

## 15 The birth of argumentation

---

The aim of this chapter is to show that the use of language has passed through two separate stages. The first of these, marked by the informative mode described in the preceding chapter, was very likely associated with the protolanguage spoken by the species of hominids which preceded us. The second, peculiar to our own species, is marked by the capacity for argumentation.

### 15.1 Relevance in the argumentative mode

#### *The logical mode*

Sharing of information is not the only remarkable behaviour in conversation. This can be seen if we look again at the example about the Christmas tree not losing its needles (p. 270). Up to B2, it might appear that the exchange between the two speakers is restricted to the informative mode: here is an uncommon fir, fully three weeks after being cut down, yet still keeping its needles. It can be said, however, that from A3 onwards the speakers are no longer in informative mode. Together they have begun canvassing an explanation for the phenomenon. This means that the plane on which they are now functioning is a logical one. Between the two conversation behaviours there is a clear difference and it is important to what follows. Neither of the speakers tries to trivialize this instance of B's Christmas tree. For example, A could have mentioned a niece of hers whose tree still had its needles after a month or something of that kind. Instead, she expresses her astonishment in a different way, using the term *odd* at A3. At B3 the speaker, noting the register in which A is functioning, expresses shared astonishment with *Yes, I can't think why*. The closing remark (A4: *It's a plastic one!*) is not meant to be taken seriously, though