

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This study was undertaken to determine whether young children are able to manage conversational implicature in their daily interactions. It was also an investigation of children's pragmatic competence

5.1 Summary of Findings

The data presented and analysed in Chapter Four has provided affirmative answers to the research questions of this study:

RQ 1. Do young children demonstrate any observable ability to imply meaning and understand non-literal meaning of the CI type?

RQ 2. If they do, what are the identifiable aspects of pragmatic competence within their possession which may have facilitated this ability?

In addition, the application of adult discourse perspectives (Chapter 2.3: Aspects of Human Communication) to the analysis of the data collected has provided pertinent insights concerning child discourse with regard to the phenomenon of conversational implicature. The underlying pragmatic competence facilitating the management of this form of language use is evident from the data collected. The subjects are found to demonstrate

knowledge and awareness of the following aspects of human communication:

- i. Talk is intuitive (Chapter 2.3.4)
- ii. Relevance can be assumed (Chapter 2.3.4)
- iii. Communication is other-oriented (Chapter 2.3.5)
- iv. Contexts are not always fixed (Chapter 2.3.6.1)
- v. Communication involves the meeting of perspectives (Chapter 2.3.7)

The evidence of pragmatic competence provided by the data in this study has shown that the child's actual use of language is many times richer in diversity and complexity than the underlying abstract linguistic system. Many of the utterances made by the subjects exhibit grammatical imperfection but this has not hampered their' exploitation of meaning potentials in discourse. In fact, the variety of strategies they have employed to produce CI in the samples seem to indicate an adult-like competence in the use of indirectness in meaning making.(Chapter 2.4)

The aspects of pragmatic competence listed above are reflective of those possessed by adults (Chapter 2.3). The researcher will briefly discuss the extent of this pragmatic awareness and knowledge with reference to some of the situations presented in Chapter Four.

5.1.1 Talk is intuitive.

The data shows the children's awareness of the intuitive and intentional nature of talk. In all the situations, there is an identifiable underlying intention which is not openly stated in the utterances. This points to an understanding that language can be used to generate indirect, non-literal meaning in order to make intentions or desires known. When personal functions are served this way, there is often a manifestation of the child's psychological and emotional states together with his perceptions of the world and reality.(Chapter 2.3.4) The strategies they employ are indirect ways of expressing these states. For instance, the children F (Situation 22) and D (Situation 23) express their annoyance through the use of rhetorical questions. Similarly, Child H (Situation 25) shows a longing for affection by making an accusative statement.

5.1.2 Relevance can be assumed

The successful uptake of a CI by the hearers in all the situations hinges on a basic assumption that what is spoken by their interactants is relevant. This also alludes to an understanding of the cooperative nature of talk. (Chapter 2.3.2) As such, there is always a reciprocation in the form of a verbal or physical response to what is said.

5.1.3 Communication is other-oriented

The children applying the CI phenomenon to their discourse are mindful of the fact that what they say is meant for another's ears and the aim is to bring about a desired response. The active expectation of a response (Shotter 1993) can be found in many of the situations. Situations 9,16 and 19 are some examples of this. Even a soliloquy-like utterance such as that produced by Child E (Situation 14) can have the same purpose.

5.1.4 Contexts are not always fixed

The subjects in this study show awareness that contexts can be exploited, created and recreated. At times, previous contexts are recreated and exploited (Situation 1). At other times, new contexts are mentally created (Situation 8). When the subjects experiment with context, they demonstrate an understanding of the multiplicity of meanings in speech which causes contexts to be unstable. (Bakhtin 1986) They also seem to recognize that context is a resource which can be manipulated to advance intentions and to elicit the desired responses.

5.1.5 Communication involves the meeting of perspectives

As shown in the documentation of each situation, children rely on retrospective elements of shared knowledge and previous experience to generate implicature. Often, these are the elements which determine the linguistic and strategic choices made by the child. Child D (Situation 11)

and Child J (Situation 17) recall past instances which they do not want repeated in the current context so they resort to the language of humour and flattery respectively. In other words, children do have some perception of the anticipatory and retrospective dimensions involved in CI.

In some instances, the social and cultural conditioning they have experienced is also evident in the linguistic choices they make and the strategies they use. Child A (Situation 15) seems constrained by face-saving considerations when dealing with the grandfather's request. Similarly, Child E's (Situation 21) apparent compliance to his grandmother's advice and Child K's (Situation 13) quick response to a tricky situation seem to indicate a consideration of 'respect'. In many of the humour situations (Chapter 4.2.5), the subjects also demonstrate the knowledge of social liberties which can be taken in conversation, particularly when it involves participants who are family members.

In view of the evidence found in the data, it can be concluded that children do have within their possession an adult-like pragmatic competence which allows them to handle implied meaning efficiently.

5.2 Implications for Parents and Caregivers

Children learn more than the linguistic features of a language from their environment. Their perception of what language can do and accomplish for them is also nurtured in the daily interactive happenings around them. One parent-observer commented, "I never knew my child was so devious. We better not encourage it." To what extent CI can be labeled devious needs verification by further work as the scope of this study did not include an investigation of truth conditionals. Perhaps the appropriate stance for parents to take with regard to CI should be that CI is part and parcel of human communication. For if parents and caretakers are more attentive to how they themselves convey meaning in their daily interactions, they will note that they themselves are perpetrators of this form of language use. Since the young child has not been formally trained in the facets of language use, the ability to implicate would appear to be 'caught' rather than specifically taught, via the exposure to the social and cultural routines in the home interactive environment. This initial apprenticeship is observed by Painter (1999:63):

Children learn language and become socialized into the culture at home.

The child's daily encounters lead him to perceive that humans live in an 'intentional' world and that language is an effective meaning negotiating tool. (Shweder 1990). More than just a symbolic system that encodes meanings, language is perceived as a tool for establishing (maintaining

and creating) social and psychological realities. There is one particular situation (Situation 25), which seems to suggest strongly a link between the child's linguistic choice and psychological state. At the risk of treading into the disciplines of psychology and counseling, the researcher would like to suggest that the awareness of CI may help parents understand their children better. It reminds parents to listen to the 'unspoken' or 'hidden' meaning embedded in an utterance. A seemingly matter-of-fact statement as that made by Child H in the above mentioned situation, may actually contain a CI carrying a hint of a personal need or a cry for attention. Taking what is said at face value or brushing aside any possible significance in a child's utterance may result in a missed opportunity to foster understanding and strengthen relationships within the family. However, this implication for parenting would require further research to establish concretely the link between linguistic choice and psychological or emotional needs.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the framework for analysis adopted in this study must be regarded contextual requiring corroborative study. It would be useful to document other data driven strategies to contribute to a better understanding of the nature of CI and the pragmatic skills involved in the management of this phenomenon. Replication studies involving children of different age groups to explore the strategies and topics commonly

covered, for example, can be done. Alternatively, longitudinal studies can be conducted to study the strategies used to generate CI in depth.

There is also scope for comparative studies investigating the monolingual and bilingual variables as well as social/ cultural differences which may influence CI use among children. There is certainly a need for more descriptive and theoretical work on implicatures. (Broersma 1993)

However, the researcher must bear in mind that when dealing with CI, which is basically intuitive and intentional data, it may be necessary to allow the penetration of the value notion in the process of analysis. The researcher must be prepared to resolve problems related to methodology and framework for analysis. It will be a challenge to maintain a principled and objective stance in view of the open-endedness of interpretations which CI data requires.

5.6 Conclusion

That young children do conversationally implicate and are able to do so competently is evident from the verbal performance and the repertoire of indirect strategies documented in this study. They understand the intersubjective world of discourse and they seem to know enough of the perspectives that emerge and merge as goals and purposes are presented for negotiation in the world of situated discourse. (Gu 1999) The

pragmatic competence within their possession and at their disposal cannot thus be overlooked or regarded as inferior to their adult counterparts. It should persuade researchers to consider child discourse as authentic research data that can lend greater insight to the study of meaning in human communication.