The logic of indirect speech

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Overview

- What is indirect speech?
- Why is it interesting?
- Existing explanations.
- Three-part theory of the logic behind indirect speech.
What is indirect speech?

- Some examples:
  - A sexual come-on
  - A polite request
  - A threat
  - A bribe
Why is it interesting?

The problem:

- It is costly
- It may be misunderstood
- Unnecessary
Existing explanations

Existing explanations are based on *cooperation* assumption.

- Politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987)
- Cooperation principles (Grice, 1975)

*conflict?*
Existing explanations

Not considering conflict situations
(Williams, 1966 & Trivers, 1985)

Conflict examples:
- threats
- secrets
- investigations
Three-part theory of the logic behind indirect speech.

"off-record indirect speech acts“ –
1. Plausible deniability
2. Relationship negotiations
3. Language as digital medium
**Plausible deniability**

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<tr>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Dishonest cop</th>
<th>Honest cop</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Traffic ticket</td>
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Relationship negotiations

Two purposes for language:

- Convey proposition
- Negotiate & maintain relationships

Literal vs. Implicated
Relationship negotiations

Types of relationships
(Fiske, 1992):
1. dominance/authority
2. communality
3. reciprocity

Avoiding “awkwardness”
Language as digital medium

1. Possible deniability (not even plausible)
2. transmitting (Goffman, 1959)
3. Common vs. Mutual knowledge
Computational linguistics implications

- User interface
- Semantics
- Encode social norms