Indirectness

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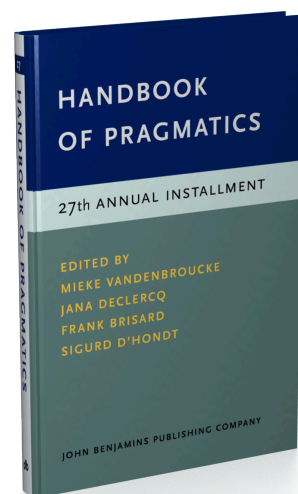**Edited by Mieke Vandenbroucke, Jana Declercq, Frank Brisard and Sigurd D'hondt**
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1. Introduction

Since the late 1970s, scholars in pragmatics have given a lot of attention to the phenom-enon of indirectness (also referred to as *indirect communication*), with a clear focus on indirect directives or indirect requests (IRs) (see, e.g., Ruytenbeek 2021). In the present article, I will address the most important definitions of speech act indirectness that have been proposed in the literature since the early work by Austin (1962) and Searle (1975) in the speech act theoretic tradition. In addition, I will critically review available experi-mental data bearing on the processing of different types of indirectness.

Since the majority of studies on the production side of indirectness have docu-mented the realization of specific speech act types, such as requests, apologies, refusals, etc., it seems appropriate to discuss these studies separately, in a dedicated Handbook entry (see, for example, the recent contributions on complaining (Rodriguez 2022) and directives (Ruytenbeek 2023)). Therefore, in Section 4 of this article, I have instead cho-sen to address the cognitive dimension of the mechanisms of indirection by reviewing experimental research in psycho- and neurolinguistics that attempts to identify the char-acteristics specific to indirection, rather than the peculiarities of the processing or pro-duction of different types of speech acts. Thus, unlike previous review articles focusing on IRs such as Walker (2013), I will not discuss in detail here the bulk of the empirical research that has been devoted to the forms that (direct and indirect) speech acts (SAs) take across different languages (but see Section 2.2.3 for a short overview) or commu-nicative genres.

This contribution is structured as follows. I will first review the major notions of indirectness that co-exist in the literature, starting from the original notion of an indi-rect speech act to eventually consider degrees of indirectness (Section 2). I will then address, in Section 3, the view that indirectness is motivated by politeness considera-tions, as well as other reasons for opting for indirect communication. In Section 4, I will review experimental work bearing on the processing of ISAs, ranging from offline paraphrase acceptability judgments to neurolinguistic and psychophysiological studies. In Section 5, I will conclude and outline promising directions for future research on the topic of indirectness.

2.   What is indirectness?

Two recurring issues with indirectness are, on the one hand, that different notions are used in the literature to refer to the direct or indirect mode of realization of SAs and, on the other hand, that authors do not always make explicit what notion of indirectness they are endorsing (Grainger and Mills 2016: 34). In addition, scholars such as Kiesling and Johnson (2010) have developed broader, interaction-oriented notions of indirectness (or what they called *indirection*) that largely depart from the traditional, speech act theoretic view of *speech act* indirectness (see also Lempert 2012 for a discussion). The goal of this section is therefore to identify the different notions of speech act indirectness on the market, with a focus on whether they consist in a binary distinction between direct and indirect SAs (Section 2.1), or, rather, conceive of SAs in terms of a continuum of (in)directness (Section 2.2).

2.1   Binary notions

2.1.1   *Indirectness and non-literalness*

According to Searle's (1969) speech act theory (SAT), the assignment of a speech act (or illocutionary act) to a particular utterance depends on the mood of the sentence uttered.[1] It is the morpho-syntactic features of the sentence (the *illocutionary force indicators*) that determine illocutionary force (Searle 1979: 30; Vanderveken 1990: 15–16). This theory is often called "literalist" because it postulates a one-to-one correspondence relationship between sentences containing such illocutionary force indicators and their illocutionary meaning when they are used in the performance of literal SAs. In other words, for SAT, sentence-types encode illocutionary forces — a view called the *Literal Force Hypothesis*. (For more details, see Ruytenbeek 2021, Chapter 1 and Meibauer 2019)

In SAT, in addition to the SA that can be predicted on the basis of the sentence-type, an utterance can result in the performance of another SA. For example, the interrogative sentence in (1) would constitute, at the literal level, the performance of a request for information about the addressee's (A) ability to close the door.

(1)   Can you shut the door?

In many situations, this interrogative construction is uttered by the speaker (S) to indirectly request that A close the door, without S actually intending A to provide them with an answer to the question asked. In that case, the only thing that would matter to S is whether A will comply with their request for action. According to SAT, the request

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1. Following the speech act theoretic tradition, I will use the phrase *illocutionary act* or, for short, *speech act*, to refer to the action performed by a speaker who utters a sentence with an illocutionary force and a propositional content.

achieved by means of the utterance in (1) is regarded as indirect in the sense that it is performed *by means of, and in addition to*, the literal SA associated with the interrogative sentence type instantiated by (1), namely a polar question about A's ability to close the door. To infer that S did not want them to take the utterance of (1) as a literal question about their abilities, A has to use Gricean principles of conversational cooperation, as well as contextual information (Grice 1975). This inferential reasoning allows A to come to the conclusion that the literal question about their abilities is irrelevant in the current conversational context. A will then use the literal meaning of S's utterance as a starting point to uncover S's illocutionary intention beyond that literal meaning (Searle 1975, 1979: 113–114).

The original speech act theoretic definition of indirectness thus is closely related to the notion of non-literalness. It cannot, however, satisfactorily be equated with it (Grainger and Mills 2016: 35–37). In SAT, indirectness constitutes a subset of the category of non-literalness. Non-literal language use — for example, irony and metaphor — and indirectness are similar in the sense that the content of the SA that S primarily intends to perform is not identical with the content of the SA encoded by the sentence-type of the utterance (sentence mood). ISAs, however, are characterized by the double performance of a direct SA and an indirect SA, the latter being performed not instead of, but in addition to the former (Searle 1979: 114–115; 143–144). By contrast, in the case of a (non-literal) ironic or metaphorical utterance, S means something different from what they literally express. It is therefore possible for an utterance to convey both a non-literal SA and another, distinct, ISA. Accordingly, the interrogative utterance in (2) could be intended as a request in a context where A is making a lot of noise.

(2)   Could you make any more noise?

With (2), S would be requesting that A keep it down. According to SAT, such an ironic request would count two times as non-literal: S is not asking whether it is possible for A to make more noise, and neither are they actually requesting that A make more noise.

In SAT, there is a one-to-one relationship between each of the three sentence-types and the major English SA types (Searle 1979; Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Vanderveken 1990). According to the literalist view assumed by SAT, illocutionary forces are encoded at the level of sentence-types. Declaratives encode the illocutionary force of asserting, imperatives the force of requesting action, and interrogatives the force of requesting information. A straightforward consequence of this view regarding the scope of indirectness is that, as soon as the actual illocutionary force of an utterance departs from its direct illocutionary force, the SA counts as indirect. So, any request for action performed by means of a sentence that is *not* imperative, any request for information performed by means of a sentence that is *not* of the interrogative type, and any assertive SA that is *not* performed by means of a declarative sentence fall within the category of indirectness. For instance, the good wishes performed with the imperative utterance in

(3) would be considered indirect, i.e., performed by means of, and in addition to, the literal directive SA encoded by the imperative sentence-type. (For a more detailed discussion of the indirect uses of imperatives, see, e.g., Ruytenbeek 2021)

(3) Sleep well!

As we will see in Section 2.2, in the aftermath of SAT, several scholars have extended the notion of indirectness to cases that do not fit the literalist dimension of the initial theory.

2.1.2 *Indirectness and the locutionary/illocutionary distinction*

The speech act theoretic notion of indirectness introduced by Searle (1975) can be traced back to Austin's (1962) distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. To simplify somewhat, according to Austin (1962: 94–98), performing a locutionary act boils down to producing a meaningful utterance; the performance of an illocutionary act necessarily entails the performance of a locutionary act. An example is (4), which, at the illocutionary level, would be a request to shut the door.

(4) You could shut the door.

The locutionary act performed with (4) can be referred to by using reported speech, as in *S said that A could close the door* (Austin 1962: 95). In the case of the imperative in (5), the locutionary act would be that *S told A to shut the door*:

(5) Shut the door.

Thus, according to Austin, the three major English sentence-types, i.e., declarative, interrogative, and imperative encode different types of locutionary acts (see also Recanati 2013). While different SAs are possible at the illocutionary level, such as the assertion that A could shut the door for (4), only one locutionary act of saying is associated with the utterance.

As in Austin's (1962) approach, the definition of indirectness proposed by Recanati (1987) builds on the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts associated with the utterance of a sentence. For Recanati, it is crucial to discern the illocutionary act *indicated* by an utterance, or its potential illocutionary force, and the illocutionary act that is actually *performed* by means of the utterance. According to Recanati, the locutionary act corresponds to the illocutionary act indicated by an utterance. In this view, it is possible for the illocutionary act indicated by a sentence (locutionary act) and the illocutionary act that the utterance is meant to perform (actual illocutionary act) to differ. This is what happens with ISAs. In (4), for example, at the locutionary level, S is saying that A is able to shut the door. The illocutionary act that is indicated by the utterance of the sentence (4) is thus an assertive. However, on some occasions, in uttering (4), S performs an illocutionary act that does not match the one indicated by the sentence uttered, i.e., a request that A shut the door.

Another way to approach indirectness in reference to the locutionary/illocutionary opposition has been proposed by Kissine (2013: 118–122). This time, the distinction concerns the propositional content of the locutionary act and of the illocutionary act, respectively. As Kissine (2008, 2013) suggests, in the case of an ISA such as (4), the propositional content of the locutionary act of *saying that* (i.e., that A is able to shut the door) is different from the propositional content of the illocutionary act of requesting, i.e., that A shut the door.

(4)   You could shut the door. (repeated)

For Kissine (2013: 98–100, 118–122), the illocutionary act performed by uttering a sentence should be considered indirect only if its propositional content is not identical to that of the locutionary act that is performed with the utterance.

2.1.3   *Indirectness and secondariness*

Thus far, we have discussed definitions of indirectness from a formal point of view, i.e., by differentiating levels of meaning associated either with the type of sentence used or with the type of SA performed or indicated. Now I would like to consider ISAs from a more cognitive point of view, by giving a central role to distinctions involving the perspective of the interpreter. One such distinction concerns the primary vs. secondary status of the SAs that can be performed by the uttering of a sentence. For instance, according to Recanati (2004: 74–75), an illocutionary meaning (or SA) would be *secondary* in the sense that its interpretation requires the derivation of another, more basic, *primary* meaning that is implied by the utterance act. Understanding the secondary meaning of an utterance thus involves an inferential path taking the primary meaning as a starting point. Secondary illocutionary meanings meet Recanati's (2004: 42–44) availability condition, according to which language users are aware of the distinction between primary and secondary meanings, and of the inference from the primary meaning to the secondary meaning. Whether an IR performed by means of, for example, (1)–(4) would meet the availability condition is unclear.

(1)   Can you shut the door? (repeated)

(4)   You could shut the door. (repeated)

This question boils down, in part, to asking whether the interpreters would also infer the meaning of a question (1) or statement (4) about their ability to shut the door. If the availability condition is not met, the SA will qualify as primary. (The experimental evidence discussed in Section 4 suggests that this is indeed often not the case and hence, that many of such SAs qualify as primary.) By contrast, it seems safer to hypothesize that, in the case of the remark about the negative state of affairs in (6), the primary meaning of a statement would be available to the interpreter.

(6)   It's cold in here.

The idea is that A would be able to reflect afterwards on the reason why S made a comment about the temperature in the room. The IR in (6) would thus be considered secondary in the sense that it meets the availability condition.

In Ruytenbeek (2021: Chapter 1), I pointed out an ambiguity in Recanati's primary/secondary distinction. Based on Recanati's writings, it is possible to interpret the distinction in terms of a logical relationship. According to another interpretation, the distinction concerns the temporal relationship between the two levels of meaning: an illocutionary meaning would be secondary because it is derived *after* the primary illocutionary meaning. This is precisely the definition that Kissine (2013) adopted. According to him, a SA counts as secondary if its understanding necessitates the prior interpretation of another, primary SA. Under this chronological definition, the IR performed with the remark in (6) would be considered secondary because A first has to interpret the remark as a statement about the temperature before being able to understand it as a request.

To return to the question of the definition of indirectness, we can conclude that the direct or indirect nature of an illocutionary act can be distinguished from the fact that it is primary or secondary. An indirect SA can thus be secondary, that is, interpreted without the utterance being understood as a direct (and primary) SA (Recanati, 1987: 165–167; see also Kissine 2013: 111–122). Accordingly, recent experimental work on the processing of indirect requests (IRs) such as Ruytenbeek et al.'s (2017) study indicates that the SA of requesting can be performed in an indirect manner without being interpreted as a secondary illocutionary meaning. (More on this in Section 4.1.)

2.1.4   *Conventional indirectness: Binary or categorical?*

The notion of indirectness that was originally proposed by Searle (1975) is associated with the distinction between conventional and non-conventional ISAs. As pointed out by Searle (1969, 1975), a general observation about ISAs is that the content of many sentences used in their performance is conceptually related to their felicity conditions. For instance, in the case of directives, the following IR constructions refer to different types of felicity conditions (cf. Searle 1975: 64–67, 71–72).

(1)   Can you shut the door? (repeated)

(7)   You will shut the door.

(8)   I would like you to shut the door.

For instance, (1) concerns the preparatory condition for the performance of a directive SA, i.e., A's ability to carry out the action expressed in the propositional content of the utterance. (7) refers to the propositional content condition according to which A will perform a future action. As a statement to the effect that S wants A to do the action of

shutting the door, (8) concerns the sincerity condition for the performance of requests. Searle (1975: 66) noted that many sentences used in the performance of ISAs have a "generality of form." What he was hinting at is that the syntactic structure of the constructions instantiated in, for example, (1), (7), and (8) includes a modal verb (i.e., *can* and *will/would*), the second-person pronoun *you* to single out the addressee and a verbal phrase (VP) corresponding to the action to be performed by A. In the literature, ISAs performed by uttering such sentences with a generality of form are called *conventional* (and also, albeit less frequently, *conventionalized*) ISAs (e.g., Searle 1975; Morgan 1978). What these constructions have in common is that they all instantiate a more abstract construction, i.e., modal verb + *you* + VP.

Clark (1979: 432–433) is more precise than Searle when it comes to explaining what it means for an ISA construction to be "conventionally" indirect. He explains that conventional ISAs involve different *conventions of means*, i.e., conventions about the strategies that can be used to perform ISAs. According to him, a convention of means "specifies a semantic device by which an indirect speech act can be performed" (Clark 1979: 433). An example of a convention of means is making a reference to the preparatory conditions that have to be met for the performance of the intended SA to be felicitous. From that perspective, the utterance in (9) would qualify as a conventional ISA — a conventional IR, to be more accurate — as it refers to a convention of means aligned with the preparatory condition for directives (cf. Searle 1975: 61–62).[2]

(9)   Could you tell me the price for a fifth of Jim Beam?   (Clark 1979: 448)

By contrast, unlike (9) and the constructions in (7)–(8), the polar interrogative sentence in (10) does not involve the convention of means about the preparatory conditions for directives (nor any other convention of means related to the felicity conditions for directives, more generally).

(10)   Does a fifth of Jim Beam cost more than £5?   (Clark 1979: 448)

That being said, Clark claims that even though it is a non-conventional IR, (10), which expresses a question about the price of a fifth of Jim Beam, can still be used to request that A tell S how much a fifth of Jim Beam costs. IRs performed by means of sentences that do not express the expected action are also often referred to as "non-conventional" ISAs. An example is (6), which expresses a reason for A to perform some action.

(6)   It's cold in here. (repeated)

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2. Panther and Thornburg (1998) reinterpreted Searle's notion of conventionality of means through the lens of *metonymic illocutionary scenarios*, which outline how the propositional content of constructions used as IRs relate to the conceptual content of the SA of requesting. Within their cognitive linguistic framework, the components of the request scenario are a reinterpretation of SAT's felicity conditions.

Searle (1975: 66) pointed out that, even though it has not the generality of form discussed above, under proper circumstances (6) can serve as a request (for example, to shut the window or turn on the heating).

It seems to me that, despite the fact that sentences such as (6) do not explicitly mention the specific action that is requested from A, such utterances would nonetheless qualify as *conventional* ISAs: while unrelated to the felicity conditions of the SA, a relevant convention of means involves A's reasons for complying with the directive (or S's reasons for performing the directive). I fail to see why the notion of conventionality of means should be limited to the categories of sentences that *both* have a generality of form and refer to felicity conditions of a particular SA type. In Ruytenbeek (2021), I proposed to extend the scope of this notion not only to remarks such as (6) (the convention is the expression of a negative state of affairs), but also to imperative directives. In the latter case, the convention of means is expressing the content of the requested action using a force-dynamic pattern. I therefore believe that the right question to ask is not whether a construction used to perform an ISA is conventional or non-conventional; rather, it is about which convention of means is instantiated by a particular ISA utterance. Conventionality of means can thus be conceived of as a categorical criterion according to which a SA of a particular type can be performed by choosing from a list of strategies. In fact, this view does justice to Searle's observation that not all the sentences of the group "Sentences concerning reasons for doing [the action]" have a generality of form. As will also become clear from the discussion offered in Section 2.2.1, whether an ISA construction is related to a convention of means for the performance of ISAs and whether it has a generality of form are two different questions that should not be confused. Because the bulk of research devoted to the relationship between SA performance and conventionality of means to date has focused exclusively on directives, another issue that remains open for further investigation is the extent to which the notion of conventionality of means can be applied to non-directive SAs.

2.2   Graded notions

2.2.1   *Standardization*

In addition to the binary notion of indirectness and the categorical notion of conventionality (of means), what Clark (1979: 433) calls *conventionality of form* is also useful for distinguishing between the variety of indirect realizations of SAs:

> There are [...] conventions of form — conventions about the wording of indirect speech acts. *Can you pass the salt?* and *Could you pass the salt?*, for example, are highly conventional, or idiomatic, forms in English for requesting the salt. *Is it possible for you to pass the salt?* and *Are you able to pass the salt?* are less idiomatic, and *Is it the case that you at present have the ability to pass the salt?* is not at all idiomatic.

Within a single convention of means, constructions differ in terms of the degree to which they make their indirect illocutionary meaning available for interpretation. Consider the following two constructions, both of which concern A's ability to shut the door.

(1)   Can you shut the door? (repeated)

(11)   Are you able to shut the door?

While their literal meaning is identical (if one interprets modal *can* in the ability sense) and both can, in theory, felicitously be used as a request to shut the door, (1) is more strongly associated to the performance of an IR compared to (11). In other words, relative to (11), (1) has a stronger degree of *standardization* as an IR expression. Accordingly, ISAs performed by means of constructions such as (1) are referred to as *standardized* ISAs, while ISAs performed with constructions such as (11) are labeled *non-standardized* ISAs, referring to different positions on a cline of standardization. The notion of standardization relates to Morgan's (1978) conventions of usage, according to which natural inferential schemes have "conventionalized" over time, giving rise to short-circuited inferences.

A similar view was advocated by Bach and Harnish (1979:198), who proposed, following Morgan (1978), that the frequency of use of an IR construction such as (1) with a directive illocutionary meaning has resulted in the "compression of the inference" from the literal meaning of the utterance — the question about A's abilities — to its indirect directive meaning. For them, considering that a given ISA construction is highly standardized for the performance of a type of ISA means that the inferential path from the literal to the indirect illocutionary meaning of the expression has been short-circuited; this enables, in the case of a *Can you VP?* IR, A to infer "[S's] requestive illocutionary intent without having to identify the literal intent of questioning" (Bach and Harnish 1979:198).

Following Bach and Harnish (1979), to avoid any confusion, I will not employ *conventionality* in two different senses. Rather, I will only use *conventional(ity)* to refer to conventions of means and *standardization* to refer to differences in the degree to which an ISA construction makes its ISA meaning more or less transparent for the interpreter.[3]

In addition to the two criteria that we have discussed above, i.e., conventionality of means and standardization, a third notion is required to satisfactorily account for the variety of constructions that can be used in the performance of ISAs. To illustrate, while the following two utterances involve the same convention of means about A's abilities and are elaborations on the same *Can you...?* construction, they differ in the extent to which they make their indirect request illocutionary meaning salient.

(1)   Can you shut the door? (repeated)

(12)   Can you shut the door, please?

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3. Note that Brown and Levinson (1987:132; 290), following Morgan (1978), use the term *conventionalization* to refer to the diachronic process of standardization.

This is what I called *illocutionary force salience* (Ruytenbeek 2021: Chapter 3). The idea is that, while the propositional content of these two utterances is identical, the presence of the request Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) *please* in (12) makes its IR meaning more salient compared to that of (1) (this prediction was experimentally demonstrated in Clark's (1979) studies about IR interpretation by local merchants over the phone). Interestingly, the notion of illocutionary force salience both applies to direct and indirect SA realizations. For example, considering the pair of utterances in (5)–(13), it can be argued that the presence of *please* makes the request meaning of the construction more salient in the sense that the same utterance without the particle does not leave out other possible interpretations, such as a command or a piece of advice.

(5)   Shut the door. (repeated)

(13)   Shut the door, please.

More recently, Holtgraves and Robinson (2020) have shown that the presence of an emoji can help interpreters disambiguate utterances with a potentially sarcastic meaning. This suggests that emoji can function as IFIDs, thus increasing the degree of salience of the (possibly indirect) illocutionary meaning of utterances.

2.2.2   *Degrees of indirectness*

At this stage, regardless of the exact definition of indirectness that we assume, a SA either is direct or indirect. However, there is also a graded notion of indirectness available in the literature (see, for instance, Leech 1983; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Blum-Kulka 1987; and Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). According to this view, *direct* and *indirect* refer to different positions on a scale of (in)directness. If we apply this notion to the SA of request, for example, the direct SA constructions according to the original speech act theoretic definition, i.e., imperative requests, would be considered as "more direct" compared to the request forms originally classified as indirect, such as *Can you VP?*.

A scholar who adopted this view is Leech (1983:108), who was interested in the effect of "using a more and more indirect kind of illocution" on the degree of perceived politeness.[4] The focus was thus on how participants perceived varying degrees of (in)directness (Blum-Kulka 1987:132). The rationale for a scale of request indirectness was that "forms [can be] ordered approximately according to […] the obviousness of the directive" (Ervin-Tripp 1976:29) or to their "degree of illocutionary transparency" (Blum-Kulka 1987:133). Accordingly, the longer "the inferential path needed to arrive at an utterance's illocutionary point," the more indirect the SA performed with this utterance

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4. Contrary to what Blum-Kulka (1987:133) claimed, while Searle (1975) suggested that the amount of interpretative work can be expected to be higher for requests performed by means of, for example, negative state remarks compared to ability questions, he never explicitly endorsed a graded notion of (in)directness. Nor did Brown and Levinson (1987) assume that indirectness comes by degrees.

(Blum-Kulka 1987:133). A positive correlation is thus postulated between the degree of indirectness and the amount of inferential work for the interpreter. In the case of the most direct SA realizations, the illocutionary force is indicated, for example, at the level of the sentence-type used, while for the most indirect forms the illocutionary force has to be inferred.

Following the view that (in)directness comes in degrees, a variety of IR realizations were arranged on a cline of increasing indirectness, ranging from imperatives to negative state remarks, with standardized IR constructions of the *Can you VP?* type in between. While early proposals distinguished between only six request realization types (Ervin-Tripp 1976:29–45), later classifications included eight (House and Kasper 1981:163–164) or nine categories (Blum-Kulka 1987:133).

Despite its apparent appeal, the operationalization of (in)directness in terms of relative degrees faces a number of problems. From the perspective of the amount of inferential work for the interpreter, some contrasts do indeed seem a priori plausible; imperative requests, for example, should be easier to interpret as requests relative to negative state remarks (cf. the category of hints in Ervin-Tripp (1976:42–45) and House and Kasper (1981:163)). For other contrasts, however, it is less clear whether one construction, e.g., ability interrogatives, should be perceived as more indirect than the other, e.g., want declaratives. In fact, the defendants of what can be called the *graded indirectness hypothesis* rarely made explicit the criteria they used to position different constructions on the (in)directness scale. This is understandable in Blum-Kulka's (1987) study, as relative positions on the cline of (in)directness were determined on the basis of respondents' directness ratings.

Directives set aside, the definition of (in)directness that has been applied to the SA of complaining in previous work (House and Kasper 1981:160–161; Trosborg 1995:315–372) proves even more problematic. As pointed out by Decock and Depraetere (2018), in addition to the notion of the transparency with which the illocutionary meaning is conveyed (assuming greater inferential work for more indirect SA realizations), the "assumed degree of face-threat" (2018:35) for the recipient of the complaint also plays a role. For instance, according to House and Kasper (1981:160–161), the complaint performed by means of (14) is more indirect compared to that performed with (15).

(14)   You have ruined my blouse.

(15)   You are really mean.

While, as House and Kasper proposed, in both (14) and (15) S indeed *explicitly asserts* something, the propositional content of (15) does not express the complainable, i.e., the negative event that S is complaining about. In face-threat terms, (15) is more likely to be perceived by A as being offensive — at least in Western cultures — (Decock and Depraetere 2018:35), but that has nothing to do with the degree of illocutionary transparency or the hypothesized amount of interpretative work for A. In the same vein,

Trosborg (1995:314) draws a contrast between a "straightforward accusation" (direct complaint) and utterances that "only indirectly express [S's] ill feelings towards [A]." Here, the propositional content of the intended complaint SA is different in both cases, which makes an (in)directness-based comparison irrelevant. The upshot of this discussion is that complaint (in)directness, as adopted by House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995), is a (largely unclear) combination of illocutionary meaning transparency and face-threat considerations. A possible solution would be to replace it, as Decock and Depraetere (2018) did, with a graded notion of illocutionary transparency of the complaint meaning.

A third issue is that the graded notion of (in)directness only seems viable if it is operationalized in a context-dependent manner. That is, unlike the traditional binary definition of indirectness, it is virtually impossible to determine a priori all possible contrasts in terms of relative (in)directness between candidate constructions. Moreover, the validity of a particular scale of (in)directness would require systematic empirical investigation. That being said, the view that different realizations of a given SA type can be ordered on a cline of (in)directness has made an important contribution by allowing testable predictions about the degree of interpretive effort associated with different SA realizations.

2.2.3   Cross-cultural research on indirectness

Under the impulse of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), scholars have explored the (in)direct realizations of different speech acts across different languages. Most, if not all, of the studies that I will briefly address below adopt a graded view of (in)directness, whether at the level of individual SA realizations or at the level of groups of speakers. Using either authentic data from corpora or natural interactions or data from discourse completion tasks, these authors document speakers' preference for more or less (in)direct speech act realizations. In these studies, indirectness is often approached as a type of politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson 1987; more on this in Section 3).

A tendency in cross-cultural pragmatic research on indirectness has been to include an English lingua-culture as a standard of comparison (e.g., Kerkam 2015 on Arabic; Ngor-To Yeung 2000 on Chinese; Larina 2008 on Russian; Ogiermann 2009 on German, Polish and Russian; Spees 1994 on Japanese; Tannen 1981 on Greek; Hidalgo-Downing et al. 2014 and Márquez Reiter et al. 2005 on Spanish). However, such a reference to English is not systematic and there also exist monocultural studies, such as Le Pair (2005) and Schouten (2007) on Dutch and Pizziconi (2009) on Japanese. In addition, the last few years have seen a growing number of studies adopting a cross-cultural comparative perspective, such as Chen and Wang (2021), who investigated indirectness in the speech of Chinese and Korean speakers, and Venuti (2020), who focused on IRs in German and Italian (see also Rygg (2012) on Norwegian and Japanese).

A large body of research specifically concerns (in)directness in directives (Benzdira 2023 on Algerian Arabic; Ngor-To Yeung 2000; Zhang 1995 on Chinese; Byon 2006 and Yu 2011 on Korean; Lwanga-Lumu 1999 on Luganda; Upadhyay 2003 on Nepali; Ruytenbeek 2019, 2020 and Manno 2002 on French; Marti 2006 on Turkish; Ruzickova 2007 on Spanish; Wierzbicka 2003: Chapter 2 on Polish). Here, too, cross-cultural comparisons can be found: De Geer and Tulviste (2002) documented IRs (and requests in general) in Swedish and Estonian, Veres-Guśpiel (2020) IRs in Polish and Hungarian, Márquez Reiter (2002) in Uruguayan and Peninsular Spanish, and Marsily (2018) in French and Spanish. Another example is Yu (2011), who analyzed the relationship between (in)directness and politeness in request realizations in English, Hebrew, and Korean. In Sifianou (1993), off-record indirectness was investigated both in Greek and in English. In the footsteps of Ogiermann (2009), Urbanik (2017) explored directives in Polish and Norwegian. As far as other SA types are concerned, in Chinese, for instance, indirectness has been investigated in general (Zhou and Zhang 2022), as well as in evaluations (Chen and Wang 2021), proposals, and disagreements (Ngor-To Yeung 2000). The indirectness of both requests and criticisms has been analyzed in Russian (Kulbayeva 2020).

Although not exhaustive, this overview shows that empirical studies on the topic of SA indirectness in the world's languages are far from systematic. Hopefully, the coming years will see more comparative work between distant languages and cultures, as well as research targeting different types of SA within specific lingua-cultures.

3.   The reasons for indirectness

Before asking why speakers might resort to indirectness, we must first qualify the idea that indirectness is necessarily the result of a strategic choice on their part. Although this view lies at the heart of Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential politeness theory, according to which the use of indirectness in positive, negative, and off-record politeness strategies allows speakers to minimize the emotional costs of their utterances (see also Searle 1975), it has been the subject of debate in recent years. I will return to it shortly.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), SAs constitute, for the most part, a threat to the speaker's and/or to the addressee's face(s). Specifically, directive acts endanger the negative face of addressees, as they reduce their freedom of action. Thus, the imperative request (5) exerts some degree of psychological pressure on A to perform this action, regardless of their actual volitional state.

(5)   Shut the door. (repeated)

On the other hand, illocutionary acts that imply a negative evaluation of A's person or actions, such as criticisms, reproaches, and insults, damage A's positive face, i.e., A's desire to be approved of. This is the case, for example, with (16), which damages A's public self-image and reputation.

(16) You did a terrible presentation.

To minimize the threat to A's negative face, S could phrase their request in an indirect manner involving, for example, a negative politeness strategy consisting in giving A options. In (12), by using modal *can* and an interrogative construction, S makes it easier for A not to comply.

(12) Can you shut the door? (repeated)

Instead of openly criticizing A's performance with a negative, devaluing judgment as in (16), S could also produce an ambiguous utterance like (17), which is likely to be understood as an excuse for the underachievement if the presentation turns out to be of poor quality (or if A believes it to be so) (Holtgraves 1998).

(17) It's difficult to give a good presentation.

A number of empirical studies have shown that (standardized) indirect SA realizations are not necessarily associated with a higher degree of perceived politeness compared to direct SA realizations (e.g., Blum-Kulka 1987; Ogiermann 2009; Upadhyay 2003; Wierzbicka 1985). Against the background of graded indirectness, we can conclude that there is no positive correlation between degree of indirectness and degree of perceived politeness. For instance, very indirect and complex SA realizations can decrease perceived politeness, as they require too much inferential work from A (Manno 2002). They can also be perceived as *overpolite*, which has a negative overtone (Culpeper 2011: 100–103). One should therefore not assume that less standardized ISAs, such as hints, are necessarily more polite than more standardized ones. These findings make it all the more necessary to identify other possible motivations for the use of SA indirectness.

   In situations where politeness considerations are not the reason why S formulate their utterances in an indirect manner, the main motivations for indirectness are the wish to avoid committing oneself to the very performance of the SA, the desire to convey multiple meanings at once and the creation or the reinforcement of the intimacy between S and A (Ruytenbeek 2021: Chapter 5).

   Regarding the first reason, the more unlikely the direct illocutionary meaning of a pragmatically ambiguous utterance, the more likely that the interpreter will infer its indirect meaning (Clark 1979). For example, if A was unaware of the current temperature in the room where S and A were sitting at the time of the utterance, A may very well interpret (6) at face value, i.e., as a mere comment about the cold temperature.

(6) It's cold in here. (repeated)

This type of ISAs belongs to Brown and Levinson's (1987: 211) category of off-record indirectness, which is characterized by the impossibility to attribute a clear illocutionary intent to S. Because of their truly ambiguous nature, off-record SAs require higher inferential work on the part of the interpreter. Obviously, illocutionary commitment

avoidance and politeness considerations are not incompatible motivations for indirectness, as the former enables S to protect themselves (including their positive face) from the potentially negative consequences of their utterances. In fact, off-record indirectness offers the best cost/benefit ratio when it comes to performing high-risk SAs such as attempting to bribe a person or making sexual advances, which are central to the *strategic speaker model* (Lee and Pinker 2010; Pinker 2011; Pinker et al. 2008). According to this model, off-record indirectness makes it possible for S to maximize the success of their communicative goals while minimizing the negative consequences of their intended ISAs, such as negative emotions, social awkwardness, and legal costs. This is because off-record utterances allow for plausible deniability of S's illocutionary intent: S cannot be considered to be committed to the performance of the SA they nonetheless intended to convey.

Another advantage of resorting to indirectness is that it helps convey multiple illocutionary meanings at the same time, instead of having to get them across using separate utterances. This is also true of (6), a declarative sentence depicting a negative state of affairs. It can, in addition to its literal meaning about the temperature, be a means for S to convey their dissatisfaction and/or to request that A do something about the current state of affairs. Terkourafi (2011, 2014) proposed that off-record indirectness can, on some occasions, be used to create or reinforce a feeling of intimacy between the conversational participants. This is because S, in leaving implicit a range of illocutionary meanings, may count on the fact that A will be able to figure these out by themself. In doing so, S would emphasize and strengthen the common ground they shared with A, i.e., the set of mutual assumptions and beliefs that they are relying on when drafting their utterance, and which will be invoked by A to make sense of the same utterance. The high amount of inferential work necessary for A to identify the meanings that S indirectly communicates is thus offset by the positive socio-emotional effects of relationship reinforcement.

4.   Experimental evidence on the processing of indirectness

In order to understand what it means for an utterance to constitute an ISA, it is necessary to take a closer look at available experimental data. In what follows, I will therefore critically discuss experimental studies that have explored the processing of indirectness. As the majority of previous studies concern directive SAs, with a clear focus on requests, the generalizability of their results remains fairly limited. Nevertheless, we will also see that recent years have witnessed the publication of studies examining other speech acts such as indirect responses and indirect refusals.

4.1   Indirectness and secondariness

Following Grice's (1975) and Searle's (1975) explanation of how the intended meaning of an ISA expression can be inferred by an interpreter, deriving the direct SA of an ISA utterance is the starting point of an inference leading to the recognition of the intended ISA. As Searle (1975: 62–63) himself pointed out, an explanation along these lines is not meant as a psychological theory of utterance interpretation, but rather as a possible rational reconstruction of the inferential steps involved in ISA understanding. Based on the classic speech act theoretic analysis, a sequential model of ISA interpretation was developed: the Standard Pragmatic Model or, for short, SPM. A central tenet of the SPM is that an ISA is by definition secondary, as it is inferred on the basis of, and in addition to, the primary illocutionary meaning of the utterance. For instance, according to the SPM, the IR interpretation of *Can you VP?* is predicted to be the result of an inferential procedure anchored in the recognition of the direct SA performed with the utterance, i.e., the question about A's abilities. In other words, the derivation of this direct meaning is necessary to access the intended IR meaning of the utterance.

Gibbs (1979) conducted a case study to assess the reliability of the SPM. Participants were shown brief stories concluding with a specific utterance, such as (18), framed either as an IR or a direct question. In another experimental condition, the construction was presented without any accompanying contextual narrative.

(18)   Must you open the window?

Following their reading of the target utterance, participants were asked to determine whether a subsequent sentence, such as (19)–(20), accurately paraphrased the utterance they had just read.

(19)   Need you open the window?

(20)   Do not open the window.

In instances where the target utterances were presented without prior context, participants were quicker to process paraphrases like (19), corresponding to the direct question interpretation, compared to the request paraphrases such as (20). This suggests that the direct interpretation of such IR expressions was readily available. However, when a context preceded the utterance, responses were faster for interpreting the IR paraphrases such as (20). This suggests that if a suitable context precedes a structure commonly used as an indirect request, whether it is used as a direct speech act or as an indirect request does not increase the time needed to understand it and judge its paraphrase as (in)correct. These findings challenge the validity of the SPM, which posits that expressions used as indirect requests, which are secondary by definition, should require more time to process compared to their direct uses. Subsequent experiments employing varied methodologies and/or different forms of indirect requests corroborated this finding.

What these studies show is that, regardless of whether the direct meaning of an IR construction gets activated during comprehension, ISAs that are contextually supported do not increase response times compared to direct alternatives.

4.2   Direct and indirect interpretations of ISA constructions

A more systematic approach to the empirical study of indirectness is to compare the comprehension of the direct vs. the indirect meaning of a particular ISA construction. For instance, one would contrast the ability question meaning of the IR construction *Can you VP?* with its indirect meaning of a request to VP. The underlying assumption is that it is possible to conceive of a context in which the ISA construction, such as *Can you VP?*, is truly ambiguous between its direct and its indirect interpretation. An example of such experimental approaches is Abbeduto et al.'s (1989) pioneer study, where IR constructions of the *Could you VP?* type were presented to participants. The properties of the physical items used in the lab where the experiment took place created the conditions necessary to make constructions such as (21)–(22) contextually ambiguous.

(21)   Could you open the scissors?

(22)   Could you roll the shoebox?

The results of this study indicate that, when they had doubts regarding whether or not it was possible to perform the action mentioned in the utterance, the participants responded only to the direct meaning of the utterance.

   In Shapiro and Murphy's (1993) study, participants were presented with questions such as (23)–(24). Their task was to indicate whether or not the question contained a plausible direct meaning, i.e., the meaning of a request for information for (23)–(24).

(23)   Can you stop whistling?

(24)   Do you have any money?

To avoid any interference due to the presence of an indirect meaning, such as a request for action in (23) or a request for money in (24), participants were explicitly instructed to ignore the possible indirect meanings of the utterances. Provided you can whistle, it is very easy to stop whistling; this makes the ability question meaning of (23) quite unlikely. By contrast, the direct meaning of (24), i.e., that of a request for information, is more likely to be associated with the expression. This study reveals that the presence of a plausible indirect meaning increases response times for deciding whether the direct meaning is plausible, as is the case in (24). The experiment was then replicated with a twist; this time, participants were not instructed to assess the likelihood of the direct illocutionary meaning, but, rather, they were asked to answer pragmatically ambiguous questions similar to those in (23)–(24). The results of the experiment indicate that participants did not

take longer to answer a question when one or two meanings were plausible. In addition, their response times were similar regardless of whether it was the direct or the indirect meaning of the utterance that was the only plausible interpretation. This suggests that it is not the direct or indirect nature of an illocutionary meaning, but, rather, whether or not it is a likely continuation of a conversation that impacts its processing times.

Using event-related potentials (ERPs) to measure electrical neural activity during stimulus processing, Coulson and Lovett (2010) compared the comprehension of negative state remarks such as (25) intended as a direct statement or as an IR for another bowl of soup.

(25)   My soup is too cold to eat.

The participants in their study had to indicate whether a remark such as (25) was an expected continuation of the scenario or not. Coulson and Lovett found, for these negative state remarks, different patterns of brain activity for the direct and indirect interpretations. When the remark was meant as an IR, it gave rise to more positive waveforms between the second word (*soup*) and the sixth word (*to*) compared to its interpretation as a direct statement. For the authors, this finding was an indication of decreased processing effort for the utterance when it was meant as an IR. However, it can also be explained by the observation that, compared to the literal statement reading, the IR interpretation of the negative state remarks was more natural in the conversational contexts used in Coulson and Lovett's experimental scenarios (see also Boux et al. 2023:3 and Ruytenbeek 2021: Chapter 4).

Another study pertaining to the processing of negative state remarks is van Ackeren et al.'s (2012), which investigated the activation of brain regions associated with motor action during the processing of negative state remarks such as (26) used as IRs.

(26)   It is very hot here.

The authors first displayed a picture of a scene on the computer screen; then they presented a spoken utterance to the participants. The participants' task was to listen attentively to the utterances and decide whether or not the speakers wanted their addressees to perform some action. In 15% of the trials, they were also asked whether the utterance was a request. The key finding of this study is that, despite the fact that the literal meaning of negative state remarks such as (26) does not include any lexical reference to motor action, processing them as IRs elicited increased activation in the cortical motor areas. In addition, negative state remarks meant as IRs gave rise to a stronger activation of two brain regions typically associated with Theory of Mind (ToM): the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) and the temporo-parietal junction (TPJ). This latter result can be explained by the need for extra activation in the ToM areas for the successful comprehension of less standardized ISA expressions, the processing of which relies heavily on the mental states the interpreter attributes to S. These findings thus reveal extra pro-

cessing costs for IRs of the negative state remark type, as these were associated with a higher level of activation in specific brain regions. Importantly, other experimental studies found similar ToM brain networks to be activated during the processing of indirect replies in English and Japanese (e.g., Bašnáková et al. 2014; Bendtz et al. 2022; Feng et al. 2021; Shibata et al. 2011; see Boux et al. 2023 for a discussion).

Using the pupillometry technique, Tromp et al. (2016) measured changes in pupil size during the interpretation of negative state remarks. With a design comparable to van Ackeren et al.'s (2012), they found that negative state remarks increased pupil diameter only when they were used as IRs. Assuming that changes in pupil size reflect changes in processing load (see e.g., Piquado et al. 2010 for a review), this finding could indicate that IRs of the negative state remark type are more effortful to process compared to their direct counterparts. This conclusion should, however, be qualified: as in van Ackeren et al.'s (2012) study, the IR uses of the negative state remarks in Tromp et al.'s (2016) experiment were compared to a different SA type, i.e., statements (assertive type) (Egorova et al. 2014). It therefore remains possible that the brain activation and pupil size patterns found in these studies reflect, at least in part, processing differences for distinct SA types.

The experimental studies reported on in Ruytenbeek et al. (2017) were designed in such a way that French IR constructions, such as *Can you VP?* (*Pouvez-vous VP?*) and *Is it possible to VP?* (*Est-il possible de VP?*), could be interpreted either as a polar question or as an IR in exactly the same context. The authors designed a grid containing geometrical shapes of different types (square, circle, etc.) and colours (red, green, etc.), with some boxes in the grid being empty. A response button with *yes* and *no* as options was featured just below the grid containing the coloured shapes. One experiment consisted in the audio presentation of recorded utterances played through headphones. At the same time, the grid containing the coloured geometrical shapes and the response buttons was displayed on the screen of the testing computer. The participants were instructed to react to the stimuli either by answering with *yes* or *no* or by moving a shape to another box in the grid. It was only possible to displace a shape if the final position was empty so that the shape would fit it.

In the first experiment, the stimuli included imperative instructions, IR expressions that could only be responded to with *no*, IR expressions that both could be responded to with *yes* or by displacing a shape in the grid, and control items. In the first experiment, IR utterances and controls were of the interrogative type, whereas in the second experiment their declarative counterparts (and a *true/false* response button) were used instead:

(27)   Can you move the red circle to the left of the yellow rectangle?

(28)   Is it possible to move the red circle to the left of the yellow rectangle?

(29)   You can move the red circle to the left of the yellow rectangle.

(30)   It is possible to move the red circle to the left of the yellow rectangle.

For half of the IR expressions, there were two possible response options: either clicking on the *yes* button or moving the shape to another box in the grid (it was technically impossible for participants to provide both responses to a particular stimulus; it was thus a forced choice). The following measures of IR interpretation were collected: type of response (answering yes/no or moving a shape), response times, and eye fixations.

An interesting finding in this study is that ability interrogatives and declaratives resulted in longer response times not when they were processed as IRs, but when they were understood as direct questions and statements, respectively. A plausible explanation is that the IR meaning associated with these expressions competed with the direct interpretation reflected in the *yes/true* responses, causing interference. Another finding is the absence of eye fixations on the *yes/true* response buttons for trials where a stimulus was interpreted as an IR. This suggests, against the SPM discussed in Section 4.1, that the IR interpretations of these stimuli were primary and not secondary. It was also found by Ruytenbeek et al. (2017) that the request interpretations were more frequent for the highly standardized *Can you VP?* and *You can VP* compared to the less standardized *Is it possible to VP?* and *It is possible to VP*. This result provides empirical evidence for the impact of degrees of standardization on the likelihood of an indirect interpretation. Finally, it is quite striking that the direct interpretations of the pragmatically ambiguous ability interrogatives and declaratives outnumbered their IR interpretations by a ratio of two to one. A plausible reason for the high frequency of direct interpretations of the IR stimuli in Ruytenbeek et al.'s (2017) experiments has to do with politeness considerations. As we saw in Section 3, politeness is sometimes a reason for using indirectness. In the context of Ruytenbeek et al.'s (2017) studies, however, no real interaction took place between the speakers who had recorded the spoken utterances and the actual participants in the experiments. The latter were therefore unlikely to attribute to the former any intention to be polite that would explain their use of indirectness.[5] Another possible reason why participants more often interpreted the IR constructions as direct SAs is that it was easier for them to do so: clicking on the *yes/true* button took less time than selecting and moving a shape to another box in the grid.

In a recent study, Boux et al. (2023) investigated the cognitive properties of the interpretation of indirect replies. The stimuli in their experiment consisted of question-answer pairs such as (31a)–(32) and (31b)–(32):

(31) a. Is your cat hurt?
      b. Are you bringing your cat to the vet?

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5. An anonymous reviewer remarked that since politeness can also occur between strangers, prior interaction is not a precondition for it. A possible explanation for the presence of indirectness in the instructions of this study could be a default expectation that instructions are formulated *in a polite manner*; of course, further empirical work will be needed to verify this hypothesis.

(32)   It got wounded.

Here, the SA performed in the first part of the pair is a request for information; both the direct and the indirect replies provide information to the question asked. The study also included pairs constituted by an information query (33a) or an indirect offer/proposal (33b) followed by a reply such as (34).

(33)   a.   Have you decided on a destination?
       b.   Shall I buy the train tickets?

(34)   We are not sure where to go yet.

While (34) provided information to the question asked in (33a), the same expression consisted of the rejection of the offer/proposal in (33b). Three key findings are worth commenting on here. First, participants rated the indirect replies as being less predictable compared to their direct counterparts, which can be explained by the fact that there were fewer constraints on the propositional content of indirect replies compared to *yes* and *no* direct replies. Second, indirect replies were perceived as less semantically similar to the questions and less coherent with the preceding context in comparison with direct replies. This lower degree of coherence with the context is consistent with the analysis of indirect replies following information queries and declinations of offers as violations of the relation maxim (Grice 1975). And third, participants considered the interpretation of indirect replies to be less certain compared to that of direct replies. It is important to note that these different measures displayed a very high positive correlation rate. It therefore makes sense to operationalize off-record indirectness using such a set of cognitive features that should, in all likelihood, also be reflected by neuro-psychological correlates (cf. Tomasello 2023).

4.3   Summary

Let us take stock. The experimental studies discussed in this Section invalidate the hypothesis, presented in Section 2, that standardized IRs are necessarily secondary. Concerning the processing times associated with indirectness in requests, available evidence shows that highly standardized IRs do not systematically take longer to process relative to their imperative counterparts or their direct interpretations. In other words, the comprehension of an IR does not necessarily entail the activation of its direct meaning. Whether these results also apply to less standardized IR expressions, such as negative state remarks, remains to be demonstrated. In future experimental studies, one should indeed remain aware that indirectness is not a homogenous pragmatic category, as it both encompasses idiomatic, highly standardized ISA constructions and less standardized ISA constructions also referred to as off-record indirectness. Regarding the neuro-cognitive correlates of indirectness, while little is known about highly standardized ISAs,

available experimental data indicate that negative state remarks and indirect replies, both of which can be motivated by considerations of politeness, result in a higher activation in the brain network associated with Theory of Mind.

5.   Conclusions and future directions

When I opened this article, I asked the following question: *What is indirectness?* To answer it, I put forward the idea that two types of notions should be distinguished in the literature: binary definitions, on the one hand, and a graded notion, on the other hand. In doing so, I reduced the complexity of the picture drawn by authors such as Grainger and Mills (2016: 34–35), while acknowledging the substantial body of cross-cultural pragmatic studies on (in)directness across different languages and varieties of languages. I also pointed to the theoretical difficulties encountered by the hypothesis of a continuum of (in)directness. I believe that the terminological clarification and the discussion of available definitions offered in this article will "support, guide, but also challenge the interpretation of psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic studies on indirectness" (Boux et al. 2023: 22). This research will make it possible to test a higher number of predictions depending on the theoretical background one assumes. For instance, I expect the processing effort for different SA interpretations — and the likelihood that an ISA will be primary or secondary — to be shaped by a combination of parameters including, among others, conventionality of means, standardization, and salience of illocutionary meaning. Following the impulse of the neurolinguistic and psycholinguistic studies carried out in the last decade, more recent experimental studies involving psychophysiological methods are needed to document the brain activity and the cognitive and emotional correlates of various forms of indirectness (Tomasello 2023), while remaining aware that speakers' motivation for using indirectness may very well influence how their utterances are perceived and processed. I hope that, complemented by a systematic consideration of the socio-cultural variables influencing SA comprehension, the notions and approaches discussed in this article will pave the way for more studies on SA interpretation in general, and on indirectness in particular both in specific world's languages and as part of cross-cultural comparative research.

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