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Quantifier *irgendein* and local implicatures

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This snippet focuses on a puzzle concerning the alternatives associated with the German existential quantifiers *einige* (‘some’) and *irgendeine* (‘any’) under embedding. In particular, we show that the two quantifiers trigger different implicatures in upward-entailing (UE) and downward-entailing (DE) contexts; see (1) and (2) respectively. In short, *einige* and *irgendeine* trigger the same *not all* implicature when embedded under ‘every’ (UE), but behave differently from each other when embedded under ‘none’ (DE). Whereas *einige* triggers a local implicature in DE contexts, *irgendeine* is interpreted as ‘none’.

1. Jedes der Mädchen fand *einige/irgendeine* ihrer Murmeln.
   every of the girls found some/any of her marbles
   ‘Each of the girls found some of her marbles.’
   \(\sim\) Each of the girls found *some but not all* of her marbles.

2. Keines der Mädchen fand *einige/irgendeine* ihrer Murmeln.
   none of the girls found some/any of her marbles
   ‘None of the girls found some/any of her marbles.’
   \(\sim\) None of the girls found *some but not all* of her marbles.

In grammatical accounts (Fox 2007; Chierchia 2013), an embedded occurrence of a scalar element may trigger local calculation of alternatives and their negation. If *einige/irgendeine* trigger a local implicature, then the readings in (1) and (2) result. What counts as an alternative to these kinds of sentences is a central issue for all such theories that have emerged from the neo–Gricean account of implicatures (Horn 1989; Sauerland 2004).

Gotzner and Benz (2018) have developed an experimental paradigm in which participants systematically derived the embedded implicature in the case of *einige* ‘some’ being embedded under *alle* ‘all’. In an interactive version of this paradigm (Benz et al. 2018), we collected a large corpus of production and interpretation data on German sentences of the form ‘Q of the girls found Q’ of their marbles’. Q and Q’ could be, among others, *einige* ‘some’, *alle/jedes* ‘all’/‘every’, *keines* ‘none’, and *irgendeine* ‘any’ (for details see https://osf.io/qs2vj/).

In (3) percentages of responses indicating a local *some but not all* reading for interpretation (%int) and production (%prod) are shown. As can be seen, when *einige* and *irgendeine* are embedded under *alle* (A-E and A-I respectively), the interpretation that each girl found some but not all marbles arises consistently for both quantifiers. In the case of embedding under *keine* ‘no’, however, interpretations diverge: *einige* embedded under *keine* (N-E) is predominantly interpreted as ‘some but not all’, whereas *irgendeine* embedded under *keine* (N-I) never gives rise to a local implicature. Instead, the sentence with *irgendeine* is interpreted as ‘no girl found anything’.
The data give rise to the following puzzle about alternatives: if one assumes with Buccola and Haida (2017) that ‘all’ is an alternative to 

\textit{irgendeine}, then this explains why A-E and A-I trigger the same local implicature, but it leaves unexplained why N-E and N-I behave differently. If, alternatively, one assumes that \textit{irgendeine} does not activate the ‘all’ alternative, then the observations about N-E and N-I follow, but the embedded implicature of A-I remains unexplained. One may argue that the \textit{not all} implicature of A-I is the result of \textit{irgendeine} being singular. Note, however, that participants only saw pictures in which girls had either none or at least 2 out of 4 marbles. Hence, the \textit{all found one} interpretation for A-I was contextually blocked.

Another suggestion is that the \textit{not all} inference from \textit{einige} has become conventionalized, whereas the \textit{not all} inference from \textit{irgendeine} is a true implicature that is blocked in DE contexts. Contrary to this assumption, Benz et al. (2018) show cases in which \textit{einige} in UE contexts fails to produce the expected implicature. Solving the puzzle of alternatives associated with German \textit{irgendeine} may also require further investigation of its distribution and NPI behaviour, which seems to differ from that of English \textit{any}.

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & N-E & N-I & A-E & A-I \\
\hline
\#int/\#prod & 35/15 & 98/77 & 76/50 & 4/7 \\
\%int & 77 & 1 & 91 & 100 \\
\%prod & 100 & 0 & 96 & 100 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Utterance tokens.}
\end{table}

\textbf{#int}: abs. number of interpreted utterance tokens.

\textbf{#prod}: abs. number of produced utterance tokens.

References


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