

ESF Humanities Exploratory Workshop

## "Towards Experimental Pragmatics"

*Lyon, France, 17-19 May 2001*

**Convenors: Dr. Ira Noveck and Professor Dan Sperber**

### **Executive summary**

The objective of the workshop was to facilitate the emergence of a new field called Experimental Pragmatics. This field brings together the theoretical perspectives offered by linguistics and the rigorous methodology of experimental psychology. The focus of the workshop was on defining major theoretical issues in pragmatics the experimental investigation of which seems particularly promising, both from a linguistic and a psychological point of view. Which theoretical claims can be experimentally tested with profit is not obvious. Drawing theoretical conclusions from experiments requires studied caution. Thus, it is advisable for both theorists and experimentalists to agree on a set of goals, or at least to have a mutual understanding of their potential contributions to this new field.

The talks and the ensuing discussions could be broken down into 5 main areas:

- 1) How effort affects pragmatic processing: It is assumed by Gricean pragmatics, neo-Gricean theory or by relevance theory that speakers are expected to spare unnecessary effort to their listeners, and that this expectation plays a role in comprehension. Studies in Experimental Pragmatics can be especially useful for analyzing and measuring effort in comprehension, either through reading times or other latency measures, and to finetune theoretical approaches that invoke a notion of effort. Children are particularly interesting with respect to effort because the same task, pragmatic or otherwise, usually becomes easier with age. The following papers addressed these issues:

**Bezuidenhout**, *Implicature, relevance and default pragmatic inferences*

**Guasti**, *Experimental studies on scalar implicatures in children and adults*

**Noveck**, *How experimentation can help characterize implicatures*

**Reboul** *Letting pragmatics out of the linguistic bag: the case of Koenig's puzzle*

**Sanford** *The Experimental Pragmatics of denial: perspective and reference in negative environments*

- 2) The role of literal meaning: According to Grice (and to classical rhetorics), literal meaning is computed and considered first, and non-literal meanings are considered only if literal meaning fails to meet listeners' expectations. According to other approaches (Gibbs, Recanati, Sperber and Wilson), listeners pay no particular attention to literal meaning and compute directly the speaker's intended meaning, whether it is literal or not. These contrasting views have different testable implications:

**B. Clark**, *Processing Effort and Weak Implicature: Towards An Experimental Methodology*

**Gibbs**, *Pragmatics in interpreting what speakers say and implicate*

- 3) To what extent do the analytic categories of pragmatics correspond to distinctions that hearers-listeners themselves make? Are the contrasts literal/nonliteral, sentence meaning/speaker's meaning, explicit/implicit recognized by hearers-listeners? What role, if any, do they play in utterance interpretation?

**Giora** Freedom of mind: You can't put a salient meaning down

**Glucksberg**, On the fate(s) of literal meanings

**Coulson**, Semantic Leaps: Conceptual Blending and the Literal/Nonliteral Distinction

- 4) It has often been noted that participants' performance in experimental tasks (for instance in the psychology of reasoning, or of categorization) is in part to be explained by pragmatic factors. Too often, this is tantamount to leaving as unexplained an even more untested residue. It seems highly desirable, rather, to identify and separate these pragmatic factors, to test their effects, and thereby to both improve the interpretation of standard experiments and to finetune pragmatic hypotheses.

**Bernicot** *Brain injury and pragmatics: conversational abilities in adolescents with frontal lobe damage*

**Handley & Feeney** *Reasoning and pragmatics: The case of EVEN-IF*

**Politzer**, *Reasoning, judgment, and pragmatics*

- 5) How is the context determined? Many researchers in pragmatics (in particular Clark and colleagues) adopt a "mutual knowledge" hypothesis according to which the context of comprehension is limited to assumptions shared by the interlocutors, and known by them to be shared, and known by them to be known to be shared, etc. Other theorists (Sperber and Wilson) are skeptical that mutual knowledge is necessary or even possible.

**H. Clark** *Speaking commitments*

**Sperber & Van der Henst** *Some experimentally testable implications of relevance theory*

The presence of several prominent linguists and psychologists facilitated the in-depth discussions. Specifically, people like Dick Carter, Robyn Carston, Vittorio Girotto, Professor Ekkehard Koenig (ESF), Stephen C. Levinson, Jacques Moeschler, Francois Recanati, Johan van der Auwera, and Deirdre Wilson led to lengthy discussions and even some unanticipated reconciliations.

*Ira Noveck*

**Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)**

**EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP**

**“Towards Experimental Pragmatics”**



**Lyon, France**

**17-19 May 2001**

***Convenors: I. Noveck<sup>#</sup> and D. Sperber\****

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The European Science Foundation (ESF) acts as a catalyst for the development of science by bringing together leading scientists and funding agencies to debate, plan and implement pan-European scientific and science policy initiatives.

ESF is the European association of 70 major national funding agencies devoted to scientific research in 27 countries. It represents all scientific disciplines: physical and engineering sciences, life and environmental sciences, medical sciences, humanities and social sciences. The Foundation assists its Member Organisations in two main ways: by bringing scientists together in its scientific programmes, networks, exploratory workshops and European research conferences, to work on topics of common concern; and through the joint study of issues of strategic importance in European science policy.

It maintains close relations with other scientific institutions within and outside Europe. By its activities, the ESF adds value by cooperation and coordination across national frontiers and endeavours, offers expert scientific advice on strategic issues, and provides the European forum for science.

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European Science Foundation - SCH<sup>1</sup> Exploratory Workshop:  
**Towards experimental pragmatics**  
Lyon, France, 17-19 May 2001

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**Objectives:**

We believe that we are now witnessing the emergence of a new field, *Experimental Pragmatics*, where the theoretical perspectives offered by linguistics and the rigorous methodology of experimental psychology are being brought together. The workshop aims to contribute to this emergence. The focus of the workshop will be on defining major theoretical issues in pragmatics, the experimental investigation of which seems particularly promising both from a linguistic and a psychological point of view.

Which theoretical claims can be experimentally tested with profit is not obvious. Drawing theoretical conclusions from experiments requires studied caution. Thus, it is advisable for both theorists and experimentalists to agree on a set of goals, or at least to have a mutual understanding of their potential contributions to this new field. This is what we hope the workshop will help achieve.

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<sup>1</sup> ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities - Web site: <http://www.esf.org/sch>



## ESF/SCH Objectives:

The main tasks of the **ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)** are:

- to encourage interdisciplinary work through the independent evaluation of collaborative research proposals emanating from the scholarly community;
- to identify priority research areas and to play an integrative and co-ordinating role by creating links between research communities which in the Humanities are often small and fragmented.
- to contribute to the development of the ESF science policy agenda and to provide expert advice on science policy actions at the European level in the field of its responsibilities.

The Committee is well aware that the ESF is the only European Agency where the Humanities have a place next to the other sciences and where European projects are reviewed, developed and subsequently operated.

The Committee considers it all the more important to be heard as the voice of the Human Sciences in Europe and to continue pleading for a more prominent place for the Humanities in the European landscape.

**Exploratory workshops** are viewed by ESF Standing Committees as a useful instrument for identifying emerging fields requiring action at a European level. Exploratory Workshops are aimed at helping European research teams to exchange knowledge, establish new links and to explore the possibilities of developing future collaborative actions.

One outcome of an ESF Exploratory Workshop may be that participants decide to submit a proposal for an ESF scientific **Programme, Network or Euroconference**, possibly to be financed by, and coordinated through, the European Science Foundation. If this is the case, it is expected that participants of the workshop follow the relevant procedures.

In the case of **Programmes** (“à la carte” or EUROCORES), a draft proposal should be submitted to the SCH Secretariat for advice, to then subsequently undergo further external refereeing. If successful in obtaining SCH's scientific recommendation, the proposal will be submitted to ESF Member Organisations for funding on a voluntary basis. More details are available at [www.esf.org/sch](http://www.esf.org/sch).

In the case of a **Network** the proposal is submitted to the ESF Network Secretariat. The results of the refereeing process and SCH's scientific recommendations are provided to the Network Group. This is the body that decides whether or not to recommend a proposal for launching. More details are available at [www.esf.org/networks](http://www.esf.org/networks).

In the case of **Euroconferences**, the proposal is submitted to the ESF Euresco Secretariat. A Committee (assisted by Advisory Panels) takes full responsibility for the selection of conference subjects and chairmen. More details are available at [www.esf.org/euresco](http://www.esf.org/euresco).



## **PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME**

### **Thursday 17 May 2001**

- 12h20 - 13h50      *Lunch*
- **Welcome**
  - **ESF/SCH Presentation** (*E. Koenig*)
  - **Introduction**
- 13h50 - 14h40      **TBA ?**  
*Stephen C. Levinson*
- 14h40 - 15h20      **Implicature, relevance and default pragmatic inferences**  
*Anne Bezuidenhout*
- 15h20 - 15h40      *Break*
- 15h40 - 16h30      **Experimental studies on scalar implicatures in children and adults**  
*Teresa Guasti*
- 16h30 - 17h20      **Brain injury and pragmatics: conversational abilities in adolescents with frontal lobe damage**  
*Josie Bernicot*
- Evening              *Dinner at the "Restaurant Daniel Ancel"*

### **Friday 18 May 2001**

- 09h30 - 10h20      **Some experimentally testable implications of relevance theory**  
*Dan Sperber & Jean-Baptiste van der Henst*
- 10h20 - 11h10      **Reasoning, judgement and pragmatics**  
*Guy Politzer*
- 11h10 - 11h30      *Break*
- 11h30 - 12h20      **Processing effort and weak implicature: towards an experimental methodology**  
*Billy Clark*
- 12h20 - 13h50      *Lunch*



**Friday 18 May 2001** (continued)

- 13h50 - 14h40      **On the fate(s) of literal meanings**  
*Sam Glucksberg*
- 14h40 - 15h20      **Semantic leaps: Conceptual blending and the  
literal/non-literal distinction**  
*Seana Coulson*
- 15h20 - 15h40      *Break*
- 15h40 - 16h30      **Pragmatics in interpreting what speakers say  
and implicate**  
*Ray Gibbs*
- 16h30 - 17h20      **Freedom of mind: you can't put a salient meaning  
down**  
*Rachel Giora*
- Evening              *Dinner at the "Restaurant Les Muses de l'Opéra"*

**Saturday 19 May 2001**

- 09h30 - 10h20      **Speaking commitments**  
*Herbert H. Clark*
- 10h20 - 11h10      **The experimental pragmatics of denial:  
perspective and reference in negative  
environments**  
*Tony Sanford*
- 11h10 - 11h30      *Break*
- 11h30 - 12h20      **Reasoning and pragmatics: the case of EVEN-IF**  
*Simon J. Handley & Aidan Feeley*
- 12h20 - 13h50      *Lunch*
- 13h50 - 14h40      **How experimentation can help characterise  
implicatures**  
*Ira Noveck*
- 14h40 - 15h20      **How are implicatures actually computed ?**  
*Gennaro Chierchia*
- 15h20 - 15h40      *Break*
- 15h40 - 16h30      **Letting pragmatics out of the linguistic bag: the  
case of Koenig's puzzle**  
*Anne Reboul*
- 16h30                **Meeting Closes**
- Evening              *Dinner at the "Restaurant La Voute"*





## Final List of Participants

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