Relevance theory was developed in the 1970s and 80s. Over the years, there have been a various modifications—hopefully improvements. In this and in posts to follow, I want to engage in some further rethinking. Today, I start, as a warm-up, with a terminological issue.

In in our 1986 book, *Relevance: Communication and cognition*, Deirdre and I drew a sharp contrast between two forms of communication, which we called "coded communication" and "ostensive-inferential communication."

In coded communication (exemplified by animal signalling and various cultural artefacts such as the Morse code), a communicator encodes a message into a signal that the addressee decodes. In ostensive-inferential communication (well exemplified by standard human pointing), a communicator ostensively requests the attention of the addressee and provides evidence from which the addressee can infer what information the communicator intends to convey.

There are *combined* forms: a communicative behaviour can involve both the production of a decodable signal and an act of ostension. Verbal communication, we argued, is a case in point. It is ostensive but it uses the senses encoded by linguistic expressions not to encode the speaker's meaning but to give evidence of this meaning.

On the other hand, there are no *intermediate* forms, behaviours that would qualify neither as signalling nor as ostension but that would be somewhere between the two. In particular, we deny that, in evolution, earlier primate signalling could have morphed into human ostensive communication through a series of intermediate forms (for a detailed discussion, see Thom Scott Phillips' 2014 book, *Speaking Our Minds*). This does not mean, however, that there are no precursors to ostensive-inferential communication. I want to share some speculative ideas about these precursors. Before doing so, however, I need to do a bit of terminological house cleaning.

There is a problem with the label "ostensive-inferential communication" and more precisely with the word "inferential" in it. When we wrote our book, we roughly accepted Jerry Fodor's view of the architecture of the human mind (presented in his 1983 *Modularity of Mind*): a variety of input modules combined with non-modular central processes. Inference, we assumed, was one of these central processes: it could be applied to any kind of task (in particular to the task of comprehension). We departed, however, from more standard views of inference in assuming that every concept (with the possible exception of concepts of individuals expressed by proper names) contributes its own deductive rules to the inference process. In other terms, we saw the inference process itself as quite domain-general, but inference rules as highly domain-specific.

Partly under the influence of then nascent evolutionary psychology, we soon came to see inference in a different light: not as a process performed by one central cognitive system using deductive rules, but as a function performed by a wide variety of cognitive mechanisms or modules, each drawing inference in its own specialised domain and using procedures adapted to this domain (for a recent detailed picture, see Hugo Mercier & Dan Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason*, 2017).

Comprehension, which attributes a communicative intention to a communicator, is a form of mindreading and might be viewed as one type of output of a mindreading module. We argued, however (in our 2002 "Pragmatics, modularity and mindreading"), that comprehension is performed by a more specialised inferential module – maybe a sub-module of a more general mindreading module. Unlike mindreading in general, comprehension can use a specialized procedure that takes advantage of the fact that the communicator is conveying a presumption of relevance and is actively helping her audience infer her meaning.

Talking, as we used to, of "ostensive-inferential communication" failed, then, to capture the very

special character of the inferences that, we now realised, are involved in the comprehension process.

Thirty years ago, we had also been assuming that, in coded communication, inference plays at most a marginal role. Seeing inference, as we do now, not as one central system but as a function performed in different ways by most cognitive mechanisms, there is no clear reason anymore to contrast inference and decoding the way we did. Decoding itself can be viewed as a one type of specialised inferential procedure among many.

Even more importantly, much work on animal communication (in particular Dorothy Cheney & Robert Seyfarth's, *How Monkeys See the World: Inside the Mind of Another Species*, 1990 – see also their 2008 *Baboon Metaphysics*) has shown how much animal communication involves context-sensitive inferences: the same coded signal can be disambiguated differently in different contexts.

So, for a while now, we have been talking of "ostensive communication," dropping "inferential." It seemed like a good and simple solution. But actually, it turned out to raise more problems than it solves. To talk of just "ostensive communication" forced us to enrich the meaning of "ostension" in ways that are not truly justified.

In comparative and developmental psychology, "ostension" is often used in a wide sense – arguably too wide – to describe behaviour the function of which is to catch the attention of others. We had used it to refer, more narrowly, not just to the act of catching attention but of catching attention in an intentional and overt way. Now, to be able to use "ostensive communication" simpliciter, we had to further narrow down the meaning of "ostension." "Ostension" would now denote intentional and overt behaviour of the communicator aimed at attracting attention not just to something she would be producing or pointing at, but also, ultimately, to her own communicative intention. We had good reasons to give up "inferential" in "ostensive-inferential communication" but as a result, we now had "ostensive" do not only its attention-related earlier job, but also the job that "inferential" had been intended to do. This, we soon realised, was terminologically awkward and theoretically question-begging.

Yesterday, I was, once more, discussing all this with Deirdre. The best solution we can think of at the moment to this terminological conundrum is to replace "inferential" with "interpretive."

In *Relevance*, we characterised "interpretation" as a relationship between two representations, one representing the other in virtue of a resemblance of content. This is a fairly standard sense of "interpretation": an interpreter from French into English, for instance, is given a text in French and produces a text in English that represents the French text by being as similar as possible to it in content. A summary or an exegesis are interpretations that either reduce or expand the content of the text they represent. To interpret the thoughts of others is to represent them by means of mental representations of one's own of similar content, and so on. In the same spirit, we had written:

> "We see verbal communication as involving a speaker producing an utterance as a public interpretation of one of her thoughts, and the hearer constructing a mental interpretation of this utterance, and hence of the original thought. Let us say that an utterance is an *interpretive expression* of a thought of the speaker's, and that the hearer makes an *interpretive assumption* about the speaker's informative intention." (*Relevance*, pp. 230-1).

So "ostensive-interpretive communication" highlights the two perspectives, that of the communicator who acts ostensively and of the audience who interprets. It does so more

informatively and accurately than did “ostensive-inferential.” Still, it is a mouthful. Any better idea?

In a week or so, I will move to more substantial issues regarding ostension itself and its place in evolution and in development.