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Exposing and avoiding unwanted inferences in conversational interaction

Chi-Hé Elder [a, *], Michael Haugh [b]

[a] University of East Anglia, UK
[b] The University of Queensland, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Utterances give rise to many potential inferences. They can be communicated explicitly or implicitly, they may or may not be intended, and they may or may not even be inferred. In this paper, we focus on how speakers orient to 'unwanted inferences': potential inferences (or inferables) that can—but need not—be inferred from what has been said. Such inferences can be 'unwanted' in different ways: as secondary propositions that the speaker does not wish to be—or to have been—inferred, or as secondary propositions that the speaker does not wish to be held committed to having communicated. We illustrate the practices or methods by which speakers attempt to divert attention from them, offering a 6-part taxonomy that accounts for: (a) the source of the unwanted inference, and (b) the extent to which the inference in question is exposed or remains embedded in the conversational record. We then present some observations on how meanings of varying degrees of explicitness are drawn upon and negotiated by all parties, evidencing the range of meanings that are available in the minds of speakers that go beyond what the speaker is canonically taken to mean to communicate.

1. Introduction

Post-Gricean pragmatic theory has given considerable energy to modelling 'primary meanings' in communication. Generally speaking, these constitute the main propositions that speakers intend to communicate and that recipients recover. These main propositions can pertain to the explicit content of what is 'said', developments or modulations of the logical form (as per Relevance Theory, Sperber and Wilson, 1995/86, and Truth-Conditional Pragmatics, Recanati, 2010), or can depart from the logical form altogether if the intended primary meaning is expressed implicitly (as in Default Semantics, Jaszczolt, 2010). In our earlier work (Elder and Haugh, 2018), we promoted the idea of primary meanings pertaining to the output of the process of interactional achievement between conversational participants. On that account, what counts as the primary meaning of an utterance is the proposition (or set of propositions) that need to be inferred from that utterance for the subsequent response to be warranted. Such an object of study departs from the Gricean view insofar as it allows that meanings putatively 'intended' by speakers at the point of utterance may not be the ones that participants eventually operationalise, and the process of meaning negotiation allows unintended but nevertheless inferable meanings to surface

* Corresponding author. Norwich Research Park, University of East Anglia, NR4 7TJ, UK.
E-mail addresses: c.elder@uea.ac.uk (C.-H. Elder), michael.haugh@uq.edu.au (M. Haugh).

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instead. This is because what counts as a warranted response to an utterance is not necessarily exhausted by the prior speaker's intentions.

While the interactional achievement account offers insights into how participants' private inferences surface as primary meanings (Elder and Haugh, 2018), it also reminds us that speakers often have alternative meanings in mind that are left off the shared conversational record. That is, even if there is a primary meaning that is intended by the speaker, inferred by the recipient, or co-constructed by participants, there will also be a host of 'secondary meanings' that are inferable from what people say. This paper is concerned with those inferences that are *not* seemingly designed to surface as primary meanings—what we term 'secondary meanings'—but that are exposed in some way in the conversational record by (one or more) participants.

An important feature of secondary meanings is that while they may be readily inferable, they do not *need* to be inferred by the recipient in order for them to be able to respond appropriately to the speaker's prior utterance(s). In some cases, however, secondary meanings can surface on the conversational record through speakers disclaiming, denying, disavowing, or otherwise repudiating something that is inferable from what they have just said. In this paper, we examine how secondary meanings, which were apparently designed to remain firmly embedded in the inferential substrate of conversational interaction (Haugh, 2017a; see also Jefferson, 1987, 2003), end up on the conversational record, in turn evidencing the range of meanings that are available in the minds of speakers.

To exemplify what we have in mind, consider the following example which is taken from a first conversation between two speakers of (American) English who are meeting for the first time at a university in Australia. The excerpt begins with Jane telling Issac how taking classes has enabled her to meet people from all over the world.[1]

(1) CAAT: AmAm05

01	Jan:		I've met (.) a lot of (.) like every class I have
02			like has thi:rty different nationalities
03	Iss:		.hh yeah (.) Austra- I nev- ((clears throat))
04			I think just by location Au- Australia
05		->	has a lot of A- Asians in it (.)
06			.hh which is >but it's< (.) to say Asians
07		->	**I don't m- mean to say that they're similar**
08			cause you know they've got (.) you know
09			tons of Chinese (.) Japanese (.) Malaysians
10			(.) u:m Koreans=
11	Jan:		|((nods)) =mhm
12	Iss:		.hh (.) .hh °it's really cool°
13	Jan:		yeah. I ↑love it here

Issac responds by agreeing with Jane (line 3), and then goes on to offer an account for why there are so many different nationalities in their classes (lines 3–5), namely, because there are a lot of "Asians" living in Australia. What happens next is of central interest to this paper. Issac launches a self-initiated self-repair (Schegloff et al., 1977) in which he claims that in using the referential term "Asians", he does not mean to imply that he is assuming that they constitute a homogenous group (lines 6–9). This repair constitutes an instance of what Bolden et al. (2022: 204) have recently characterised as an "over-exposed self-correction", by which a speaker "draws attention to the error in the process of correcting it". Notably, as Bolden et al. (2022: 206) observe, "in over-exposing the trouble source, speakers do more than simply correct it. Rather, they manage (or reflexively reconstruct) a range of troubles that the error has raised". The trouble that Issac is evidently orienting to here is that his use of the term "Asians" could be taken as him implicating that Asians are all the same. Indeed, it is worth noting that prior to this excerpt, Jane and Issac were talking about how the use of terms like "Oriental" or "Asian" are potentially racist (data not shown), and so the speakers were clearly primed to be attentive to what is inferable from using such terms, and hence there are good reasons for Issac to treat this particular inference as unwanted.[2]

What is important to observe is that the inference in question cannot be formally considered part of the primary meaning communicated through Issac's account in lines 3–5. That is, there is little evidence to suggest that in using the term "Asians", Issac intended to communicate that he thinks they constitute a homogenous group (or other undesirable attitudes). There is also little evidence to suggest that Jane would need to have drawn this inference in order to respond appropriately to Issac's account. Indeed, the way in which his disclaimer is delivered, namely through an extended series of self-initiated self-repairs, and the various perturbations therein (Schegloff, 1987a), exposes the potential inference in question as a somewhat delicate matter (Jefferson, 2003; Lerner, 2013; Mandelbaum, 2016). As such, while this inference may be readily inferable from what has been said by Issac, it does not fall within the scope of the main propositions that Issac evidently intended to communicate, but rather the inference is construed as an *unwanted* secondary meaning.

Here we acknowledge that the explanatory value of intentions in the study of pragmatic inference continues to be debated, even in post-Gricean circles (see Assimakopoulos, 2021; Elder, forthcoming for further discussion). However, we also assume

[1] This excerpt and those that follow are transcribed using Conversation Analytic (CA) conventions (Jefferson, 2004; Hepburn and Bolden, 2013). Further details about our data sources and method of analysis are described in section three.

[2] Indeed, this particular example could also be regarded as an instance of a microaggression. This raises a complex set of questions around what counts as an appropriate response in such cases. However, our focus is on unwanted inferences more generally, and so further consideration of such issues lies outside of the scope of this paper (but see Elder, 2021).

that it goes without saying that speakers do inevitably have private beliefs about what they have said. As we cannot 'get into the minds of speakers', the secondary meanings that lie beneath the surface are inevitably more difficult to elucidate than primary meanings. Nevertheless, what we aim to demonstrate in this paper is that by closely examining the ways in which participants variously expose, as well as avoid exposing, unwanted inferences, such secondary meanings become analytically tractable; participants need not explicitly operationalise meanings as 'primary' (i.e. intended) in order for them to be publicly inferable. In this paper, we analyse a corpus of interactions in English to examine how participants orient to different kinds of secondary meanings without necessarily explicitly putting them on record. Specifically, we draw on the mechanisms of meaning negotiation and repair to elucidate unwanted inferences that participants draw upon, but that do not result in fully-fledged interactional achievements, carefully examining how speakers work to avoid these becoming the primary matter of the interaction.

In what follows, we outline ways in which unwanted inferences arise in interaction, building a taxonomy of cases to highlight the dimensions on which an inference can be unwanted, oriented to, exposed and/or avoided. We begin, in the following section, by first characterising what we mean by 'unwanted inferences' in more detail, drawing on prior research on cancellation (in pragmatics) and self-repair (in Conversation Analysis, CA), as well as on the primary-secondary meaning distinction. We then go on to outline, in section three, the data and methods that underpin our study, before introducing, in section four, a taxonomy of unwanted inferences that draws attention to the extent to which they can be exposed or remain embedded in the under-current of conversational interaction. We conclude by considering some implications of our account of unwanted inferences for the role of inference in pragmatic interpretation and communication more generally.

2. Characterising unwanted inferences

Utterances can give rise to many potential, or 'putative', implicatures. Since Grice (1975, 1989), it is generally considered that the hallmark of an implicature is that it can be explicitly 'cancelled' via phrases such as 'but I don't mean to imply … ', 'in fact … ', and so on.[3] While speakers don't usually need to cancel an implicature that they intend the recipient to recover, explicit cancellation is a discursive strategy that speakers can employ when there is a risk of a misunderstanding, or when they wish to treat the recipient's (displayed) understanding as a misunderstanding of the speaker's intended meaning (Haugh, 2013; Elder, forthcoming). Explicit cancellation is thus akin, in some respects at least, to the discursive strategy of conversational repair (Schegloff et al., 1977); that is, publicly signalling troubles in understanding through corrections and clarifications.

When analysing misunderstandings or troubles in understanding, the focus in post-Gricean pragmatics has been on the question of which inferences in relation to speaker meaning can be plausibly or legitimately denied or 'cancelled' (e.g. Jaszczolt, 2009; Haugh, 2013; Mazzarella, 2021), while in CA the focus has been on repair of actions delivered through speech, including problems in speaking, hearing and understanding (Schegloff, 1992; Schegloff et al., 1977). Research about the latter has largely focused on 'misunderstandings' of the primary action(s) delivered by turns at talk. Notably, what is meant by 'misunderstanding' in the CA literature is not limited to misapprehensions by recipients of (what is taken to be) the primary action(s) delivered by the utterance or turn in question, but may also encompass understandings that are inconsistent with the way(s) in which the producer of the trouble source wishes to be understood (see Drew and Penn, 2016: 51–52). Here we outline some key findings from empirical CA studies of repair across languages that are relevant to our analysis of unwanted inferences.

First, while repair can be initiated and carried out by either speakers or recipients, there is evidence of a (structural) preference for speakers to carry out those repairs (the so-called 'preference for self-correction') (Schegloff et al., 1977). A second key finding is that there is a (structural) preference for repairs to be carried out as close to the trouble source in question as possible (Schegloff, 1992). What this means, in practice, is that in cases where the speaker anticipates a possible 'misunderstanding', the repair is initiated and carried out by the speaker in the same turn, or as close to the end of their turn as possible (e.g. in what CA scholars call the 'transition space' between the current speaker's turn and the next speaker's turn); while in cases where a (potential) 'misunderstanding' becomes apparent from a response by a recipient to the utterance in question, the repair is carried out in the next possible speaking turn that can be legitimately taken by that speaker (e.g. in what CA scholars call third position). A third key finding is that not only are there a range of different methods by which self-repairs can be implemented (e.g. Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1997, 2013), but that analysis of "self-repairs can offer us direct access to the alternative designs considered by speakers, the initially selected design being rejected by the speaker in favour of the subsequent version selected, the repair" (Drew et al., 2013: 74). Closely examining instances of self-repair can thus offer us analytical leverage when investigating normative dimensions of the inferential substrate that underlie conversational interaction. Finally, studies have indicated that repair practices vary in the extent to which self-correction remains embedded or is exposed in the conversational record (Jefferson, 1987). Mandelbaum (2016), for instance, has argued that embedded self-correction can be used to delicately remove inapposite hearings, while Bolden et al. (2022) argue that over-exposed self-correction is used to manage potential ascriptions of incompetence or moral transgression.[4]

[3] Grice (1978) also introduced the idea of 'contextual cancellation', but this is not directly relevant to the analysis in this paper.

[4] A comprehensive review of the CA literature on repair lies outside of the scope of this paper, but see Kitzinger (2013) and Hayashi et al. (2013) for useful summaries.

Here we contribute to the growing tradition in interactional pragmatics of taking insights from CA research to usefully inform our understanding of the interactional underpinnings of pragmatic inference (Sanders, 2005; Deppermann, 2012, 2018; Haugh, 2022), focussing specifically on the role of repair in evidencing secondary meanings that are in the minds of speakers. The boundary between 'primary' and 'secondary' meanings is, of course, far from clear-cut (see e.g. Koev, 2018 for discussion). While secondary meanings are often framed as the counterpart to 'what is said', encoded content, or truth-conditional content (Sander, 2022), we allow that explicitly uttered sentence meanings can also be considered 'secondary' when the main, primary message expressed pertains to an implicitly communicated message (as in Default Semantics, Jaszczolt, 2010). In this respect, we refer to 'primary meanings' as the propositions that need to be inferred by the recipient in order to *fit an apposite response* to the speaker's (just) prior utterance (cf. Enfield and Sidnell, 2017), while we refer to 'secondary meanings' as any additional inferences that are made available by the speaker's (just) prior utterance, but that do not change what counts as an appropriate response by that (just) prior utterance. In this sense, secondary meanings "are usually 'off record', and not easy to respond to directly without completely redirecting the talk" (Levinson, 2013: 107).

Our claim, then, is that an unwanted inference is not (necessarily) an *unintended* primary meaning (a classic case of 'misunderstanding'), but rather a *secondary meaning* that is treated or construed as *inapposite* by the speaker through an implicit or explicit *disclaimer*. By 'inapposite', we mean that the secondary meanings made available from the recipient's response to the speaker are not only inconsistent with "the way we wish our talk to be understood" (Drew and Penn, 2016: 51–52), but involve inferences that are potentially "offensive, embarrassing, or threatening to social solidarity" (Mandelbaum, 2016: 10).[5] Then, by 'disclaimer', we mean a practice or method by which a speaker denies, disavows or repudiates the unwanted secondary meaning, for example by asserting it to be untrue, refusing to acknowledge or accept it, or denying responsibility for it. Disclaimers are traditionally treated as prospective operations by which speakers "ward off and defeat in advance doubts and negative typifications which may result from intended conduct" (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975: 3). However, in this paper we use disclaimers in a broader sense, to encompass their retrospective usage as well (Tayebi and Parvaresh, 2014).

To repeat, building on CA studies of repair practices, the speaker's disclaimer of a secondary meaning, which is inferable from what is said but which may or may not be inferred by the recipient, is canonically accomplished through self-repair. This observation enables us to propose that an unwanted inference consists of a sequence of moves made by the participants themselves, rather than a category of meaning as defined by the analyst. Accordingly, the manner in which unwanted inferences canonically arise[6] is through an ordered sequence of utterances across three temporal positions.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 implicitly or explicitly recovered inference (from u_1)
S 3 disclaimer (of the inference recovered from u_1)

As per (Elder and Haugh, 2018), we label the utterance that occasions the (inapposite) inference in question in first position (P1) as u_1, here standing for 'utterance 1 by the speaker (S)', or what is usually termed the 'trouble source' in CA (Schegloff, 1992). This is followed, in second or next position (P2), by a response by the recipient (R) that indicates an explicit or implicit orientation to some kind of inference that is inferable from u_1, but which is not required to respond appropriately to the primary meaning communicated by u_1. S then responds in third position (P3) with an implicit or explicit disclaimer that treats the inference recovered from u_1 in P2 by R as inapposite.

We can observe an instance of this ordered sequence in the following example which is taken from a telephone call between two college students. In this case, we find evidence of an orientation to a secondary meaning as an unwanted inference from the third position repair implemented by the speaker. Prior to this excerpt, Dee-Ann has been asking Skeet why she is going to bed early. Skeet has responded that she is feeling tired (line 1). Following a partial questioning repeat (Robinson, 2013) by Dee-Ann (line 2), the sequence of interest begins with Skeet offering an account for her tiredness (line 5).

(2) UTCL: ROM8a.1.1

01	Ske:		no I'm jus tired=
02	Dee:		=tired
03	Ske:		°yeah.°
04			(0.4)
05	Ske:	->	went to bed too late las' night.=
06	Dee:		=(°yep°) I donno why:
07			(.)
08		->	*huh huh [.h N o t] my fault.* ((*exaggerated accent))
09	Ske:		[(no idea.)]
10			(0.3)
11	Ske:	->	**I- (.) didn't say that**
12	Dee:		Okay

[5] In this respect, our category of unwanted inferences has conceptual affinities with other terms that allude to some form of interactional delicacy, such as "illegitimate understandings" (Lawrence 2003) or "inapposite hearings" (Mandelbaum, 2016). The focus in this paper, however, is primarily on theorising (speaker) meaning rather than social action, and so we avoid directly recycling those terms from CA studies (despite the clear affinities between them).

[6] By "canonically arise" we mean that unwanted inferences are formally characterised, on our account, through three-part operations (even in instances where one of those moves is absent).

Dee-Ann responds that she doesn't know why Skeet is feeling tired (line 6), and then jokingly denies that it is Dee-Ann's fault (line 8). The latter is arguably implemented with a non-serious valence (Holt, 2016), as it is prefaced with laughter and delivered with an exaggerated regional accent that indexes her supposed innocence (Lawrence, 2003). However, in so doing, Dee-Ann also orients to Skeet's account as potentially blaming her for feeling tired (i.e. it is Dee-Ann's fault that Skeet went to bed too late last night), thus exposing this inference (P2). Skeet responds, in turn, by denying this is what she meant (line 11, P3), a disclaimer that is then acknowledged by Dee-Ann (line 12). Notably, this disclaimer is formulated as not *saying* that, which leaves open the possibility that there are other implications arising from what she (explicitly) said.[7]

We can observe the way in which this third position repair corrects the 'trouble source' in question through the following sequence.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source'): "went to bed too late last night" (line 5)
R 2 explicitly recovered inference: "not my fault" (line 8)
S 3 disclaimer: "I didn't say that" (line 11)

In short, Skeet treats the implication arising from her account that it was Dee-Ann's fault, which is explicitly recovered through a joking denial as an unwanted inference through a third position self-repair.

The implicit or explicit recovery of the unwanted secondary meaning(s) in question may, however, be omitted by disclaimers that are accomplished through same turn repairs, transition space repairs, or third turn repairs. In these cases, the ordered sequence of utterances is in effect reduced to a two-part rather than three-part operation, as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 Ø
S 3 disclaimer (of the inference recovered from u_1)

In such cases, the inference from u_1 remains a *potential* inference that S backs off from, rather than an inference that has been recovered (implicitly or explicitly) by R through their response to u_1. In all cases, then, it is through S's disclaimer of a secondary meaning that is inferred, or is at least inferable, from u_1 that the inference is construed as an *unwanted* inference.

We can observe an instance of this latter sequence in example (1), which we briefly discussed in the introduction. In this case, we find evidence of an orientation to a potential secondary meaning as an unwanted inference from a same turn repair implemented by the speaker. We summarise the way in which this same turn repair exposes and self-corrects the 'trouble source' in question as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source'): "Australia has a lot of Asians in it" (lines 4–5)
R 2 Ø
S 3 disclaimer: "I don't mean to say that they're similar" (line 7)

In short, Issac treats what is only potentially inferable from his account as unwanted through a same turn self-repair, thereby also exposing that secondary meaning in the conversational record.

In the following section, we briefly describe the dataset and the method of analysis that warrants our characterisation of unwanted inferences. We then present our preliminary taxonomy of ways in which such inferences are exposed or avoided that emerged in the course of our analysis in section four.

3. Data and method

As instances of unwanted inferences had to be manually identified, we drew candidate examples from a diverse set of corpora of spontaneous, conversational interactions in English (primarily in American, Australian and British English). These corpora comprise audio and video recordings and associated transcripts of co-present and telephone-mediated talk-in-interaction across a range of different settings, including first conversations, everyday talk between family and friends, as well as in institutional settings, including broadcast media. The data are drawn from "classic" CA materials (such as the Newport Beach and Holt collections), as well as data collected by one of the authors (such as the Corpus of Americans and Australians Talking; see Haugh and Musgrave, 2019), and supplemented with examples identified in published CA studies of repair. Participants' informed consent to use and publish the data was obtained in all cases, and pseudonyms employed to ensure their anonymity.

An initial set of 41 candidate examples of unwanted inferences were transcribed in more detail using CA transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004; Hepburn and Bolden, 2013) in cases where these were not already used. This is because not only what is said by the participants, but how and when it is said is important for warranting our analyses of these inferences as unwanted secondary meanings (Clift and Haugh, 2021). However, in order to make the transcripts more accessible for readers less familiar with these transcription conventions, sharp-eyed readers will notice that we are using standard spellings in these transcripts and have avoided representing rapid speech phenomena, such as elision, unless these are crucial to our analysis. As our focus was on analysing secondary meanings that are inferable from what is said, non-verbal aspects of

[7] See Lawrence (2003) for a much more extended and detailed analysis of this example.

interactions (where video recordings are available) were only transcribed in cases where they are directly relevant to our analysis of unwanted inferences.[8]

Our collection of examples of unwanted inferences was analysed through an interactional pragmatics lens. Interactional pragmatics is an approach to the analysis of pragmatic phenomena, such as implicature and (im)politeness, which is informed by research and methods in ethnomethodological CA (Clift and Haugh, 2021). The focus of analysis was thus on carefully examining the sequential environments in which instances of unwanted inferences were found to arise, including a specific focus on the repair practices employed in explicitly or implicitly disclaiming those inferences and construing them as unwanted. This necessarily involved examining the broader sequential environment in which they arose, as well as particular features of the composition of those sequences. Since we are dealing with phenomena that are arguably designed to remain embedded in the conversational record, a notable feature of our analysis is that we draw not only on the responses of recipients to warrant our analysis (Sacks et al., 1974), but also on the composition and position of self-repairs by speakers about their own talk (Drew et al., 2013).

Our analytical approach thus entailed undertaking detailed single case analyses (Schegloff, 1987a) of all 41 examples of unwanted inferences in our collection. The different types of unwanted inferences are thus identified via the various repair practices by which they are instantiated. However, our criteria for developing a taxonomy of unwanted inferences is developed primarily on pragmatic grounds, building on the well-known distinction between explicit and implicit meanings, as the main aim of our analysis is to examine the relationship between unwanted inferences and classic accounts of speaker meaning in pragmatics. For that reason, while we briefly focus on the sequential accomplishment of these inferences as unwanted in our analysis, we focus primarily on reporting the pragmatic grounds for this taxonomy in discussing illustrative examples of each type of unwanted inference. We also caution that this is necessarily an exploratory study, as while our collection of unwanted inferences draws from a wide range of different contexts (attesting to its context-generality), it is nevertheless a relatively small collection, and is limited to examples from a single language (English).

4. Towards a taxonomy of unwanted inferences

In this section we present examples in which speakers expose unwanted inferences, as well as try to back off or avoid secondary meanings for which they don't want to be held committed as having communicated. As we will see, this involves considering both: (1) what exactly is 'unwanted'—whether the content of the inference, or merely being held committed to having communicated that inference—and (2) the propositional content of the inference in question, which itself is not always clear. Through detailed analysis of our 41 candidate examples of unwanted inferences, we progressively refined our taxonomy along two key dimensions: (1) how R orients to the inference in question; and (2) how S disclaims the inference in question.

We observed that R can orient to an inference that arises from S's prior utterance in such a way that the inference (a) is explicitly recovered (i.e. explicitly stated by R), (b) is implicitly recovered (i.e. indirectly communicated by R via an implicature or other pragmatic means), or (c) remains embedded as a potential inference (i.e. unacknowledged by R). With respect to the latter, we observed that any of these inferences can then be treated by S as unwanted through (a) an explicit disclaimer (i.e. directly denied or disavowed by S, e.g. "I didn't mean that") or (b) an implicit disclaimer (i.e. indirectly denied or disavowed by S, as exemplified in the analyses to follow). These options gave us a 3 × 2 taxonomy of ways in which speakers can either expose or attempt to avoid unwanted inferences, resulting in six types of unwanted inferences as summarised in Table 1. The frequency of each type is also reported in this table. Notably, these different types of unwanted inferences systematically vary in the degree to which they are exposed in the conversational record (i.e. they ostensibly become 'on record'), or remain embedded in the undercurrent of that conversational record (i.e. they remain 'off record') (Jefferson, 1987; Haugh, 2017a; Bolden et al., 2022).

Table 1
Taxonomy of ways of orienting to unwanted inferences.

exposed ← → embedded

	explicitly recovered inference	implicitly recovered inference	potential inference
explicit disclaimer	type 1 (n=6)	type 2 (n=8)	type 3 (n=11)
implicit disclaimer	type 4 (n=2)	type 5 (n=6)	type 6 (n=8)

embedded

[8] In our collection, we only identified one instance where a facial expression proved instrumental to the participants' orientation to an inference as unwanted. The paucity of such cases may, however, be a function of the corpora we examined. Further consideration of the role of multimodal cues with respect to unwanted inferences thus lies outside of the scope of this paper.

Having characterised our six types of unwanted inferences according to pragmatic criteria, we then analysed instances of each type in our corpus of interactions to find broader patterns across these response types. One key finding from this analysis concerns the nature of the disclaimers across the six types. We found that for both explicitly and implicitly recovered inferences, third position disclaimers are achieved via different operations, including third position repair, third position non-straightforward responses,[9] and third position sequential deletion repairs. Potential inferences, being disclaimed through *same or next turn operations*, occurred through same turn repair, transition space repair, or third turn repair.[10] These findings are summarised as follows.

Type 1 S explicitly disclaims an explicitly recovered inference through third position repair
Type 2 S explicitly disclaims an implicitly recovered inference through third position repair
Type 3 S explicitly disclaims a potential inference through transition space or third turn repair
Type 4 S implicitly disclaims an explicitly recovered inference through third position non-straightforward response
Type 5 S implicitly disclaims an implicitly recovered inference through third position non-straightforward response or third position sequential deletion repair
Type 6 S implicitly disclaims a potential inference through same turn or transition space repair

A second key finding concerns the nature of what about these inferences seemed to be 'unwanted' by the speaker. We found that characterising these inferences as 'unwanted' is warranted by the co-occurrence of a repair and/or non-straightforward response to a prior hearably inapposite inference, which might arise for a variety of reasons, such as potential impropriety, offensiveness, embarrassment, or threat to (positive) self-presentation. Notably, we found that S can disclaim either the propositional content of the inference, or they can disclaim their commitment to having communicated that content.

The following subsections demonstrate how each type of unwanted inference is identifiable through the different practices or methods by which S disclaims the inference(s) in question, exemplified with extracts from our corpus of interactions.

4.1. Type 1: Explicitly disclaiming an explicitly recovered inference

A Type 1 unwanted inference consists of three (sequentially-linked) turns through a third position self-repair by S of a (potentially) inapposite inference arising from u_1 that is explicitly recovered, and thus exposed, by R, as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 explicitly recovered inference (from u_1)
S 3 explicit disclaimer (of the inference recovered from u_1)

In the case of Type 1 unwanted inferences, R puts an (often knowably) unwanted inference on record in second position (P2) that is inferable from u_1 in first position (P1), which S then denies in third position (P3). While explicit disclaimers typically evidence an inference as unintended by S, as we will discuss, in our data we found that the explicitly recovered meaning may constitute a 'wise guy' interpretation (Ariel, 2016) or 'joke-first' (Schegloff, 1987b) that is used to tease S, thereby withholding attribution of commitment of that proposition from S. Notably, R often subsequently implicitly withdraws or acknowledges positing a 'wise guy' (i.e. non-serious) interpretation through a return to a serious frame in fourth position (P4).

Consider the following excerpt from a first conversation between Peter (an international student from the United States) and Sally (a local student from Australia) in which they have been talking about differences in what people eat in their respective home countries.

(3) CAAT: AmAus02

01 Pet: I like kangaroo though.
02 you [guys] don't eat it here though for some reason.
03 Sal: [yeah?]
04 (.)
05 Sal: ↑n[o:.]
06 Pet: [don]'t know why. [it's] wild there's no hormones
07 Sal: [(I::-]
08 Pet: there's °no°, there's nothing i:n it?
09 it's the healthiest meat you can eat? [bu:t?]
10 Sal: [yeah?]
11 (.)
12 Sal: I guess [because] (0.2) it's a bit of a

[9] By non-straightforward responses we mean instances where the recipient indicates resistance towards the terms or agenda of the prior turn (e.g. through 'well'-prefacing) (Heritage, 2015; Haugh, 2022). See section 4.4 for further discussion and examples of this.

[10] A distinction is drawn in CA between third position repairs and third turn repairs (see Schegloff, 1997). At the risk of gross oversimplification, in the former case, the repair operation is occasioned by some aspect of R's response, following the trouble source, while in the latter case S undertakes repair irrespective of R's subsequent response to S's initial turn.

13 Pet: [he hem?]
14 Sal: -> cultural thing? like where I'm from people
15 feed kangaroo meat to dogs? so: (0.2) ye:ah.
16 Pet: -> °I guess I'm a dog.°
17 Sal: -> **[I- no: I don't mean dogs] eat it**
18 Pet: [I like dogs so that's okay]
19 Sal: I just mean because [(I know)] that my fath-
20 Pet: [>that's okay<]
21 Sal: you know like my stepdad's a farmer? and that's
22 what he does? it's just (0.2) I wouldn't
23 °even° (0.2) like I would eat it, but I just
24 wouldn't go out of my way to °eat it°
25 sort of thing

Here, Sally and Peter are discussing the practice of eating kangaroo meat. Peter has disclosed in line 1 that he likes eating kangaroo, but observes that people don't seem to eat it in Australia, despite it being "the healthiest meat you can eat" (line 9). In extolling the virtues of kangaroo meat, and concluding with a turn-final 'but' that orients to leaving something hearably unsaid (Mulder and Thompson, 2008), Peter appears to be prompting an account from Sally as to why Australians don't eat it more often. Sally suggests in lines 14–15 that it might be a "cultural thing", as where she's from, "people feed kangaroo meat to dogs" (P1). Notably, Sally hearably withholds the upshot of her account through a turn-final "so yeah" (Raymond, 2004). Peter's (P2) response to Sally's account exposes an inferable conclusion based on the fact that he enjoys eating kangaroo, but that kangaroo is apparently reserved for dogs, "I guess I'm a dog" (line 16), leveraging the way in which she projected an upshot but left it unsaid through that turn-final 'so', although his softened voice is suggestive of a tease (Drew, 1987; Haugh and Pillet-Shore, 2018). Sally is caught off guard by this apparently unintended interpretation of what she said, maintaining a serious frame as she attempts to disclaim through a third position repair (P3) that she didn't mean that "dogs *eat* it" (line 17), before continuing with an extended self-repair ("I just mean …") that is framed as an account as to why she said people in Australia don't eat it much (lines 19–25). The unwanted inference in question is exposed both through Peter explicitly recovering an inferable conclusion from what Sally previously said, and Sally's explicit disclaimer, which both explicitly withdraws the target inference here (or at least attempts to do so), and presents an alternative interpretation of what she meant. Here, then, we have an arguably purposeful misunderstanding of Sally's P1 (first positioned) utterance that is made available from Peter's jocular P2 (second positioned) response.[11] The sequence by which we can identify this unwanted inference can be summarised as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source'): "like where I'm from people feed kangaroo meat to dogs" (lines 14-15)
R 2 explicitly recovered inference: "I guess I'm a dog" (line 16)
S 3 disclaimer: "I don't mean dogs eat it" (line 17)

Note that a Type 1 unwanted inference could, in theory at least, also arise through R erroneously misunderstanding S and therefore exposing an unintended meaning, which S then works to repair. These are the more standard cases of misunderstanding, which result in negotiations of primary meanings (Elder and Haugh, 2018). However, our category of unwanted inferences is designed to capture negotiations of secondary meanings. It is through the explicit recovery of these unwanted inferences (by R) and explicit disclaimers (by S) that they become exposed to the point that they enter the conversational record (i.e. they become 'on record'). But, unlike in the case of the negotiation of primary meanings, exposing unwanted inferences in this way may be done in a non-serious or joking frame. As such, those unwanted inferences only *ostensibly* enter the conversational record (Clark, 1996) and the speaker is not taken as necessarily committed to having communicated those propositions.

4.2. Type 2: Explicitly disclaiming an implicitly recovered inference

A Type 2 unwanted inference consists of three (sequentially-linked) turns by a third position self-repair by S of a (potentially) inapposite inference arising from u_1 that is implicitly recovered by R, as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 implicitly recovered inference (from u_1)
S 3 explicit disclaimer (of the inference recovered from u_1)

While Type 1 unwanted inferences are due to R's response explicitly exposing an unwanted secondary meaning from S's just prior utterance in P1, Type 2 unwanted inferences involve R only *implicitly* exposing the inference in question through their P2 response.

Consider the following interaction between Sirl and Michael. Michael has been staying at Sirl's place and will be taking a flight back home that day.

(4) Field notes, London (July 2000)

01 ((Michael was about to enter the bathroom, but noticed Sirl
02 was also trying to enter it. Both remain standing in front of

[11] Example (2), which we previously discussed in section 2, is another instance of this kind of Type 1 unwanted inference.

03			the bathroom door))
04	Sir:	->	what time are you leaving this morning?
05	Mik:		oh, in about an hour I suppose.
06		->	are you in a hurry to leave?
07	Sir:	->	no, no, **just asking.**
08			(2.0)
09	Mik:		would you like to use the bathroom first?
10	Sir:		yeah, sure, if you don't mind.

The way in which Sirl appears to be avoiding making a request, instead leaving it to Michael to enact an offer, has been discussed in previous studies (Haugh, 2007; Elder and Haugh, 2018). Our interest here is specifically in Sirl's self-repair in response to Michael's query about whether Sirl is in a hurry to leave.

In line 4, Sirl asks when Michael is planning on leaving that morning (P1). Michael's response in line 5 provides a response to the (explicit) format of Sirl's inquiry, while his response in line 6—our proposed P2 response—appears to orient to the inferred purpose of Sirl's inquiry (Pomerantz, 2017), namely whether Sirl would like to use the bathroom first. However, in line 7, Sirl not only explicitly denies being in any such hurry ("no no"), but also implements a third position self-repair (P3) of his initial inquiry in claiming to be "just asking", thereby treating Michael's query as implementing a double-barrelled action (Rossi, 2018). Sirl's explicit disclaimer blocks Michael's explicitly recovered inference that Sirl is in a hurry, as well as his implicitly recovered inference that Sirl wants to use the bathroom first; at the same time, the 'just'-prefaced repair downplays or minimises the relevance of his prior question to the current interaction (Woofitt, 1991), and thus appears to construe the inference as an unwanted secondary meaning. However, the fact that this inference was subsequently exposed by Michael (line 9) and accepted by Sirl (line 10) suggests that it was not the propositional content of Michael's implicitly communicated inference in line 6 that was unwanted (i.e. that Sirl wants to use the bathroom first), but rather the inference that Sirl was wanting to use the bathroom first *because* he is "in a hurry" (and so prioritising his needs over those of Michael). The sequence by which we can identify this unwanted inference can be summarised as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source'): "what time are you leaving this morning?" (line 4)
R 2 implicitly recovered inference: Sirl wants to use the bathroom first (line 6)
S 3 explicit disclaimer: "no, no, just asking" (line 7)

In short, Sirl backs off from the implication available through his prior inquiry that he is wanting to use the bathroom first through an explicit disclaimer, treating it as an unwanted secondary meaning. But the fact that he later accepts the offer to use the bathroom first, suggests we have a case of a primary meaning posing as an unwanted secondary meaning. In treating the meaning as unwanted, Sirl can avoid any commitment to having communicated it, thereby treating such a meaning as "better left unsaid though not undone" (Pomerantz, 1980: 195).

While in the above example the content of what is disclaimed is relatively determinate, our next example demonstrates how what is implicitly recovered can be much more indeterminate. Here the situation is slightly different insofar as although R does ostensibly explicitly expose an inference in P2, something about the way that S reacts suggests that there is something more that is unwanted than simply the propositional content of the P2 utterance. Prior to this excerpt, Edna has invited Margy and her mother to lunch. Notably, although Margy has refused Edna's proposal to pay for them, it remains unresolved who will pay for the lunch (see Drew et al., 2013: 77–78).

(5) NB:VII

01	Edn:		well honey li:sten I'll t(hh)alk with you:: uh:
02			we'll [get to(h)]ge[ther::[:]
03	Mar:		[.hhhhhh] [H e y [w]ell Edna maybe next week El-e-you:ll
04			li:ke E:lss she's a lotta fun. She's coming down, .t.h-.h-.h
05			you know,.h-.h and uh m- why don't we all do that. We'll go up
06			and eat at Coco's? or will go someplace e:lse.=
07	Edn:	->	=oh Co[co's is FUN UP] THERE ON THE HILL=
08	Mar:		[( )]
09	Edn:		=and you look do[wn it's so p]retty,
10	Mar:		[y:::: Ye:ah.]
11			yeah. Let's do it.
12	Edn:		AND IT'S chea:p, hu
13	Mar:		yeahh[hahh]
14	Edn:		[hihh]#h:::::(h) I'm O::n a(h):.ehhh=
15			=I'M ON [RETI [:RE [MENT.] .hhh
16	Mar:	->	[.hhh [Hey[well y]:ou're not taking us Edna=
17			=but I[: thin [k it'd be fun [to go:.]
18	Edn:		[.hhhhh[OH: DON'T [be s::o(h)hh)=
19		->	=**u- I[: did]n't mean that ruh-ah::**=
20	Mar:		[N_o-]
21	Edn:	->	=I:(hh) didn't m:mean [that [at]
22	Mar:		[.hhh [we]ll n[o I:'m no:t-] gon]na invite=
23	Edn:		[a_:_: : : :]ll.]
24	Mar:		=all of us:: up there and then I- have you pay the bi:ll .hhh
25			I[: just] think it'd be f:fun to a[ll have all] of us go:.=
26	Edn:		[ehhh!] [( )]

27 Mar: =and I want Elss to see you .hh[hh
28 Edn: [.hhh=
29 -> =oh[: h o n e y I] didn't] mean that=
30 Mar: [(Yeah know I mean)] she's-]
31 Edn: =[at a-] a(h)::::::::ll.]
32 Mar: =[she's] just the kind of] a person that yeah know it doesn't
33 make any di[fference ( )
34 Edn: -> [BUD SAYS IT SURE SOUNDED LIKE I MEANT IT=
35 -> =BUT [I DIDN'T,]
36 Mar: [U:A::hhhh] haah haah [haa]
37 Edn: [I d]on't have a Di:ner's-.hh=
38 -> =no-u-honey I: r:really didn't mean [tha:[t but BU]D and [I]=
39 Mar: [.hh-[I : : : :] [oo]=
40 Edn: =ATE UP THERE the other night it was:: really good foo:d
41 very reasonable.

In lines 1–2, Edna launches a pre-closing sequence (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) in proposing that when Margy comes over next week they should get together. Margy proposes in lines 3–6 that they have lunch at Cocos with her mother and friend (Elss), implicitly renewing Edna's earlier invitation (cf. Drew, 2005). Although it has not yet been explicitly resolved at that point who is going to pay for the lunch, the way in which Edna accepts Margy's proposal in lines 7–12 suggests that Edna is implying that she will be paying for them all. Specifically, she proffers a three-part list (Jefferson, 1991), specifying that Cocos is "fun", "pretty" and "cheap", the latter of which she expands on as being positive given she's "on retirement" (lines 14–15). So despite accepting Margy's proposal to go to Coco's, the way she justifies the choice of restaurant ends up becoming the trouble source for the interaction that follows (i.e. constitutes our u_1 in P1).

In line 16, Margy responds with "hey, you're not taking us Edna" (P2), making available an inference that she'd interpreted Edna's previous turn as Edna being reluctant to pay for them all, or perhaps that Edna feels like she has been shoehorned into paying for Margy's friend (due to her earlier inviting Margy and her mother for lunch at Cocos), or even that Edna is only inviting Margy's friend to Cocos because it is "cheap". Edna immediately denies through a third position repair that is not what she meant in line 19 (P3). This seems like a simple case of explicitly denying an unintended inference that is due to a misunderstanding. However, despite Margy accepting Edna's disclaimer (line 20), we see Edna go on to repeat her disclaimer a further four times (lines 21, 29, 34–35, 38). So, despite the initial P2 response from Margy clearly exposing an inference (thereby making it a candidate for our Type 1 unwanted inference), something about the way in which Edna keeps explicitly and forcefully repeating that she "didn't mean that" suggests that there is more than just an unintended inference or a 'misunderstanding' at play here (see also Deppermann and Haugh, 2022: 7–9] for discussion), thus warranting its categorisation as a Type 2 unwanted inference. Our contention is that there is also something unwanted about the inference that Margy has *implicitly* recovered. Notably, in each case, the 'misunderstanding' in question is referred to using a pronoun ("that") rather than being explicitly repaired, thereby orienting to "some potential trouble in formulating it appropriately" (Schegloff, 1992: 1308). This suggests that it is not only the explicit content of Margy's P2 response that is unwanted, but also something else that remains somewhat delicate in what Margy has implicitly recovered and Edna is trying to deny, namely, that despite having earlier inviting them, Edna is actually reluctant to pay for them all, or she is reluctant to pay for Margy's friend, or somehow feels shoehorned into paying for Margy's friend, and so on. Through repeated explicit disclaimers Edna treats these implicitly recovered inferences as inapposite, and thus unwanted.

4.3. Type 3: Explicitly disclaiming a potential inference

In some cases if S anticipates that their utterance may be misconstrued, possibly because there is an alternative inference available from what they said that they do not wish to communicate (or be held committed to communicating), they can attempt to 'block' the unwanted inference using explicit cancellation phrases (Haugh, 2013), or other forms of self-initiated self-repairs. A Type 3 unwanted inference consists of three (temporally-linked) turns through a third turn self-repair by S of a (potentially) inapposite inference arising from u_1. Notably, R does not appear to orient to the potential inference, but S immediately denies it and thereby attempts to block it from entering the conversational record. However, in explicitly disclaiming this potential inference S thereby exposes the inferable in question, as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 continuer or acknowledgement
S 3 explicit disclaimer (of the inference recoverable from u_1)

Unlike Types 1 and 2 unwanted inferences, evidence of recovery of a Type 3 unwanted inference is absent because R produces a neutral response token (e.g. a continuer) in next/second turn that does not orient to a potential unwanted inference. In this respect, the subsequent explicit disclaimer by S constitutes an instance of third turn self-repair. As with third *position* self-repairs (as found in Types 1 and 2, cf. Schegloff, 1992, 1997), in the case of third turn self-repairs, an explicit disclaimer follows a response from R to the potential trouble turn in question. However, this disclaimer is not sequentially responsive to R's response, but rather orients to a potential unwanted inference that is inferable from S's prior turn (Deppermann, 2014). It is in that sense, then, that the explicit disclaimer in the case of Type 3 unwanted inferences constitutes a third *turn* self-repair operation.

To help us better appreciate the distinction between Type 3 and Type 1 or 2 unwanted inferences, let us first consider an example in which S exposes a potential inference through a third turn self-repair. In the following excerpt, taken from a radio talkback show, Brad, a radio talk-show host is talking with a caller about the latter's military experience (see also Mandelbaum, 2016: 113–114).

(6) BC: Gray, 42-43

01	Cal:		I never saw a single piece of action while I was there.
02	Bra:		mhhm,
03	Cal:		I was (manning the) civil affairs,
04		->	and I had a very good time.
05	Bra:	->	mm hm,
06	Cal:	->	**nothing uh lewd in any- by way of a good time,**
07			**I mean**
08	Bra:		yes, [I know what you mean
09	Cal:		[(perfectly) honest good time.

Here, Brad simply responds to the Caller saying he had "a very good time" when he was working in the military (line 4), to which Brad simply responds with an acknowledgement token "mm hm" (Gardner, 2007), in line 5, which encourages the Caller to continue talking about his experiences in the military. Yet despite no indication that the host (Brad) has picked up on the potential double-entendre associated with what is meant by having a "good time" (Mandelbaum, 2016: 113), the Caller nevertheless explicitly disclaims having meant it in a sexually suggestive sense (lines 6–7).[12] The latter explicit disclaimer by the Caller is not responsive to Brad's acknowledgement, but rather orients to the potential inference arising from u_1 in his prior turn, thereby exposing it. It is in that sense that the self-repair by the Caller occupies third turn rather than third position (i.e. it is temporally third, but is not sequentially third) (Schegloff, 1997). Notably, Brad subsequently claims to "know what you mean" (line 8), suggesting that the Caller is not being held committed to that unwanted inference, despite it entering the conversational record. Yet in spite of that, the Caller nevertheless engages in another self-repair operation, characterising it as a "perfectly honest good time" (line 9), once again underscoring his treatment of this potential inference as unwanted. The sequence by which we can identify this unwanted inference can be summarised as follows.

S	1	u_1 ('trouble source'): "I had a very good time" (line 4)
R	2	acknowledgement: "mm hm" (line 5)
S	3	explicit disclaimer: "nothing uh lewd" (line 6)

Speakers can also expose potential inferences through transition space self-repairs, that is, immediately following completion of a turn prior to any response from recipients (Schegloff et al., 1977). In such instances, recovery of the potential inference by R, and hence attribution to S, is absent, while S produces a disclaimer in the transition space following completion of S's initial turn, as follows.

S	1	u_1 ('trouble source')
R	2	Ø
S	3	explicit disclaimer (of the inference recovered from u_1)

When explicit disclaimers are accomplished through transition space self-repairs, the three temporally-linked turns are then in effect reduced, in practice, to a two-part operation by S alone that construes a potential inference as unwanted.

Consider the following case, in which a postgraduate student (PS) has been complaining to an administration officer (AO) in the school that he is not able to access his assigned filing cabinet as the previous occupant did not leave behind the key. The administration officer has proposed various courses of action that the postgraduate student could take to resolve this problem, including trying to track down the previous occupant or contacting security to seek assistance. The postgraduate student has responded that he has tried both of these courses of action already, but has not been successful in resolving the problem. The unwanted inference in question arises when the administration officer muses to herself that breaking into the filing cabinet would not be an acceptable course of action.

(7) TRS07

01	AO:		.hh it's really (.) difficult to
02		->	know how to- cause you- you can't (0.7)
03			break it to get into it,
04	PS:		yep.
05	AO:		.hh u:m because [then you're damaging furn]iture=
06	PS:		[and I've I've had lots of]
07	AO:	->	=>**not that you'd do that< anyway, but?**
08			(.)
09	PS:		I just? I have stuff that (I) need to:
10			(.)
11	AO:		=secure.

[12] Given this occurred on radio talkback, this explicit disclaimer may not only be orienting to the unwanted inference that could be drawn by the host, but also the overhearing radio audience.

12 PS: to- ye:ah [to be] secure, yeah.
13 AO: [ye:ah:]

In raising this course of action as something to be rejected (lines 2–3), and providing an account for that rejected course of action (line 5), the administration officer is claiming they have run out of viable options for remedying the problem in question (lines 1–2). Our interest, however, is in what happens next. While the student goes on to offer his own account for not breaking into the filing cabinet, the administration officer orients to a potential inference from her account as unwanted through a transition space repair in line 7.

While there are no indications in this response that the student has oriented to anything untoward in what the administration officer has just said, through a self-repair the administration officer immediately denies the inference that she thinks the student would do such a thing (line 7). Our contention is that in disclaiming the inference that the administration officer thinks the student might try to break into the filing cabinet, she is not only orienting to this inference as unintended, but also as unwanted. That is, it is not just that she did not intend to implicate that the student would do such a thing, but that she does not want to be heard as implying that. The administration officer orients to the delicacy of this inference through the design of her self-repair. She orients to the halting of the ongoing progressivity of the troubles-remedy sequence by delivering this correction of her prior talk as a rush through (Schegloff, 1982), while the discourse particle 'anyway' frames this self-correction as somehow contradicting what was inferable from that prior talk (Owen, 1985). The implications of contradicting what was inferable from what she previously said are hearably left "hanging" through a turn-final 'but' (Mulder and Thompson, 2008). This self-repair evidences that she treats what is inferable from her prior rejection of a possible remedy to the student's problems as not only unintended, but as a delicate matter. It is through treating this self-repair as delicate that what is inferable—a secondary meaning that was evidently not intended to be responded to—is construed here as unwanted. The self-repair initiated by the administration officer thus appears to be designed to deny or block these inferences, thereby simultaneously treating them as unwanted.

The sequence by which we can identify this unwanted inference can be summarised as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source'): "you can't break it to get into it, because then you're damaging furniture" (lines 2–5)
R 2 Ø
S 3 explicit disclaimer: "not that you'd do that anyway" (line 7)

In short, the administration officer backs off from the inference that she thinks that the student would consider breaking into the filing cabinet, treating it as an unwanted secondary meaning through an explicit disclaimer.[13]

4.4. Type 4: Implicitly disclaiming an explicitly recovered inference

In the preceding discussion of Types 1–3 unwanted inferences, we have examined instances where the unwanted inference in question is explicitly disclaimed by S, and in the case of Type 1 unwanted inferences, exposed through explicit recovery by R of the inference in question as well. Here we move to Type 4 unwanted inferences, in which an explicitly recovered inference is implicitly disclaimed through a non-straightforward response by S (Schegloff and Lerner, 2009; Haugh, 2022). A non-straightforward response is one that does not match the formal design preference of the prior turn or accept the presuppositions and terms of that turn (Stivers et al., 2011: 20), and can be accomplished, for instance, through non-type-conforming responses (Raymond, 2003), 'well'-prefacing (Schegloff and Lerner, 2009; Heritage, 2015), or accounts (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013). A non-straightforward response in a Type 4 unwanted inference thus consists of three (sequentially-linked) turns by a non-straightforward response in third position by S to the (potentially) inapposite inference arising from u_1 that is explicitly recovered by R, as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 explicitly recovered inference (from u_1)
S 3 non-straightforward response (to the inference recovered from u_1)

In contrast to Type 1 unwanted inferences, Type 4 unwanted inferences involve S implicitly denying or tacitly avoiding the recovered inference as explicated by R. Arguably, it is by disclaiming the inference implicitly through a non-straightforward response that S is able to avoid being held committed to having communicated the inference in question.

Consider the following example from a conversation between two sisters, Lottie and Emma. Just prior to this excerpt, Lottie has already asked Emma twice whether she wants Lottie to take her out tomorrow, first to the shops and then to the beauty parlour. Emma has declined both of these proposals from her sister (see Clayman and Heritage, 2014: 58, 81–82).

(8) NB:IV:10:R

01 Lot: ↑don't you want me to come dow:n and get you tomorrow and
02 take you dow:n to the beauty parlour?
03 (0.3)
04 Emm: what fo:r I ↑just did my hair it looks like pruh- a
05 profess↓ional.
06 (0.3)

[13] Example (1), which we discussed in the introduction, is another instance of this type of unwanted inference.

07 Lot: -> ↑I mean uh: you wanna go to the store or anything over at
08 the Market[Ba: sket]or an]ything?]
09 Emm: [.hmhhh].thhh].hhh .h]h
11 well ↑HO[NEY] I]
12 Lot: [or]Ri]chard's?
13 (0.2)
14 Emm: I've bou↑:ght EVerythi:ng?
15 (0.9)
16 Emm: -> if[you wa]nt ↑ME TO go to the beauty parlour I wi:ll,
17 Lot: [°oh:.°]
18 (.)
19 Lot: -> ↑**well I just thought maybe we could go over to Richard's for**
20 **lunch then after I get my hair ↓fixed.**
21 Emm: alri :ght.
22 Lot: oka:y,

Notably, after Emma initially declines (line 14) the (now) fourth invitation from Lottie to take her out tomorrow (lines 7–8) (P1), she subsequently explicitly attributes an agenda to Lottie's repeated inquiries in line 16, namely, that Lottie *wants* Emma to accompany her to the beauty parlour (P2) (Curl, 2006). Indeed, it is not unreasonable to think that Emma's offer to go with Lottie is exactly what Lottie was pursuing through her repeated invitations. However, Lottie subsequently responds non-straightforwardly to Emma's offer, in lines 19–20, which has explicitly displayed an inference about Lottie's underlying agenda in pursuing this series of repeated invitations (P3). Although she accepts Emma's conditional proposal offer (Hofstetter and Stokoe, 2015), she suggests grounds other than those proposed by Emma in that offer for doing so. That is, it is not because Lottie wants Emma to accompany her to the beauty parlour as proposed by Emma in line 16, but because Lottie wants to help her sister out by taking her out for lunch (P3).[14] The sequence by which we can identify this unwanted inference can be summarised as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source'): "you wanna go to the store or anything?" (line 7)
R 2 explicitly recovered inference: "if you want me to go to the beauty parlour I will" (line 16)
S 3 non-straightforward response: "I just thought maybe we could go over to Richard's for lunch" (line 19)

In short, what is at issue here is who is (really) the beneficiary of Lottie's invitation (Clayman and Heritage, 2014). On the one hand, Lottie does not outright reject Emma's suggestion to accompany her to the beauty parlour, suggesting that Emma's displayed inference was not completely off the mark; however, Lottie's additional lunch suggestion seems to be working to avoid commitment to having communicated any such motivation, and hence treating such an inference as unwanted. This example thus demonstrates how non-straightforward responses in third position can be used to tacitly avoid explicitly recovered inferences, even when they appear entirely plausible ones for R to draw, and thereby S can avoid being held committed to having communicated them.

4.5. Type 5: Implicitly disclaiming an implicitly recovered inference

A Type 5 unwanted inference consists of three (sequentially-linked) turns by a non-straightforward response in third position by S to the (potentially) inapposite inference arising from u_1 that is implicitly recovered by R, as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 implicitly recovered inference (from u_1)
S 3 non-straightforward response (to the inference recovered from u_1)

In contrast to Type 4 unwanted inferences in which R explicitly recovers the inference in question in their response to u_1, for Type 5 unwanted inferences, R only displays their recovery of the unwanted inference through their response implicitly. But like Type 4 unwanted inferences, Type 5 unwanted inferences involve S implicitly denying or tacitly avoiding that inference that has been implicitly recovered by R through a non-straightforward response. Likewise, as we found, these implicit disclaimers do not always indicate that the inference in question is unwanted altogether, but rather that S is avoiding being held committed to having communicated that inference.

In example (9) below, we can observe a similar interaction to that which played out in example (8) with Lottie and Emma, but this time S's third position response involves a subtle display of avoiding being held committed to having communicated something that is only implicitly available from R's second position response. Leading into this excerpt, Lesley and Mum have been talking about the latter's plans to visit. It has emerged that Mum will be taking the bus.

(9) Holt: X(C):1:2:7

01 Les: ↑don't bring↑ too much
02 (0.2)
03 Mum: ↑oh that's what I was going to tell ↓you
04 -> I'm:- (.) I'm ↑not bringing an- (.) I'm not bring
05 any big j:ump- (.) big ca:rdigans
06 (0.2)

[14] Prior to this conversation Emma has been complaining about being stuck at home following an operation.

07 Les: no: y[ou can
08 Mum: [or a dressing gow:n I- a (0.2) I[can ba-
09 Les: [no-
10 (.)
11 Les: -> you can [↑borrow mi↓:ne
12 Mum: [( )-
13 Mum: -> **yeah I thought well I'd brin:g the small case (and**
14 **[just)**
15 Les: [ee yes do.

As Mum is due to arrive by bus, Lesley instructs her not to "bring too much" (line 1). This creates an opening for Mum, who is reminded to inform Lesley that she's not planning on bringing any big jumpers or cardigans, or a dressing gown (lines 4–5, 8) (P1). Lesley picks up on this disclosure with a trouble-responsive offer (Curl, 2006) in line 11, "You can borrow mine", thereby exposing a possible implicitly recoverable inference available from Mum's previous turns that Mum was hoping for just such an outcome (P2). However, Mum neither outright accepts or rejects the offer. Either of these moves would bring to the surface the possibility that Mum's previous turn could be heard as fishing for just such an offer (Haugh, 2017b, 2022), and thus would become a potential primary meaning to be negotiated. Instead, in line 13 Mum continues with a non-straightforward response to Lesley's offer. She first registers the offer ("yeah"), and then produces a 'well'-prefaced account through which she foregrounds a justification for such an offer being made (i.e. it will enable her to bring a small case), thereby implicitly accepting it. However, by embedding this 'well'-prefaced account within a reported thought quotative (Haakana, 2007), Mum also asserts her own grounds for (implicitly) accepting Lesley's offer, as this account is framed as having occurred independently of Lesley's offer being made. In so doing, she invites the inference that her initial reason for discussing her clothing choices was due to packing concerns, as opposed to what has become the topic of discussion, namely whether she could borrow Lesley's clothes when she arrives. In this way, she avoids orienting towards the possibility that she wanted Lesley to make such an offer, ensuring that inference remains embedded, rather than being exposed in the conversational record. This example provides interesting insights into the ways in which inferences can remain embedded without taking them off the table altogether. Lesley exposes the inference in question, which Mum avoids responding to directly, thereby maintaining the inference as an open possibility, while also avoiding committing to having communicated it.

Another related way in which Type 5 unwanted inferences can arise is through non-straightforward responses in third position that sequentially delete a response that is otherwise sequentially due. Through such third position responses, S can tacitly avoid endorsing any unwanted inferences that are implicitly attributed to their prior utterance. In the following example, which is taken from a first conversation between two Australians, Lily and Naomi have been discussing the granny flat that Lily is currently renting.

(10) CAAT: AusAus02

01 Lil: -> it's all I need (0.5) it's nice.
02 (0.1)
03 Lil: [I like it]
04 Nao: [goodness]
05 (0.1)
06 Nao: -> if you ever move out let me [know or]
07 Lil: [**tsk well:**]
08 Nao: [↑HEH ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha he]
09 Lil: -> [**I've got (.) that's what I was gonna say**]
10 **I- if I do move out in February I ↑will**
11 [**let you know**, because yeah]
12 Nao: [yea:h? hh ha ha ha ha ha]

The excerpt begins with Lily extolling how happy she is with the granny flat she is currently renting in lines 1–3 through a series of positive assessments ("it's all I need", "it's nice", "I like it") (P1). Notably, prior to this excerpt Naomi has explicitly stated on more than one occasion that she is looking to rent just that sort of place (for discussion see Haugh, 2022: 91–93). Lily's praising of the place she lives thus makes available the inference that she is lording it over Naomi who has not been able to find such a place to rent. Naomi's subsequent response in line 6, "if you ever move out let me know" (P2), is hearable as not only an ostensibly non-serious request, but also as a 'complimentary' assessment that upgrades agreement with Lily's assessments (Haugh, 2022). Notably, in responding in that way, Naomi implicitly makes available a possible secondary meaning that Lily is wanting to show off about her good fortune. Lily subsequently responds with a non-straightforward offer that sequentially deletes a third positioned acceptance of Naomi's upgraded 'complimentary' assessment. That is, Lily capitalises on the explicit content of Naomi's just prior utterance, responding with, "that's what I was gonna say, if I do move out in February I will let you know" (lines 9–11) (P3), thereby simultaneously construing the implicitly recovered inference from her prior positive assessments as unwanted. In short, through this non-straightforward response that sequentially deletes a response that is otherwise due, Lily avoids committing to the inference that she is not sensitive to Naomi's needs or that she wishes to engage in one upmanship with her.

4.6. Type 6: Implicitly disclaiming a potential inference

Our final type of unwanted inferences returns to the idea of inferences that are only *potentially* available from u_1, but which are not acknowledged by R at all. In our Type 3 unwanted inferences, we saw that speakers may explicitly disclaim a potential inference, thereby partially exposing the inference in question. Our Type 6 unwanted inference draws attention to the way in which speakers may instead orient to a potential inference that is made available through what they have said by subsequently *implicitly* blocking or suspending it through what they say next, either in the same turn or immediately following initial completion of their turn, prior to any response from a recipient (Schegloff et al., 1977). Type 6 unwanted inferences consist of same turn or transition space self-repairs that orient to an inference as unwanted through implicitly disclaiming it, as follows.

S 1 u_1 ('trouble source')
R 2 Ø
S 3 implicit disclaimer (of the inference recoverable from u_1)

Notably, Type 6 unwanted inferences remain maximally 'off record' as the inference remains embedded in the conversational undercurrent without any form of (explicit or implicit) exposure by R, and S's implicit orienting to the inference only provides a hint of what such an inference may pertain to.

Focusing on these kinds of potential inferences that are implicitly disclaimed by speakers might be considered to be veering into the territory of individual psychology rather than being a legitimate focus for pragmatic analysis and theorisation (Assimakopoulos, 2021). However, tantalising evidence that participants do indeed implicitly treat potential inferences as unwanted on some occasions, where being held committed to them might be considered inapposite or improper (Mandelbaum, 2016), emerges when we carefully analyse these kinds of same turn and transition space self-repair operations.

Consider the following example from a first conversation between Peter (an international student from the United States) and Sally (a local student from Australia), which we previously touched upon in example (3).

(11) CAAT: AmAus02

01	Sal:		yeah. so why'd you come ↑here?
02	Pet:		um:: (0.5) I was thinking about moving to
03			Australia, just in general.
04	Sal:		[↑oh yeah.]
05	Pet:		[cos uh I] like the culture and everything
06			I've done a few like research projects on it
07			for school. .hh but I was like "I should
08			pro::bly visit there befo(hh)re I(hh):
09			decide I just wanna go there.
10	Sal:		yeah.
11	Pet:		but? yeah. (0.2) still mi:ght.
12		->	I figure this would b- be a place I'd wanna settle down at.
13			(0.7)
14	Pet:	->	**but I gotta travel a little bit more.**
15	Sal:		↑oh ye[ah.
16	Pet:		[like. (0.2) not done yet.
17	Sal:		yea:h

The excerpt begins with Sally asking why Peter has come out to Australia (line 1). Peter responds by saying that he was thinking about living in Australia permanently (lines 2–3), but goes on to say that he thought it best to visit and see it for himself first (lines 5–9). He then repeats that he wants to "settle down" in Australia (line 12). This makes available the inference that Peter may be thinking of setting down soon. It also potentially makes available the inference that Peter may be looking for someone to "settle down" with given that "settling" can bring with it connotations of family life; that is, he is currently looking for a partner or girlfriend. Following this self-disclosure in line 12, there is a gap, allowing that some form of affiliative response might be due from Sally in line 13 given he is taking a very positive stance about life in Australia through it (Haugh and Carbaugh, 2015). Sally does not, however, offer any response, and he goes on to claim that he needs to travel more (outside of Australia) before doing so (line 14), thereby implicitly blocking this potential inference, or at least his commitment to its immediate relevance, through a concessive 'but'-prefacing of his claim. Notably, this concessive orients to the possibility that the subsequent clause is somehow counter to expectation (Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2005), given what was potentially inferable from what he previously said about settling in Australia. It is, of course, debatable as to whether Sally inferred anything of this sort. However, although she doesn't respond, the gap here indicates that she might have done (see Elder, forthcoming for discussion). Irrespective of Sally's actual cognitive state in this example, it goes without saying that speakers attribute inferences to others based on their own utterances, and, in recognising they may have communicated something unwanted, work to avoid putting those inferences on the record—more or less explicitly, and presumably, more or less successfully.

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have observed how people orient to unwanted inferences in interaction, exposing and avoiding them through various different methods. Through our taxonomy, we have demonstrated how different ways of orienting to unwanted inferences provide insights into the multiplicity of meanings that speakers are aware of in both clarifying their intended meaning(s), while inviting the recipient to neglect potentially undesirable, unintended meanings.

These different interactional methods that participants engage in are instantiations of what Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) more generally term 'practical reasoning'. This is 'why-based' abductive reasoning that foregrounds the question, 'why that now?' (e.g. Why would Lily say that? Why would Lesley's mum say it that way? What is Peter really getting at when saying he wants to settle down in Australia?). The idea is that this is an ongoing question that participants might be asking themselves (with differences in inferential complexity). So, when people formulate their utterances in non-straightforward ways, they are drawing attention to something that is also non-straightforward (Levinson, 2000; Haugh, 2022), and through these kinds of methods, participants can expose, embed, as well as avoid licensing such inferences. We have highlighted some of these practices or methods, including not only canonical third position self-repairs, but also non-straightforward responses and other more implicit methods by which speakers disclaim, deny, repudiate or reject both recovered and potential inferences as unwanted.

We acknowledge that our taxonomy is exploratory in nature and subject to further development, as there might be other response or repair operations that fit into our six types of unwanted inference. There are also other phenomena that are clearly related but we have here treated as lying outside of the scope of our analysis. Jefferson's (2003) thoughtful analysis of attempts by participants to keep the resolution of potential ambiguities off record is a case in point. We also acknowledge that we have examined instances of unwanted inferences in a limited number of varieties of English, and there may well be differences in how these are accomplished across different languages and cultures. Nevertheless, the broader point that we have attempted to make here is that the category of unwanted inferences is much more complex than simply avoiding unintended inferences and negotiating primary meanings: it is not necessarily just the propositional content that can be unwanted, but there can be other secondary meanings pertaining to social (im)propriety, grounds for making previous utterances, and so on, that participants orient to and avoid in more subtle ways.

While the theorisation of speaker meaning in pragmatics has traditionally focused on main propositions that speakers intend to communicate and recipients recover, or what are sometimes called 'primary meanings', it is clear that speakers themselves sometimes orient to secondary meanings that need not be inferred in order for the recipient to respond appropriately to the speaker. Our view is that if (ordinary) speakers are demonstrably concerned with such meanings, then those theorising about speaker meaning should be concerned about them as well. We hope that by drawing attention to the range of ways that secondary meanings are avoided as unwanted inferences, we have demonstrated a need for pragmatic theory to start to address not only the pragmatic inferences that are oriented to as part of the conversational record, but the much larger set of inferences that bubble away just below the conversational surface.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors confirm that they have no competing financial or personal interests that could affect their objectivity.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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Chi-Hé Elder is an Associate Professor in Linguistics at the University of East Anglia. Her research focuses on the nature of speaker meaning and pragmatic inferencing, with a particular interest on the role of miscommunication in discourse.

Michael Haugh is Professor of Linguistics in the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Queensland. His research interests lie in pragmatics, conversation analysis, and intercultural communication, with a particular focus on the role of language in social interaction.