

‘Is that your coat on the floor?’
Agency and autonomy in indirection
(Dr Rebecca Clift, University of Essex)

Why might a parent say to a child ‘Is that your coat on the floor?’ as a means of getting them to pick it up, rather than using a directive, ‘Pick up your coat’?

Work on indirect utterances has focused exclusively on what the *speaker* is assumed to gain from indirectness. In contrast, this talk uses insights and data – both audio- and video-recorded – from Conversation Analysis (CA) to illuminate observable *recipient* conduct as a means of identifying the interactional motivations for a speaker to be indirect. Central to the analysis is the observation that recipients do work of various kinds to exert agency in response; to establish that what they are doing has a degree of autonomy, rather than being purely acquiescent in response to a prior turn. It turns out that linguistic mechanisms deployed in the pursuit of autonomy figure centrally in this empirically-grounded account of indirectness.