

## **Project B03: Indirectness in discourse: interrogatives, implicit meaning and incongruence**

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### **Project Summary**

B03 investigates indirectness in discourse, addressing the research question of how nonliteral meaning is derived. This is a central topic for understanding the interaction of semantic and pragmatic processes in interpretation. We investigate two facets of indirectness involving interrogatives, studying a small sample of languages (mainly concentrating on German, English and Japanese). First, we consider indirect speech acts (=ISAs), where indirectness systematically derives from a mismatch of clause type and intended speech act (*Kannst Du mir das Salz reichen?* — clause type: interrogative; speech act: request), and we compare those to nonconventionalised utterances whose particular indirect or additional meaning and illocution — and relevance to the current discourse — needs to be inferred (*Findest Du auch, dass es hier kalt ist?*). We expect the former to be dependent on the formal properties of clause types, their conventions of usage, and their degree of conventionalisation in different languages, while in the latter case we assume interpretations based on general inferences to be at play (e.g., conversational implicatures, and reasoning about the world and the interlocutors' goals). As a second aspect of indirectness related to interrogatives, we investigate incongruent question-response pairs frequently found in interviews, where the reconstruction of the discourse structure and the implicitly answered question can be made transparent using the questions-under-discussion (QUD) framework.

In order to study the different phenomena, we employ discourse completion tasks, rating tasks, and corpus annotation and analysis of discourse structure using QUDs. The overall goal is to arrive at a better understanding of the interpretive mechanisms necessary for indirectness and its creative potential, and to isolate the influences of formal properties, context and inferential processes cross-linguistically.

The research in this project brings together expertise from different fields. We aim to better understand the influence of (morpho-)syntactic and lexical properties of interrogatives (clause types) on their potential to be used for different types of indirect speech acts cross-linguistically. We use small discourses involving interrogatives to study the extent to which general principles of communication are involved in indirectness. More specifically, we are interested in which ISAs with interrogatives rely on general inferences based on their question meaning, and which are conventionalised at the level of their clause type. From indirectness in such canonical ISA situations, there is a natural path to utterances figuring as indirect replies to questions in small discourses and even

further, in more or less cooperative interview situations. This will provide us with more insights into the range of principles involved in indirectness. Last but not least, B03 will contribute to the further development and testing of the QUD-tree framework in order to provide a systematic account of indirectness in discourse.

Within the CRC, the project contributes to the investigation of general mechanisms that allow for creative interpretation, and in particular the mechanisms that can enrich or abstract away from conventional interpretation, as well as their limits. Additionally, investigating the social pressure on speakers to be linguistically creative in order to succeed in interviews and other dialogue situations contributes to the overall question concerning the sources and benefits of linguistic creativity.

### **Open Positions**

#### **PhD position 1 (65%)**

*Profile:* The ideal candidate has a background in linguistics (syntax, pragmatics, and/or interface) and additionally has experience in experimental linguistics or corpus work. (Linguistic) Knowledge of a non-European language is a plus.

*Main research focus within the project:* The main goal of the PhD project will be working on a dissertation project on indirect questions and indirect replies from a cross-linguistic perspective. The project is concerned with syntactic aspects of interrogatives and answers to interrogatives, and their pragmatic interpretation in context. He/She will be involved in conducting experimental and corpus studies.

#### **PhD position 2 (65%)**

*Profile:* The ideal candidate has a background in discourse pragmatics (e.g. discourse structure, speech acts) and an interest in corpus annotation.

*Main research focus within the project:* This PhD will be involved in analyzing question-answer sequences in different interview situations, and write a dissertation in the field of corpus-based QUD and discourse structure theory, with a special focus on indirect replies and indirect speech acts.

### **For further information please contact the project leaders:**

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