating his vegetables, his parents and grandma will force him to finish what is on the plate. A lecture on the benefits of eating vegetables is also forthcoming.

##### **Intention**

He wants to find a way out of eating them now and at the same time escape what he has previously gone through .

#### **Analysis**

The child in Situation 21 is in a dilemma. He realizes that his choice of verbal behaviour must reflect an accommodation to grandma's advice, yet at the same

time he has no intention of complying with the expected act of eating the vegetables. With his apparent awareness of the current and prospective nature of contexts, he creates a reply which carries an imaginary future context which he hopes will satisfy the grandmother's present concern.

Interestingly, the researcher was told that he got away with it because the grandma had taken his reply in a way which was probably not intended by him but which worked out to his advantage. The grandma took his reply to mean that his future wife will do a better job of cooking the vegetables.

#### 4.2.13 Strategy: Using Rhetorical Questions

##### *Situation 22*

B : I ask father to buy for you the Baby Smurf.

F : You think I'm a girl? (looking displeased)

B : OK, I ask father to buy for you Smurf with the red T-shirt.

*Age of Child B: 7 ,Child F:5 years*

##### Setting/physical context

B and F are in a car going home after gawking at toys in Toys R Us.

##### Previous experience/shared knowledge

The Smurf in red T-shirt is an adult Smurf. F associates this with masculinity. The Baby Smurf, like Barbie dolls, is a girl toy.

Intention

Child B wants his sister, F, to convey the right message to his father.

***Situation 23***

D : Sonia, why you still sitting down? (annoyed)

C : Ah?

D : I carried two cups (of water) already.

(C starts to arrange the placemats on the table.)

*Age of Child C: 7 years, Child D: 6 years*

Setting/ physical context

It's tea-time and the younger sister, D, has been helping to carry things from the kitchen to the dining hall. Older sister, C, is lazing around.

Previous experience/shared knowledge

Mum says that getting the table ready for meals is a shared task.

Intention

D does not want to end up doing everything.

**Analysis**

Child F in Situation 22 has obviously taken offence to what the sister has said. He expresses his displeasure but he does this in a fault-finding manner. (You

think...?) Interestingly, the rhetorical nature of this utterance seems reflective of the Cantonese culture and it is usually employed by interactants who share a social camaraderie with each other. The usual Yes or No is not used in B's reply and this is indicative of her familiarity with this form of implicature. Instead she redresses what she has said earlier and produces a response that placates the brother.

How D expresses her displeasure with her sister's behaviour does lend support to Grice's perception of man as a complex being and that the psychological state of the speaker has a bearing on the meaning of an utterance. In Situation 25, D could have easily asked C to help her in a direct way but she chooses to open the conversation with a question which carries the weight of an accusation. Despite it being rhetorical in nature, it has the effect of calling C's attention to the situation. The implicature is further developed in the next utterance where she emphasizes the work she has done in preparation for tea. This has the added weight of putting the sister on a guilt trip and it seems to work because in the end the desired response from the sister takes place.

#### **4.2.14 Strategy: Providing Logical Explanation**

##### ***Situation 24***

Mother: Why are they playing in the rain?

K : Afterwards can take medicine.

Mother: Mmmm.

*Age of Child K: 3 years*

### Setting

Mother and K are looking out of the window and watching some of the neighbour's children playing in the rain.

### Previous knowledge/Shared Knowledge

Playing in the rain can cause illness.

### Intention

To provide a logical answer to mother's supposed question.

## **Analysis**

This situation illustrates the rule-governed understanding of cooperation in conversation. Observing the conversational rule that every question deserves a response, the child digs deep into her resources of prior knowledge to find an appropriate explanation to the why question. The child does not as yet comprehend the function of rhetorical questions nor is she able to perceive that what was uttered by the mother was what Linell (1998) calls a non-soliciting initiative. The mother was merely making a comment that the children should not be playing in the rain.

This example also gives insight to the way knowledge is networked in the mind of the child to produce an implicature. It is observed that there was no significant time lapse between the mother's utterance and the child's reply whereas it took



the mother (the researcher herself) a couple of moments to ponder on the reply in order to extricate the CI:

- (i) rain can make one fall sick
- (ii) when one is sick, one takes medicine.

Seeking confirmation of the CI, the mother later narrates the incident to the elder sister, Subject C, and asks her why she thinks the younger sister has responded in such a way. C replied, “Yeah, after you get sick and have to take medicine”. This is an eye-opener for the area of conversational implicature. It seems to have different uses depending on the contexts that are emergent in the minds of the speaker at a particular time. Implicature need not always be used to disguise intentions or to promote the speaker’s agenda. Sometimes it is, as in this case, used to promote logical thinking through a retrieval of prior knowledge and experience.

#### 4.2.16 Strategy: Making Accusations

##### *Situation 25*

H: You don’t love me anymore.

Mom: Of course, I do. (Gives him a hug)

*Age of Child H: 4 years*

##### Setting

Mother is busy helping the elder sister with her schoolwork. H snuggles up to mother and makes the statement.

##### Previous experience/shared knowledge

Mother spends quite a long time with the sister during such coaching

sessions. He is left to fill his own time.

Intention

H wants to get some attention from his mother.

**Analysis**

Unlike situation 25, Child H is being accusative in a direct manner. He makes the utterance to draw the mother's attention to himself but that is not his main intention. His real goal and purpose is to receive not just a verbal response but also some form of physical assurance in the form of a hug from the mother. This is one example of how humans use language to tug at the heart strings of their fellow humans. The child's ability to exploit this through the use of a simple utterance speaks much about his understanding of the power of language to control and manipulate human feelings.

**4.3 Summary**

The conversational implicatures found in this study provide us with glimpses of the conceptual and perceptual capabilities of children. Despite their being abstract entities, they are observable and measurable, if we allow ourselves to subscribe to an open-ended approach to discourse analysis, where the intuitive nature of talk is given recognition.

The pragmatic competence demonstrated by the children in the above situations reveals an understanding of what language can do and what human

communication entails. The multifaceted ways in which they have produced and attended to implied meaning or CI shows not just an understanding of context but also how it can be used to serve a goal and purpose-driven end. They demonstrate the awareness that human communication encompasses, among others, aspects of previous experience, shared/partially shared knowledge as well as social and cultural dimensions. Although the scope of this study does not permit an in-depth exploration of the aspects mentioned, it makes an allusion to the child's awareness and ability to apply them to the management of implicature in conversation.