The Principle of Indirect Means in language use and language structure

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Abstract

The study proposes that in some languages, there exists a principle according to which indirect rather than direct means of expression are used whenever the goals of speech involve certain functional domains. We call this the Principle of Indirect Means. Direct means are those that grammatically or lexically encode a given function without dependence on contextual knowledge. Indirect means are those that although they code function A within the grammatical system of the language, are deployed for the coding of function B. The principle allows us to provide a unified explanation for certain phenomena in language use and language structure that in the past received unrelated explanations.

The Principle of Indirect Means, a principle of language use, exerts a powerful force on language change. It creates a major motivation for grammaticalization and results in a richness of means of expression in the domains to which it applies. The Principle of Indirect Means is also a major motivation for the creation of metaphors. The present study defines the principle, provides the evidence for its existence, and describes the implication of the principle for language use, language structure, and language change. The study also posits several typological questions. The argumentation in this study is based on cross-linguistic data.

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1. The aim and the scope of the paper

The aim of the paper is to propose the existence in some languages of a principle that underlies language use by adults, the Principle of Indirect Means. The principle states that whenever the goals of speech involve certain functional domains, indirect rather than direct means are to be used. The domains to which indirect means apply vary from culture to culture and may, in the case of multilingual speakers, be independent of the language the speakers use.

The linguistic phenomena studied under the designation of indirectness are varied, and the literature produced by these studies is quite abundant. Most of these studies were subsumed by studies of politeness. As is shown in the present study, there is abundant evidence that indirect means of expression, although used to code politeness, are also used in functions unrelated to politeness. Therefore, the use of indirect means of expression cannot be motivated solely by politeness, although politeness may be one of the outcomes of the application of the Principle of Indirect Means. We have not been able to find any other external motivation for the existence of indirect means, and therefore we propose that in some languages the Principle of Indirect Means is the motivation for the choice of forms of expression among adults. The present study presents the formulation of the principle, the evidence for its existence, and the implications of the principle for language use, language structure, and language change. We also demonstrate that the Principle of Indirect Means is one of the motivations for the emergence of metaphors across languages.

The study is organized as follows: In the first part we provide a systemically based definition of direct and indirect means of expression. We establish the concepts of direct means and indirect means with reference to the notion of functional domains put forward in Frązyngier and Mycielski (1998).

We then discuss the domains to which the Principle of Indirect Means applies. These domains vary across cultures and languages, but there exist strong cross-linguistic tendencies that can be observed (Tammen, 1981). This study demonstrates that the Principle of Indirect Means explains various language-use phenomena in the following domains: first- and second-person interactions (Brown and Levinson, 1987), which include forms of address and deontic modality; choice of forms in wh-questions; forms of coding of epistemic modality; taboo vocabulary; and metaphors.

Additionally we demonstrate that the Principle of Indirect Means operates in different domains in different varieties of speech. We have chosen as an exemplar the operation of the principle in Western literary styles and styles not affected by the literary norm.

The most important piece of evidence for the existence of the Principle of Indirect Means is provided by its operation when none of the usual motivations for indirectness is present. In some cultures the indirect means is used when no interpersonal relations, taboo, or politeness are at play. In such cultures indirectness may become a preferred style of speech. By comparing the use of metaphors (which, we argue, are instances of indirect means) in the speech of four social groups speaking three languages, we show that the ubiquitous use of indirectness, as opposed to its use for specific semantic functions, is associated with the speech of literate cultures. We examine the speech of English literate speakers, the speech of Polish literate speakers, the speech of Polish illiterate speakers, and that of speakers of Lele, an East Chadic language with no written tradition.
Finally, we examine the effects of the Principle of Indirect Means on language change. We use evidence from English to demonstrate how the Principle of Indirect Means can drive the process of grammaticalization.

The importance of the Principle of Indirect Means is that it provides a powerful motivation for language change in all of these domains: once an indirect means becomes a direct means, it must be replaced by another means, one that is considered to be less direct for a given situation. Thus there is a constant cycle of replacement as new means are sought. As a result of this cycle, certain functional domains, such as deontic modality, forms of address, and taboo, are coded by very rich systems of expressions, as opposed to those domains to which the Principle of Indirect Means does not apply. The principle thus explains the abundance of coding means, structural ‘bulges’, in various parts of the grammatical systems of the languages in which the principle operates.

2. Previous studies of indirectness

The notion of indirectness has played an important part in the study of speech acts ever since Austin (1962) where certain speech acts were considered direct and others indirect (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1975; Searle, 1975; Morgan, 1979; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, Lakoff, 1995 and references there). The motivation for the use of indirect speech acts was sought in the politeness requirements in a given culture.

Perhaps the most widely recognized definition of indirect speech acts is that formulated by Searle (1975). Searle addresses ‘cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another’ (60), or instances where ‘a sentence that contains the illocutionary force indicators of one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, in addition, another type of illocutionary act’ (59). Crucially, each of these formulations makes reference to an illocutionary act and appears to be operating at the level of a speech act rather than at the level of an individual linguistic construction.

By defining indirectness in terms of functional domains, we gain two things over a definition based on speech acts. First, we make more precise the notion of what Searle presumably means by ‘force indicators’. Sentence types, linguistic constructions, and lexical items are among the linguistic means available to speakers, and we will show that each may be used as direct means for one function and indirect means for another. Second, and more significantly, our definition provides a precise definition of what the indirect means of expression are. Our study also opens the purview of domains to which indirect means can apply. As we shall illustrate in Section 4, indirectness spans a greater range of functional domains across languages than has previously been discussed.

We consider valid the motivation for the deployment of indirect speech acts as provided by Austin (1962), Grice (1975), and Searle (1975). Any speech act, whether direct or indirect, may comprise a number of language forms that include constructions and lexical items. An indirect speech act is an act that purports to have one goal but actually aims to achieve another goal. Thus, a negotiation in bad faith whose aim is to provoke the adversary is an indirect speech act, regardless of what specific linguistic means code it. Very simply, speech acts may have in their scope whole conversations, whereas indirect means have in their scope the specific linguistic forms deployed. Opening conversational moves by certain strangers, such
as ‘Do you have a match?’ or ‘Do you have a cigarette?’ (asked by would-be muggers in Amsterdam, Holland) and ‘Do you have cigarettes?’ (asked by prostitutes in many countries), are indirect speech acts that have a purpose other than to obtain an answer to the question asked. These indirect speech acts use direct means of expression. Speech act theory at present does not distinguish between indirect means of expression and indirect speech acts. This distinction allows us to better understand the use of language in conversations.

By providing a linguistic definition of indirectness, we can explain the choice of linguistic forms that are the basis of research in discourse pragmatics as postulated by Grice (1975), Searle (1975), Tannen (1981, 1994), and Brown and Levinson (1987).

Whether every culture and every language make use of indirect means, and in what domains those choices are made, are empirical questions to be answered through examination of natural discourse in particular languages. Even within languages and cultures for which data are available, the domains to which the indirect means are applied vary from one social group to another.

Wierzbicka (1991) suggests “that the whole distinction between “direct” and “indirect” speech acts should be abandoned—at least until some clear definition of these terms is provided; and also, that the distinction between “direct” and “indirect” ways of speaking in general should be abandoned, and that the different phenomena associated with these labels should be individually examined.” (88). We do provide a linguistic definition of indirect means of expression, and we see no reason to abandon a principle that allows us to explain language use across different cultures and languages.

3. Definitions

3.1. The notion of functional domain

A functional domain is a set of semantic or pragmatic categories coded in the grammatical or lexical structure of a given language. Every member of a functional domain shares at least one semantic feature with all other members of the domain. Functional domains include such traditionally recognized categories as modality, aspect, tense, and number. Relations between verbs and arguments and between nouns, if coded by the grammatical system, are likewise considered functional domains. A functional domain may include sub-domains. Every member of a sub-domain shares at least one feature with all members of the domain and in addition at least one semantic feature with all members of the sub-domain. This additional feature is not shared with members of other sub-domains.

After Frajzyngier and Mycielski (1998), functional domains in a specific language are definable as follows:

(a) A domain $D$ is defined by a class of mutually exclusive types of expressions constructed by a set of specific means of coding $M(D)$.

(b) The types of expressions within domain $D$ have a specific semantic function in common.

(c) A domain $D$ is a class of types of expressions with a certain set of meanings $D^*$ such that $D^*$ is disjoint with $E^*$ for any domain $E \neq D$ of the same language.
Thus, the crucial component of a functional domain is a pervasive function and formal means to code this function.

For example, the domain of future tense in English (D) can be encoded by any means (M) from a class of mutually exclusive means that encode the future M(D): will + infinitive, be going to + infinitive, be about to + infinitive, etc. (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1990: 57).

3.2. The notion of direct means

A form is the direct means of encoding a functional domain if that functional domain is invoked explicitly, by virtue of using the form alone and without reference to the context of an utterance. It may be claimed that in natural language use there is never a situation when an utterance is interpreted out of context, and therefore there is no possibility of testing the hypothesis about the existence of the direct means. Nevertheless, the uses of language as a game and as an art provide ample evidence that indeed, linguistic forms, including linguistic constructions, have a meaning in isolation, out of context. Consider the first stanza of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky," a blend of perfectly grammatical forms with nonsensical lexical items completely out of any context:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

This stanza is meaningful in the sense that it describes an event, the relative time of the event, and the actions of participants in event. The only problem is that the reader does not know what the event was and who or what the participants in the event were. In a way, an interpretation of this stanza is not different from an interpretation of a text in a science that we have not yet studied, or from reading or hearing a report from a sports game that we do not understand, for example, cricket for many Americans, American football and baseball for many Europeans. For the understanding of such a text we need definitions of terms, but we do not need a grammar book to decode the text. This is also the case when we study chemistry, physics, physiology, or linguistics, provided that the text is written in a language we know.

Now that we have shown that an utterance can be interpreted in isolation, we can illustrate the direct means of encoding a functional domain. The direct means to make a request in English is the imperative form:

'Stop worrying about it, just make it up!' (a spontaneous reaction to a question)

The use of the imperative form to make a request is actually quite restricted to certain social groups and social situations (the military, some schools, traffic instructions). It is used frequently when the interpretation as an order is actually ruled out, e.g., in a recipe from the London-Lund corpus:
3.3. The notion of indirect means

Indirect means, on the other hand, are those means that are deployed for the expression of a given functional domain, but that grammatically or lexically are direct means of some other domain. Consider the following fragment from a cooking instruction session, where instead of the straight imperative, the speaker uses the auxiliary ‘can’:

The indicative mood in English is a direct means to code assertion. Specific interrogative clauses code questions about one of the participants or the circumstance of an event. But specific interrogative clauses can also be used to code assertion:

(2) ‘Who says girls can’t keep secrets?’ (Kathleen Parker’s column, Daily Camera (Boulder), April 13, 2003).

The above sentence does not ask a question but rather is an indirect means of making the assertion ‘Girls can keep secrets.’

In plain English, the definition of the term Principle of Indirect Means is that if for a given semantic or pragmatic function, form A codes this function, do not use form A to express the function coded by form A.

3.4. The notion of coding means

The coding means are all the means that a given language uses to code meaning and pragmatic functions. The coding means are comprised of the phonological means, including the prosodic means, such as tone, intonation, stress, and vowel length, and the various phonological processes, such as gemination and vowel reduction. The coding means also include the lexicon with content and grammatical morphemes, inflectional and derivational morphology, and the linear order of morphemes.
In order to provide evidence for the existence of the Principle of Indirect Means we examine some of the domains to which the principle applies. In each case we state explicitly why a given fact should be considered part of the evidence for the proposed hypothesis.

3.5. Advantages of the proposed definitions

By providing a formal and functional definition of direct and indirect means, we are allowing for the description of direct and indirect ways of speaking in various unrelated languages. The use of indirect means is a characteristic of a culture, not of a language, although languages do display the effects of extensive and prolonged applications of the Principle of Indirect Means. In this way, the study of language provides a window into the study of culture. This window has, however, one shortcoming. It does not recognize the diachrony of the observed linguistic effects. Some effects may be products of ongoing processes, and other effects may be products of processes long dead. The standard methods of linguistic reconstruction, combined with the continuing observation of the culture, will provide the answer as to which linguistic characteristic is a product of old processes and which characteristic is the product of ongoing processes.

Our definition allows us to describe indirectness with much greater effectiveness than heretofore in individual languages and may provide a useful tool for cross-linguistic comparisons. When we do observe the use of indirectness in various individual languages, some fascinating patterns emerge.

4. Domains of Indirect Means

Out of many possible domains where the Principle of Indirect Means applies we have selected for our discussion the following: personal pronouns; forms of address and forms of reference to people; questions in the personal domain; forms of assertion; deontic modality; and taboo vocabulary.

4.1. Pronouns

4.1.1. The importance of pronouns

Pronouns across languages involve interaction between the speaker, the addressee, and potentially a third participant in the discourse. As such, according to our hypothesis, they could be subject of the Principle of Indirect Means first with respect to the first- and second-person reference, and then with respect to the third-person reference. The reason the first- and second-person reference could be subject to the Principle of Indirect Means is that these are primarily involved in the speaker-hearer interaction. The evidence for the existence of the Principle of Indirect Means is (1) the existence of more than one form of reference for the speaker, the hearer, and the third person; (2) the use of a given term of reference with respect to persons other than those allowed paradigmatically; and (3) a historical instability of the terms of reference. The evidence against the Principle of Indirect Means would be if (a) the system of reference had only one form for each person,
number, or gender; (b) if each term within the system of reference were used only for the person, number, and gender that it codes paradigmatically, e.g., if the second-person pronoun referred always and only to the second person, and the third-person pronoun referred only to the third person; and (c) if the terms of reference were historically very stable. The logic behind these conditions is as follows: If there were more than one form for a given person, number, or gender, that might indicate that one form came to replace another. If a form could refer to a person other than that of its place in the paradigm, it would mean that for some reason the paradigmatic form for a given person was not used. If pronouns were historically unstable, one of the reasons, perhaps the major one, would be that over time, each pronoun was conceived as a direct means, and was replaced by another, less direct form. As we shall see below, there are languages where the evidence is overwhelmingly in support of the Principle of Indirect Means.

4.1.2. Synchronic evidence regarding pronouns

In contemporary English usage one can observe an effort, sometimes jocular, sometimes not, to avoid the use of the first-person singular pronoun ‘I’, which paradigmatically is the direct form of reference to the first person. This avoidance has different forms in different styles of speech.

One of the means of avoiding ‘I’ is to replace it with the form ‘one’, which codes an unspecified group of people that paradigmatically includes the speaker. The other means is to replace it with the paradigmatic second-person pronoun ‘you’, which in its usage may code all potential participants in the event. The use of both of these forms in reference to the first person is illustrated by the following fragment (the relevant markers are in boldface):

“The attention that had been brought on one ever since one was a child, you just didn’t want any more. The last thing you needed was greater access.” (Princess Anne’s interview for the BBC, 2002)

The use of ‘one’ and ‘you’ as a reference to the first person is made possible by the fact that both of these pronouns refer to unspecified humans that may include the speaker, as evidenced in the following commentary on a cricket game (we retain the phonetic notation of the London-Lund corpus):

10 1 32 6080 1 1 y 11 and ^if one !keeps !how#
10 1 32 6090 1 1 y 11 and ^((comes)) through a bit !quVickish#
10 1 32 6100 1 1 y 11 if you’re ^on the back foot#
10 1 32 6110 1 1 y 11 you’ve got to be ^awful qu’ick#.
10 1 32 6120 1 1 y 11 to ^come !dow on it#
10 1 32 6130 1 1 y 11 but [@] ^if you’re on the !fron foot#.
10 1 32 6140 1 1 y 11 of ^cOURSE#.
10 1 32 6150 1 1 y 11 you’ve ^got [@] every {ch’ance} of !play ing it# (LLC)

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\(^1\) We are grateful to Greville Corbett for drawing our attention to the use of the form ‘one’ in Princess Anne’s speeches.
The first-person plural pronoun in English is sometimes used as reference to the second person, especially when the speaker wants to ingratiate himself with an addressee who is somewhat unhappy or not in a favorable physical or psychological condition, for example: “Are we hungry?” “Are we happy?” “Are we sad?” This use of the first-person plural was exploited for comical effects in the following exchange between two characters from the film “Blazing Saddles”:

(3)  
- Are we awake?
- Are we black?
  -Yes we are.
  -Then we are awake.

In contemporary French, several pronouns carry functions other than their paradigmatic functions. Thus, the first-person singular can be used in reference to the addressee and to the third person:

(4)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Est-ce-que j'aime toujours les bonbons?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q 1sg:like still  art candy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Do you still like the candy?’ (a mother talking to a child with appropriate intonation indicating that je really means tu (Grevisse, 1991: 1001))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar pronominal transfers in conversations with children also exist in Polish.

The first-person plural is systematically used in French scientific writing instead of the first-person singular. In English scientific writing such usage is sporadic.

The second-person plural in French is used with respect to a singular addressee when the speaker and the addressee for whatever reason have not shifted to the second-person singular. This ‘polite usage’ represents the indirect means, because the paradigmatic form for the singular addressee is the form tu. In Russian the second-person plural is used among people who are not on familiar terms. Similarly in German, the third-person plural is used with respect to the singular addressee with whom the speaker is not very familiar. The explanation for those well-known facts is that the paradigmatic form for the addressee, the second-person singular pronoun, the direct form of address, is replaced by a paradigmatic form coding a different person or number, or both.

Unlike the English ‘one’, the French equivalent on can be used with respect to the first, second, and third person, singular and plural (Grevisse, 1991: 1140).

In some languages, e.g., Mapun (West Chadic, Frajzyngier, 1993), Polish, and Hungarian, one cannot use the third-person singular pronoun, masculine, feminine, or plural, in reference to persons present at the conversation. Instead some other, indirect form of reference must be used, such as a proper name, title, or kinship term. Here is an example from Polish. Polish has grammaticalized the form Pan ‘sir’ and its feminine and plural equivalents to be used instead of the third-person pronouns, whose use in the conversation with the third person is not allowed by the social norms:

(5)  
ślusnie, Leon ale tyś często mówię o Panu.
right Leon but 2sg:2sg often say:3sg about Sir
jeszcze niedawno temu powiedziałeś, że przyjazd Pana
still not long ago say:2SG:GEN COMP arrival Sir:GEN
murowany i że to by cię urządziło .. więc to tak.
sure COMP DEM HYP 2SG arrange SO DEM thus
‘Right. Leon, you have often talked about him. Quite recently you said that
his arrival would suit you fine.’ (Polish sources)

Until recent times in some Polish families, the second-person singular pronoun and
indeed the second-person subject coding on the verb was disallowed when children were
addressing members of the older generation, such as parents, uncles, or aunts. Instead of the
pronoun, i.e., the direct form of address, the appropriate kinship term was used, and the
verb was coded for the third-person singular masculine or feminine. The following
exchange is cited with the answer of the addressee to provide the evidence that indeed the
addressee has been addressed as the third-person singular:

(6) zresztą, czy ojciec jest pewien, że to to było akurat..
anyhow q father be:SG sure:MSG COMP DEM DEM be exactly
‘Anyhow, father, are you sure, that it was exactly . . .’

czy jestem pewien.
q be:1SG:G DEM sure:MSG
‘Am I sure?’ (Polish sources)

Even the older generation may avoid the use of the second-person singular pronoun when
addressing a younger kin:

(7) a czy Kasia musi się bawić czym chce i jak
CONJ q Kasia must refl. play what:INSTR want CONJ how
chce.
want
‘And must Kasia play with what she wants and how she wants?’

ależ, wujku
but uncle:voc
‘But Uncle!’ (Polish sources)

4.1.3. Historical evidence of pronoun replacement

The evidence that pronouns constitute direct means of expression in some languages is
provided by the fact that they are constantly renewed in languages from different families.
The renewal is a consequence of pronouns being perceived as direct means of expression
rather than of any other property of pronouns.

In English the second-person singular ‘thou’ (the digraph ‘th’ represents the ‘thorn’ and
its variants; cf. Hogg, 1992) was replaced by the second-person plural ‘you’.

In Spanish the second-person pronoun was replaced by the forms usted and ustedes,
which come from the expression vuestra merced.

In some languages, the forms coding the third-person singular pronoun come from the noun
‘man’ (cf. Heine and Kuteva, 2002: 208; Frajzyngier, 1993). This fact is important because it
indicates that either there was no third-person pronoun in such languages, or that the third-person pronoun, if there ever was one, was replaced by a form derived from the noun ‘man’.

4.2. Forms of address

The second-person singular pronoun and/or the first name are the most direct means of address existing within the grammatical system of a language. If a language uses both forms as the form of address, the use of the second-person singular is more direct than the use of the proper name. In some cultures, the use of the second-person singular is not allowed, and instead another form must be used. In addition to the historical development in English, consider the case of Riau Indonesian, where the proper name is used instead of the second person (cf. Gil, 1994). In some cultures, the use of the second-person singular pronoun and/or the first name is restricted to close friends and family members (German and Polish across the spectrum of its speakers, French with interesting variations depending on the age of speakers). In languages with severe social constraints on the use of the pronouns, the passage from the formal to the first-name form of address must be accompanied by an explicit agreement to do so, sometimes along with a small ritual affirming the change.

In cultures with severe restrictions on the use of direct means of address, the indirect means of address are used. In German the indirect means is the third-person plural form Sie. In Polish there is an elaborate system of address involving the forms Pan, Pani, Panowie, Panie (the writing system attempts to underscore the function of the forms by spelling them with capital letters). The literal translations in a different context could be rendered as Sir, Madam, Gentlemen, and Ladies. These forms are declined like pronouns, and their syntax resembles that of pronouns. They differ from pronouns only in being the indirect forms of address and reference:

(8) Radę Pani postawić psa w pokoju
advise:1SG:IMPRES Madam leave dog in peace
‘I suggest you (f) leave the dog in peace.’

Ale nie wyjdzie, dopóki Pani tu jest.
but NEG leave:3SG:FUL as long Madam here be:3SG:IMPRES
‘But he/she will not leave, as long as you (f) are here.’

Panie profesorze, powinię pan natychmiast
sir professor should:MSG sir immediately
przyjechać do szpitala
arrive to hospital
‘Professor, you should immediately come to the hospital!’

W Sejmie jest Pan członkiem Komisji
in Sejm be:3SG:IMPRES Sir member:INSTR committee
Spraw Wewnętrznych
matters:GEN internal:GEN
‘In Sejm [Polish parliament] you (m) are a member of the Internal Affairs Committee’.
czy był razem z Panem, czy pozostał jeszcze tutaj
‘Was he together with you, and did he remain here longer?’ (Korpus Tekstów PWN, glosses and translations ours)

In some cultures there is a prohibition against the use of the names of family members by some specific people. For example, in the Hlonipha system widespread in many Southern Bantu languages, a woman may not use any syllables that are part of the names of her in-laws (Finlayson, 1981). A bride must replace entire words to avoid the pronunciation of the prohibited syllables.

In Russian, one of the indirect forms of address is the use of first name followed by a patronymic. One can address anybody by his or her first name and patronymic, but the use of the first name alone is a direct form. Its use by non-authorized persons is considered very impolite. In many Chadic languages, it is not polite to use the person’s name when addressing someone. Instead one addresses the person by a form that contains the name of his or her child if there is one, or his or her father if the person does not have children. Thus, instead of saying X, one would say “father of Y” or “son of Z.” In Arabic, a person may be addressed by a form corresponding to “father of [name of oldest child]” or “mother of [oldest child].” Someone without children is addressed by a form corresponding to “son of [father].” This is probably the motivation of the multitude of proper names in Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic with such components as Ben (Hebrew), Bar (Aramaic), and Ibn (Arabic) all meaning ‘son’ and Abba (Hebrew), Abu (Arabic) meaning ‘father’. It is likely that a similar motivation and a similar process were present in western Indo-European languages. Formations of the type “X’s son” and “X’s daughter” are frequent among contemporary last names in Scandinavian languages, German, English (‘Dixon’, ‘Johnson’) and Celtic languages. The reason that this usage represents indirect means (rather than being motivated in some other way) is that in all those languages the first names actually exist. Their use, however, is restricted and the indirect means are used instead.

The motivation for the use of patronymics in Russian can be explained as another application of the Principle of Indirect Means. The first name is a direct form of address or of reference. The use of the patronymic makes for a less direct form. A first name with a patronymic is used with respect to an addressee, with respect to a third person present in the conversation, and with respect to people not present in the conversation:

Here is an example of the use of the patronymic with respect to the addressee:

(9) Nikolaj Semyonovich, pozhalujstva, voz’mite,
Nikolai Semyonovich please take:2pl.
‘Nikolai Semyonovich, please take some’

Here is an example of the use of patronymic with respect to a person not present at the conversation:
(10) i takoj est u nas odin rusist Petrov
and such:MSG be:SG at 1PL one Russian specialist Petrov
Ivan Ivanovich da?
Ivan Ivanovich [patronymic] yes
‘And so we have one Russian language specialist, Petrov. Ivan Ivanovich, don’t we?’ (Russian, Neue Texte).

In many languages, even if the proper name is used, it must be accompanied by some kind of modifier, making it less direct. Such modifiers are Mr., Mrs., Ms., Sir/Madam, Herr, Frau, Monsieur, Madame. Polish and German have the additional distinction that they use several titles in addition to the form of address with a modifier:

(11) co tu kolega professor powiedzial,
what here colleague professor say:IMPREFPAST
bo ja uwazam
because 1SG consider:1SGPREL
‘What did colleague professor say? Because I consider ...’
(http://korpus.pwn.pl/)

We can thus see that the abundance of forms of reference and forms of address in a given language is the evidence for the existence of the Principle of Indirect Means. In languages that have indirect means of reference and address for certain domains, using the direct means for these domains is not allowed unless the proper social conditions are met.

4.3. Questions in the personal domain

In many languages asking questions that pertain to the hearer’s personal domain requires the deployment of indirect means. In some languages, the hearer’s personal domain includes name and age; and in many contemporary societies also religion, social and political affiliation, sexual preference, and income. In some countries questions about national origin and native language are also considered to belong to the personal domain. Sometimes the prohibition against asking such questions is so strong that neither direct nor indirect means of asking them are allowed. Some cultures allow such questions, provided that they are formulated as questions about something else, i.e., as indirect speech acts.

In some languages, instead of a question, an affirmative statement is made with the target of the question unfulfilled. Thus, in English, the question ‘Who are you?’ is considered too direct and is often replaced by an incomplete expression with an affirmative word order and the interrogative intonation ‘You are ...’ followed by a silence, inviting the addressee to fill the gap in the clause. This is an indirect means of asking questions about someone’s name. In Polish, asking for the addressee’s name is always an awkward situation. Many years ago an expression Panie/Pani godność?’ ‘Your (m/f) dignity’ was used instead of ‘What is your name?’. Many people still prefer to ask a third party for the name of the person they have been talking to.

In American English it is not considered improper to inquire about somebody’s religion, although such questions are usually couched in a somewhat indirect way, such as ‘What
church do you go to?” under the default assumption that everybody goes to a church. In many European cultures a question about religion, even formulated in an indirect way, would be considered an intolerable invasion of privacy. In job interviews in the United States, questions about one’s family status are increasingly disallowed, among other reasons, because they may be interpreted as questions about an applicant’s sexual preferences, questions that are disallowed as well.

In some languages some verbs and some nouns in various domains may be marked for the feature [direct]. Thus some volitional verbs are more direct and others are less direct. In questions about the addressee’s wishes, less direct forms are used unless the speaker wants to appear aggressive. In German the two verbs wollen and wünschen code a realis wish and an irrealis wish (Frajzyngier and Shay, 2003). When asking somebody about his wishes, wollen is direct and therefore impolite and wünschen is indirect and therefore polite:

(12)  
_What do you want?_ (direct, hence impolite)

(13)  
_What do you want?_ (indirect, hence polite)

Polish also has two verbs corresponding to ‘want’ and ‘wish’, chcieć and życzyć sobie (potentially a calque from German). Social norms in Polish do not allow the use of the first verb when the addressee is the subject. The following content question in Polish is considered rude:

(14)  
_What do you want?_ (direct and impolite)

Polar questions with the same verb are perfectly acceptable with the addressee as the subject:

(15)  
_Do you want some milk?_ (direct and polite)

The reason why questions about the object of the verb ‘want’ as opposed to the object of the verb ‘wish’ are considered impolite is that they suggest directly that the addressee wants an object that she/he does not yet have.

4.4. Indirect means in deontic modality

Deontic modality, the domain that encompasses orders, obligations, and permissions, has been the traditional realm associated with indirect speech acts. We want to propose that the domain of deontic modality is also most susceptible to the Principle of Indirect Means. The evidence for this hypothesis consists of the following, interconnected elements: (1) the
avoidance of the direct means of coding deontic modality; (2) the richness of coding means within the domain of deontic modality as opposed to other domains, such as tense or aspect; (3) the constant renewal of the coding means within the deontic modality.

4.4.1. Avoidance of direct means in deontic modality

In the speech of English adults, in conditions other than the military, prisons, and perhaps a few other restricted environments, the use of simple imperatives is unacceptable. Even small children, 10–11 years old, consider direct orders as something inappropriate. In the London-Lund Corpus the imperative is used very seldom, and then only with respect to orders that do not really require any action on the part of the addressee. When a true order is intended, it is expressed by non-imperative forms, i.e., through the indirect means:

2_2_1 <150 (a) before you leave the premises if you’re kind enough to leave them all (London-Lund Corpus)

Direct prohibitives do occur in the London-Lund corpus, but mostly in conversations between parents and children:

2_12_0 <993 A> but I ^told my :Vather because# - .
2_12_0 <998 A> he went ber*s^erk at me# - - -
2_12_0 <999 A> he said ^how do you think I’d - elope#
2_12_0 <1000 A> if I ^lost !you#
2_12_0 <1001 A> he said ^don’t you [?]ever ((do such a thing like that)) l. (laughs) ((2 sylls)) ag/ain#

4.4.2. The richness and the renewal of forms in deontic modality

Deontic modality in English has perhaps the richest system of coding means in comparison with other domains, such as epistemic modality, interrogative modality, or tense or aspect coding means. In addition to the imperative and subjunctive moods, there are the modal auxiliaries ‘must’, ‘should’, ‘ought to’, ‘need to’, ‘has to’, ‘has got to’, ‘got to’, ‘may’, and ‘might’. There are constructions formed with the auxiliary ‘let’; constructions formed with the infinitive of the verb ‘be’, viz., ‘he is to . . . ’; and the future tense marker ‘will’, as in ‘You will . . . ’ with heavy stress on ‘will’. The question is why is there such a large number of coding means for this domain. A similar situation with respect to deontic modality obtains in some other languages, but by no means in all. How do we explain this multitude of means for one modal function? Compare this richness of means to the means of coding past tense in English. If one excludes aspectual and modal distinctions, only a few forms are available. The domain of tense is not subject to the direct/indirect means distinction. The multitude of forms available to code the mood of obligation is not due to incremental differences in meaning. Though some forms carry very subtle differences, most of the forms may be used interchangeably, that is, in exactly the same context to mean exactly the same thing or to perform exactly the same speech act. The abundance of means in this case does not reflect a penchant for compounding differences in meaning on the part of speakers. The answer must lie in the
fact that all of these means represent evidence of a rapid change. Every linguistic means in the domain of reality becomes conventionalized over time and is replaced with another means that at the time of its introduction appears to be less direct than the one it comes to replace. This cycle is repeated over and over again. The directness of a linguistic means does not follow from the sum of individual meanings of its components or the way they are arranged in the clause, but rather from the purposes for which the linguistic means is deployed.

One of these indirect means to code deontic modality is the use of the interrogative clause. Consider the following fragment from a letter to the editor:

(16) ‘Finally, if there are potential risks and limited choices for cattle management, what is being done to educate the public of the aggressive nature of seemingly docile cow(s)?’ (Open Forum. Daily Camera (Boulder), April 13, 2003)

The purpose of this question is a wish for the city authorities to inform the public about the dangers presented by aggressive cows.

An interesting argument for the proposed hypothesis about the Principle of Indirect Means is provided by languages in which the principle does not operate in the domain of deontic modality. Predictably, in such languages there are no indirect means to code deontic modality, and there should be no abundance of coding means for deontic modality. This is indeed the case in Lele (East Chadic). The imperative form of the verb is readily employed not only among peers but also among people belonging to different age and social groups. Thus one can use the imperative with respect to parents, and even to a chief, provided that the inherent meaning of the verb will not produce an impolite effect when combined with the imperative. The following imperative construction is considered polite (an unmarked tone represents mid tone):

(17) da ngù kasa ná já koloñ
    eat:IMP 2PL CORN ASSC side DEM:R
    ‘Eat the corn at the other side!’

The imperative of the verb irà ‘go’ alone is not impolite. In combination with the deictic mänjè ‘there’ the imperative of the verb irà ‘go’ is very impolite:

(18) irà ngù mänjè
    go:IMP 2PL there
    ‘Get out of here!’ (Frajzyngier, 2001)

The only other formal means to code wishes in Lele is the subjunctive form, used to express wishes with respect to the first and third person and as a modality coding permission.

Similarly, direct rather than indirect means are used in directives in Swahili (Bantu) (Podobinska, 2002).
4.5. Indirect means and assertions

In some cultures, and in some social layers of a given culture, it is the norm that adults do not make assertions that are not based on their own personal experience. Instead, there are various indirect means by which assertions, whether affirmative or negative, can be made. In Lele (East Chadic), for example, assertions not derived from personal experience are introduced by the expression meaning ‘people say’:

(19) Tùmò go kar di-nì kinyé
past time REF people GEN.PL-1PL.EXCL.COLL
kè-gè ge yàá na nè bódu ba
gen-3PL HUM say HYP COP monkey COM
gèyì-nì kur go karnda nà kùlìngò.
save-1PL.EXCL time REF WOMEN ASSC pregnancy
‘At the time of our ancestors, they say, it was the monkey who saved us at the time when women were pregnant.’ (Garrigues-Cresswell and Weibegué, 1981: 2–3 as quoted in Frajzyngier, 2001)

(20) Ore na wè-gè dà gidi-rè kólôj
goat:PL HYP give birth-3PL PREP MOON DEM.R
ni nà ge yàá na karän-do
LOC ASSC HUM tell HYP children-3F
gàn-di-gè na wèy já.
leg-GEN.PL-3PL HYP become side
‘It is said that if goats give birth in that month, their kids will have crooked legs.’ (Garrigues-Cresswell and Weibegué, 1981: 54–55, as quoted in Frajzyngier, 2001)

Likewise, English speakers make use of a variety of hedging devices such as ‘I believe’, ‘they say’, ‘apparently’. Lyons (1995) mentions that in lieu of assertion, speakers use other speech acts. Compare such expressions as ‘Honey, I think . . .’ when a parent addresses a child, or when people in a close relationship address each other. English speakers employ these devices even when they are convinced about the truth of what they say and the source of the information is their own experience. The negative assertion in English and other languages often calls for the use of indirect means (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987: 129ff). If one asks whether Mr. X is around, the answer may well be ‘I am afraid he isn’t’, when simple ‘He is not’ would do. A person asked whether he would like to join others for lunch replied, ‘I am afraid I already ate’. Thus the use of the indirect means is not motivated by uncertainty concerning the truth of the proposition, but rather by the fact that by making an unmodified assertion, affirmative or negative, the speaker violates the Principle of Indirect Means.

Another example of the application of the Principle of Indirect Means is provided by the way farmers in Northern Cameroon (and perhaps in other places too) talk about the weather. No matter how obvious are the signs of a coming rain, assertions of the type ‘it is
going to rain’ are avoided. Instead, hedging corresponding to ‘it might rain’ is used. The rain is much too important for the people to make assertions about an event over which they have no influence. Such examples demonstrate that the use of indirect means is not motivated by politeness.

4.6. Taboo

4.6.1. Introduction

The fundamental principle behind taboo vocabulary is that a given entity or process should not be mentioned by its direct name. Nevertheless, since people want to talk about such objects and events, they use indirect means to refer to entities covered by taboo. The importance of the indirect means in the taboo replacements is that, often, their use is not motivated by politeness, that is, by the interaction between the speaker and the addressee.

The domains covered by taboo vary from culture to culture, although certain patterns are widespread: the domains involving deities of all kinds, death of self, of relatives, and in many societies of chiefs and kings (West and Central Africa), serious illness that may lead to death, procreation, sex, human physiology, marital and extra-marital relations are often covered by taboo. Since taboo covers entities that are coded by nouns and verbs rather than by grammatical markers, the means of dealing with taboo is through the use of lexical items other than grammatical markers. The simplest way of providing the indirect means for taboo vocabulary is through the use of metaphors and metonymy.

Kuryłowicz (1970: 135) defines metaphor as follows: ‘A linguistic form B is a metaphor of a linguistic form A, if it is associated with A owing to the similarity of the respective referents and used to denote the referent A’ (cf. also Marouzeau, 1951). Indirect means of expression are at the heart of the process of linguistic metaphor.

If there is an object or a situation for which a language already has a specific term, this term constitutes the direct means of reference for this object or situation. If this object or situation has any importance in interpersonal relations, or if this object involves states deemed dangerous, detrimental, shameful, obscene, or embarrassing, another expression, one less direct, is deployed as reference to the object. The principles behind the choice of metaphorical expression are as follows: the situation or object A has certain characteristics that are deemed by society as belonging to one of the above classes. The term that directly refers to such situations or objects invokes in the hearer the same characteristics as the situation it describes. If there is a term that is covered by a taboo, speakers of the languages seek out another term that shares with the term covered by a taboo at least one feature, whether semantic or phonological. Thus, instead of the noun ‘God’ speakers of English may use ‘the Almighty’, stemming from attributes of the notion of God, and ‘gosh’ or ‘golly’, stemming from phonetic properties of the noun ‘God’. In either case the means of expression is indirect, and is not motivated by politeness. The need to deploy indirect means of expression motivates the existence of a very large number of metaphors in a language. Here is a very brief, cross-linguistic outline of the use of metaphors with respect to domains covered by taboos.

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\footnote{For an approach different from the one taken in the present study, cf. the now classical Lakoff and Johnson (1980). For a summary of history of studies and of contemporary approaches to metaphors, see Steinbart and Kittay (1994).}
4.6.2. Deities

In Hebrew, the name for God is not pronounced and not written down. Instead, God is represented in writing by other terms, e.g., by yhwh, which in turn is read by still other forms, e.g., as hashem ‘the name’. Even in contemporary English writing, religious Jews may refer to God as G-d, i.e., using less than complete spelling, hence indirect reference, but maintaining the initial capital letter.

In English the terms Lord and Virgin are used for Jesus and Mary. The following euphemisms for God were compiled by the authors of a document called ‘Corrupt Communication’: ga, gad, gawd, gol, golly, good God, good gracious, good grief, good Lord, goodness, goodness gracious, goodness me, good night, gosh, gracious, great Scott, od, odd (http://www.topical-bible-studies.org/21-0008.htm).

Similarly in Polish there is a variety of indirect means of reference to Jesus and Mary. e.g.: Pan Jezus ‘Lord Jesus’, Zbawiciel ‘Saviour’, Najświętsza Maria Panna ‘The most Holy Virgin Mary’, Niepokalana ‘Immaculate’, Matka Boska ‘God’s Mother’. The devil also has numerous indirect references, as in the following example where the adjective czarny ‘black one’ is used instead of ‘devil’:

(21) Woni m’eli kole Poznan’a dwom, że sé 3PL have:3PLM near Poznan’:LOC house where refl czornymu zap’isoval’i black:DAT write:3PL
‘They used to have a house near Poznan where they would serve the black one.’ [devil] (Nitsch, 1960)

4.6.3. Indirect means for death and illness

In a very large number of languages, when a reference is made to the death of a close one or of an important member of community, the death is indicated by indirect means. In many Kwa languages of Ghana, instead of saying ‘the chief has died’, expressions such as ‘the chief went to the sea’, ‘the chief went to the village’ are used.

In English the forms ‘he is not with us’, ‘he passed away’, or ‘he met his maker’ can be heard in different social strata. Cancer is sometimes referred to as ‘big C’.

In Polish, there exist a number of terms for mental illness, each motivated by a taboo that prevents mentioning the term by its own name. Here is an interesting example from a non-literate variety of Polish, where the term ptok ‘bird’ is used instead of ‘madness’:

(22) Wun zaxwerovaw. Dostow ptoka 3MS:SG become ill. get:MSG:PAST bird:ACC
‘He became ill. Went insane.’ [lit. ‘He got a bird.’] (Nitsch, 1960: 196)

A friend, talking several years ago about AIDS as a cause of somebody’s death, referred to it in French as ‘an illness that became so widespread recently’.

In several Chadic languages spoken in Cameroon and Nigeria, the verb ‘to kill’ is often taboo, even when the killing applies to animals, as in the following example from Gizi'ga (Central Chadic) where instead of the verb k overd’ ‘kill’ the verb jà ‘touch’ is used (examples from Frajzyngier’s field notes):
5. Indirect means as a preferred style of expression

The last issue to be discussed is the use of indirect means as the preferred style of expression. The importance of this issue is that on the face of it, a normal conversation that does not involve any of the domains listed above, viz. forms of address and forms of reference to people; questions in the personal domain; forms of assertion; deontic modality; and taboo vocabulary, should not be subject to the Principle of Indirect Means.

In some educated groups in Western societies, the Principle of Indirect Means extends to virtually all areas of communication, and thus indirect forms are chosen over direct forms in all domains, not only those involving interpersonal relations and taboo vocabulary. There appears to exist a correlation between a literate style of speech and indirect means. To provide evidence for this hitherto unobserved fact, we have examined the use of metaphors as a form of indirect means of expression in several varieties of speech. The importance of the use of indirect means when it is not motivated by interpersonal relations is that it shows that indirect means are more general and broader in their application than the requirements of politeness.

In what follows we analyze some of the metaphors used in the speech of university-educated speakers in the London-Lund corpus and those used in the speech of poorly educated, often illiterate, speakers of Polish from spoken texts published in Nitsch, 1960. In the London-Lund corpus we have taken the first twenty electronic pages. In the Polish dialect texts we have taken pages 195-214, all representing a variety of texts from the same dialect, Wielkopolska. In our analysis we describe the potential motivation for the use of the metaphor and the way the choice of the metaphor is made.

The picture that emerges is as follows: In both groups, metaphors are used to fill lexical gaps, i.e., a linguistic form referring to object or situation A is used as reference to an object or situation B that itself has not been lexicalized in the language. Here are examples from English and Polish:

```
1_1_0 <769 B> (("well") I get rather fed up of: some of these/ y/oungsters#
1_1_0 <770 B> and the "claptrap they {talk} s/oetimes# - -
```

The expression 'fed up' fills a lexical gap in English of 'being out of patience and disgusted' (American Heritage Dictionary), i.e., the notion that is otherwise coded by a periphrastic expression.
In the following sentence in Polish there are two metaphors: bić 'beat' instead of strzelać 'shoot', and pryskać 'splatter' for 'spray in an unpredictable direction', in this case, bullets:

(25) tag zaczyń bić, as te
    so start:3PL:M:PAST beat:INF that DEM:PL
    kule pryskawy na pilskom xarynde
    bullets splatter:PL:F on Pilsk:ADJ compound
    'They started to shoot so that bullets sprayed into the Pilsk compound.'
    (Nitsch, 1960)

Where the English educated speech differs from the Polish uneducated speech is in the use of indirect means of expression not motivated by the need to fill lexical gaps or to provide euphemisms for taboo expressions.

5.1. Indirect speech in educated English

Indirect means not serving any of the domains discussed so far in this study, i.e., not coding euphemisms, constitute a fairly large group within the sampled text of English educated speakers. It appears as if in the speech of the university-educated speakers, the indirect means of expression is becoming a generalized form of expression. Here are some of the examples of the use of indirect means.

In line 108, the verb 'stuck' is used in place of the direct means 'to be' or 'to stay':

1_1_0 <108 B> I'll be ^stuck until about [dh=l:] 1_1_0 <109 A> "^n\o#" 1_1_0 <108 (B) > ^ twentieth. [@] I'm ^hoping
In line 137, the direct means of expressing what is captured by 'run ourselves out of ...' would be 'lack':

1_1_0 <135 (A). [@? ?@:] ^and [@] I don't want to [@:] ^you kn/ow 1_1_0 <137 A> ^run ourselves out of an external examiner#

In line 287, the only motivation for using 'an image' is to be indirect. Unlike the preceding examples, in which the indirectness provides an added emotional component or degree of emphasis, the indirect means of expression in line 287 doesn’t even code the emotional attitudes of the speaker:

1_1_0 <287 A> do you ^happen to know whether. [@:m] ::Sparrow has got an image. of the man he w/ants#

---

3 The examples from the London Lund corpus retain the original numbering for ease of reference, and various markers indicating stress, intonation, and absence of pauses.
In lines 297 and 298, the verb 'to do' provides an indirect means of expressing another verb (presumably 'to teach'). This is a frequent pattern in English, where for example 'to do lunch' provides an indirect means of expressing 'to eat lunch':

1_1_0 <296 B> ^whereas, if. Roy !Peel w/ent#
1_1_0 <297 B> I sup^pose !he'd do the !lV/iterature#
1_1_0 <298 B> and ^hire somebody to do the !lV/anguage#

The expression 'so and so' in line 353 is an indirect means for some intended mild insult, for a simple noun 'fellow':

1_1_0 <352 B> on the ^other 'hand you can:never 'tell with:Edgar:Sp/arrow#
1_1_0 <353 B> he's a ^canny old s/o and _so#

In line 580, the expression 'to go badly at sea' is an indirect means for expressing something like 'to end badly':

1_1_0 <576 B> ^well I'd:like to have a chat with [/u_po_te:;]#
1_1_0 <577 A> ((2 sylls)) because ^if. ^if he. d^oesn't _work#/  
1_1_0 <578 A> in ^close. collabor:ation with y=ou#
1_1_0 <579 A> and - - and ^try to get - your ex!perience# - -
1_1_0 <580 A> he's going to go ^badly, at !seas#.

In line 743 the expression 'begging for the moon' provides a metaphorical and indirect means of saying 'hoping to attain the unattainable':

1_1_0 <743 A> is sort of ^begging for the !m\oon# - -

Consider the following example. It is possible that 'bedeviled' in line 846 is an indirect means of saying 'to torment' or 'to trouble', but the discourse does not indicate any particularly strong emotional attitude toward the paper. The noun 'wallahs', however, is certainly an indirect means for 'persons' or 'people'. The meaning provided by dictionaries for 'wallah' as 'one employed in a particular occupation or activity' does not contribute anything more than the word 'person' would:

1_1_0 <845 B> this ^English L'anguage p/aper#
1_1_0 <846 B> has ^been be'devilled 'long e''n\ough#
1_1_0 <847 B> by th((o))se ^lV/iterature w\allahs#

Metonymy is another indirect means deployed in English educated speech. A linguistic form B is a metonymy of a linguistic form A if it is associated with A owing to the spatial or temporal contiguity of the respective referents and used to denote the referent of A. (Kuryłowicz, 1970: 135; Matthews, 1997: Allen, 1994). In the following example (line 342) instead of using the second-person pronoun 'you' the speaker uses the form 'your hand':

1_1_0 <342 B> ^your hand"
1.1.0 <.342 A> ((be))cause ^that ought to:strengthen your '\land I would have th/ought#.

In line 426 the time of departure is used to refer indirectly to the train:

1.1.0 <423 B> I ^must go:down to the !\blank#
1.1.0 <425 B> ^you s/ee#
1.1.0 <426 B> ((and)) ^catch this one twenty:-!eight# -

5.2. Polish literary speech

In Polish literary texts, unlike non-literary Polish, metaphors motivated solely by the indirect style of expression (as opposed to metaphors motivated by the need to fill lexical gaps) are very frequent, as frequent as in the speech of educated speakers of English.

The following metaphors have been excerpted from nine fragments together containing 489 words. Every fragment of around 50 words contains at least one metaphor:

(26) uwingę się raz dwa.
wind:1SG:FUT refl one two
'I will wind up fast.' [Instead of 'I will do it fast.]

(27) wczoraj tak się społem,
yesterday so refl sweat:1SG:PERF:PASS
że niech ręka boska broni.
comp let hand God:ADJ defend
'Yesterday I sweated so much that may God protect.' [Instead of 'I sweated a lot.]

(28) niech Pan magister nie traci zimnej krwi.
let Sir master neg lose cold:GEN blood:GEN
'Please, Sir, do not lose your cool.' [Instead of 'Be calm.]

(29) rozumiem. Cia³e Alicja w krainie czarów
understand:1SG:PRES always Alice in land wonders:GEN
'I understand. It is always Alice in Wonderland.' [i.e., fairy tales for you]

(30) bo jedziemy na tym samym wozie.
because travel on DEM:INSTR same:INSTR wagon:LOC
'Because we are travelling on the same wagon.' [i.e., sharing life together]

The simplest expression would be:

(31) bo to samo nas czeka
because DEM same 1PL:ACC await:3SG:PRES
'Because the same thing awaits us.'

(32) a ty się wyda³as za tego karierowicza
conj 2SG refl. marry:2F:PAST prep DEM:M career man
ni z pierza, ni z mięsa
neither from feather neither from meat
‘And you married that upstart of an undetermined nature.’

(33) to taka z ciebie turkaweczka
dem such from 2sg turtle dove
‘So you are such a turtle dove . . .’ (It is not clear what this metaphor stands for)

In the following example, the expression chwała Ci, Panie ‘May the Lord be praised’ is used instead of dobrze ‘good’, a simple and direct means of expression:

(34) chwała Ci, Panie, że nie mieszkacie
glory 2sg:dat Lord: voc comp neg live:2pl:pres
w jednym z tych mieszkań
in one from dem:pl:gen apartments
wysoko pod niebem.
high under sky
‘Glory be to the Lord that you do not live in one of those high-rise apartments’

5.3. Indirect means in non-literary Polish

In the speech of uneducated Polish speakers there are metaphors, but they are not motivated by stylistic choice as in the speech of the educated speakers of Polish or English.

Metaphors are used as euphemisms for taboo vocabulary and when the speaker wants to indicate a superior degree of an event or object. Such usage is rare, but the following fragments contains three instances of indirect means:pół ‘sing’ instead of kaszlat ‘cough’. kogłus ‘whooping cough’ used as a simile, and złociste ‘golden’ used as the equivalent of ‘superior’:

(35) takem pół, jak ten kogłus co
so:1sg sing like dem whooping cough what
to dzieci majo
dem children have:3pl
‘I was singing like [as if I had] whooping cough that children get.’
[about subject’s breathing problems (Nitsch, 1960: 179)]

(36) a jeść to jak mom apetyk, to
and eat:inf dem when have:sg appetite dem
moge sjes
can:1sg eat:perf:inf
‘And as for eating, when I have appetite, I can eat.’
da na noc, to nudić było złociste,
and prep night dem even: hyp be:past golden
to jas mi ni pokazuj
dem already 1sg:dat neg show:2sg
‘but at night, even if it is golden, do not show it to me’ (Nitsch, 1960: 179)
Metaphors in the uneducated, illiterate variety of Polish are used only to fill lexical gaps and to provide means of intensification of meaning. They are not used as the default means of expression, as is the case in the educated speech of English and Polish speakers.

5.4. Indirect means in Lele

The purpose of this section is to examine whether indirect means are used as a preferred style of expression in a language without any written tradition. We have chosen Lele, an East Chadic language spoken in southern Chad and to a lesser extent in northern Cameroon. The Lele texts examined have been recorded from speakers who know French, but there appears to be very little French influence in the lexicon, grammatical structure, or in the form of the narrative. We have opted to examine metaphors as the best exemplars of indirect means of expression, and as the means easiest to detect.

Indirect means are deployed in Lele in the following domains: (a) in epistemic modality to code hearsay information as opposed to personal knowledge; (b) to code a superlative state of a phenomenon; (c) to code certain family relations; and (d) in the form of metaphors, to fill lexical gaps. The Lele text is therefore quite similar in that respect to the language of uneducated speakers of Polish. Indirect means of expression are not used as a mere style of speech, comparable to that which we have demonstrated in contemporary educated English and Polish.

Here is an illustration of the four domains in which Lele deploys indirect means. We start with an example of the use of indirect means to code epistemic modality:

(37) Tùmò go kar di-ni kínyé
    past time REF people GEN.PL-1PL.EXCL COLL
   kè-gè ge yáá na né Ọdù ba
    gen-3PL HUM SAY HYP COP monkey COM
   gèylì-ni kur go kamda ná kùlòngò.
    save-1PL.EXCL time REF women ASSC pregnancy

‘At the time of our ancestors, they say, it was the monkey who saved us at the time when women were pregnant.’ (Garrigues-Cresswell and Weihegué, 1981: 2, 3)

Using metaphors as intensifiers (mid tone unmarked):

(38) dày nà na nè tiibrè mayna
    3M ASSC HYP COP ashes ceiba tree

‘He will be considered ashes of the ceiba tree.’ [i.e., he will burn without a trace] (kapok is made from the ceiba tree)

Family relations. Instead of saying ‘old woman’ Lele deploys the expression ‘mother of’:

(39) lùmndá yé-y
    elephant mother-3M

‘mother of elephant’ [instead of ‘old female elephant’]
Filling lexical gaps. There is no lexical verb 'to betray'. Instead several metaphors are used:

(40) ŭama-ŋ kudo-ro te-y
    woman throw husband-3s buttocks-3m
    'A wife betrayed her husband.' [lit. 'a woman threw away her husband's buttocks']

(41) tama-ŋ ba kùb-tô hamli sîñe
    wife-DEF COM mouth-3f light too much
    'The wife had too light a mouth.' [i.e., betrayed a secret]

The following metaphor fills a lexical gap present in many languages in which there is a noun 'stranger, host' but no unrelated (i.e., non-derived) verb 'to host':

(42) née-y kûryô
    make:FUT-3m stranger
    'He will make him a stranger.' [i.e., he will make him welcome]

6. Forms of direct speech

Finally, there is evidence from codified or ritualized forms of direct speech in various languages that suggests that the diverse instances of indirectness illustrated above are in fact the product of a single, broadly applicable principle. The forms of system-wide direct speech found in Israeli Dugri speech (Katriel, 1986) provide examples in which the principle calling for indirect means is suspended in specific contexts. The presence of these systematic direct forms of speech implies that the instances of indirect means are not merely a collection of isolated phenomena, but a unified class of language-use strategies, because they can be systematically repealed in certain special contexts.

6.1. Conclusions

In the speech of literate speakers, indirect means have become the norm of expressions in all domains. In non-literate speech indirect means are used only in selected domains, viz. as euphemisms for taboo expressions and as a means to fill lexical gaps. In both groups, indirect means of expression may be used in language games.

7. Is the Principle of Indirect Means universal?

The present study has demonstrated the existence of indirect means of expression in a few languages only. Without going too far in the choice of languages one could demonstrate the existence of indirect means of expression in many more languages. But that does not mean that the Principle of Indirect Means operates in all languages. The theoretical model proposed here allows for the existence of languages in which no indirect means are used. These theoretical considerations stem from the observation of the following facts.
We have seen that in Lele (East Chadic) the domain of deontic modality, including orders, does not have a richer system of expressions than other domains, such as tense or aspect. Actually, it has a smaller number of coding means than are available to any of the tense or aspects in the language. We can easily conceive of a language in which other domains (where the Principle of Indirect Means usually applies) will not show the effects of the principle. In many Chadic languages (cf. Frajzyngier, 1989, 1993, 2001; Frajzyngier and Shay, 2002) speaking of genitals is not taboo. Similarly speaking of the bodily excreta is not taboo. In Lele, use of the name of God is not taboo, but in Hdi (Central Chadic), it is. The death of self, relatives, and of chiefs is taboo in most Chadic languages. But one can conceive of a language whose culture would not consider death to be taboo. Such a culture would have overcome what appears to be a visceral fear, present in older as well as contemporary societies, literate or illiterate, that by invoking a word one somehow invokes the reality that the word stands for.

8. Conclusion

The study has demonstrated the existence of the Principle of Indirect Means. This principle states that for certain functional domains, if a form A codes a function in this domain, the speaker should not use the form A, but rather another form that will indirectly code the function. This principle allows us to explain a number of hitherto unrelated phenomena in language use, language structure, and language change.

With respect to language use, the principle explains why speakers do not use the lexical or grammatical means provided by their language for the coding of various semantic categories.

As to language structure, the principle allows us to explain why in some domains there are multiple coding means and in other domains there are just a few coding means. The coding means are rich in precisely those domains where the Principle of Indirect Means applies.

The principle has important implications for language change. As conventional means of expression, through repeated use, become associated directly with a semantic domain, speakers seek out less direct means of expression. The new means of expression becomes conventionalized over time, becomes a direct means of expression, and needs in turn to be replaced. This process creates a major motivating force for grammaticalization and results in a richness of means of expression in the domains to which the Principle of Indirect Means applies.

The principle has been shown to be the motivation for a number of phenomena that have been considered unrelated. Genuine counterexamples to the Principle of Indirect Means, those where direct speech is favored (Katriel, 1986), actually support the existence of the principle in a given culture. The counterexamples point to the fact that a different cultural pattern may be established by flouting the principle. Other counterexamples (Wierzbicka, 1991) are not genuine, but only apparent: rather than contradicting the Principle of Indirect Means, they confirm that in different cultures different domains may be subject to indirect means. In some cultures and languages, the use of indirect means becomes a preferred style of expression, occurring across semantic domains.
The Principle of Indirect Means is a powerful motivation for the formation and use of metaphors. This motivation explains the use of metaphors for lexical items that do exist in the language, but that directly refer to objects and situations that are taboo. The Principle of Indirect Means explains phenomena that have hitherto been considered as indirect speech acts; it explains the use of various hedging devices as an indirect means of making assertions rather than its being motivated by the speaker’s evaluation of his source of knowledge. Finally, the deployment of indirect means in specific domains in many cultures is a minimum requirement for politeness. Thus, the use of indirect means may be linked to the attainment of the goals of politeness in one way or another.

The present study points also to a new line of inquiry. It would be interesting to see whether there exists a hierarchy whereby some functional domains require indirect means of expression more often than others. It would also be interesting to have a typology of languages and cultures to see whether some cultures and languages have more or fewer domains to which indirect means apply.

Appendix. Abbreviations

| 1 | First person |
| 2 | Second person |
| 3 | Third person |
| ACC | Accusative |
| ADJ | Adjective |
| ASSC | Associative |
| COM | Comment marker |
| COMP | Complementizers |
| CONJ | Conjunction |
| COP | Copula |
| DAT | Dative |
| DEF | Definite |
| DEM | Demonstrative |
| EXCL | Exclusive |
| F | Feminine |
| FUT | Future |
| GEN | Genitive |
| HYP | Hypothetical |
| IMP | Imperative |
| INF | Infinitive |
| INSTR | Instrumental |
| LOC | Locative |
| M | Masculine |
| NEG | Negative |
| NUM | Numeral |
| PAST | Past tense |
| PERF | Perfective |
References


