This thesis is interdisciplinary in nature. Its main contribution is an application of game theory to linguistic pragmatics. Since perhaps not many people will be familiar with both subjects at once, the need arises to introduce the basics of both fields. Although admittedly the thesis spends more effort on explaining the relevant concepts of game theory to the linguist than on explaining the relevant concepts of pragmatics to the game theorist, I would sincerely hope that the text is accessible, at least in its gist, to anybody proficient in some adjacent academic field who is interested in the topic. Be that as it may, it would certainly be forlorn optimism to expect that all of my possible readers are equally interested in all issues addressed here. I would therefore like to give a brief overview of the content of this thesis, together with an indication which parts belong to either the linguist’s track or the game theorist’s track. The linguist’s track contains all linguistic applications and only the absolutely necessary information on game theory. The game theorist’s track, on the other hand, contains the game theoretic details and only the absolutely necessary information on linguistic pragmatics.

There are five main chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the basics of both Gricean pragmatics and game theory. Chapter 2 spells out the central iterated best response (ibr) model of pragmatic reasoning. Chapter 3 is dedicated to linguistic applications of the ibr model. Chapter 4 compares the ibr model to bidirectional optimality theory and discusses data from language acquisition. Finally, chapter 5 is mainly linguistic and deals with use and interpretation of conditionals. (A more thorough abstract of the thesis can be found at the end, on page 303.)

The linguist’s track obligatorily contains sections 1.2, where basic concepts
of game theory are introduced, as well as sections 2.1 and 2.2 to understand the basic IBR model. Reading section 2.3, which discusses a refinement of the IBR model, is also recommended. After that any part or portion of chapters 3, 4 and 5 that seems relevant to the reader’s concern should be intelligible. In fact, chapter 5 is nearly independent of the game theoretic framework (with the exception of sections 5.2.4 and 5.3.4).

The game theorist’s track obligatorily contains section 1.1, which introduces the basic ideas of Gricean pragmatics, as well the whole of chapter 2. Here especially sections 2.4 and 2.5 are relevant, which compare the IBR model to related game theoretic approaches. The game theorist might furthermore take interest in section 3.1 where I discuss my preferred interpretation of signaling games in a linguistic context. Finally, a cursory glance at some of the applications in sections 3.2 and 3.3 will help understand better the linguistic motivation behind the present approach.