Text understanding by small (and big) inference steps

I will present some work from Cambridge on "let alone" constructions by my student Olesya Razuvaevskaya. This research aims at argumentation modelling: as "let alone" constructions are a fixed incarnation of the *A Fortiori* argumentation scheme, they allow us to study the inference steps necessary for understanding these arguments. I will argue that many procedural and theoretical advantages ensue from the fact that in this construction, the inference steps we observe are necessarily very small. I will present some results from an annotation study investigating this hypothesis.

On the other side of the spectrum, I will talk about Plot Units, Wendy Lehnert's extremely ambitious scheme for understanding and summarising narratives. It was created in the 1980s and is based on huge, as opposed to minimally small, inference steps. I will explain why I see this scheme as something of a vision for the future of text understanding, despite the discrepancy between what she proposes and what we can do now.