

snippets

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Scalar Implicatures in complex contexts

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Sauerland (2004) started a very fruitful line of research that still produces controversy and puzzling data – an ideal outcome. Among the tasks this landmark paper put on the agenda was an adequate theory of alternatives. The challenge was most successfully taken up by Katzir (2007), who proposed a syntactic algorithm generating exactly those alternatives which can yield implicatures of ϕ – simply put, all ψ 's which are at most as complex as ϕ :

- (1) $\psi \in \text{ALT}(\phi)$ iff ψ can be derived from ϕ by (successively) replacing sub-constituents in ϕ with (i) elements from the lexicon, (ii) sub-constituents of ϕ , and/or (iii) constituents used in previous context

But problems remain even for this most successful attempt to meet Sauerland's challenge.

First, Matsumoto (1995) showed that we need to allow context to contribute alternatives even if those are more complex than ϕ , and Katzir's (iii) indeed allows for this. Together with a consistency and a non-arbitrariness constraint (e.g. Sauerland 2004; Fox 2007), this predicts that (2b) cannot have the *but-not-all* implicature: its alternatives ALT contain both *John read all of the books* (as per (i)) and *John read some but not all of the books* (as per (iii)). Negating both is inconsistent, and there is no non-arbitrary way of choosing just one. Assuming that all mentioned constraints are identical for *only* (Fox and Katzir 2011), the *but-not-all* reading in (2c) is likewise out:

- (2) a. Sue read some but not all of the books.
b. # John read SOME of the books. (\nrightarrow not all)
c. # John only read SOME of the books. (\nrightarrow not all)

What hasn't been noted is that these readings are actually available – one just needs to add an additive particle (and the sentences also become felicitous):

- (3) a. Mary read some but not all of the books
b. John also read SOME of the books (\rightarrow not all)
c. John also only read SOME of the books (\rightarrow not all)

Since the presence of this particle is not predicted to have any impact on ALT, this is unexplained. The following minimal pair makes a similar point:

- (4) a. Mary dislikes cats but she likes pandas.
b. John only likes pandas. ($\rightarrow \neg(\text{John dislikes cats})$)
- (5) a. Mary dislikes cats but she likes pandas.
b. John also only likes pandas. ($\rightarrow \neg(\text{John likes cats})$)

Second, Fox and Katzir (2011) offer a quick fix to allow the implicature in (3b) after all (though they don't mention the additive particle): the stipulation that relevant, contextually-provided alternatives (as per (iii)) can be ignored while lexically-provided ones (as per (i)) cannot. This predicts that implicatures based on the latter should be more robust than those based on the former. But once we look past the very robust (lexical) *some - all* scale (van Tiel et al., 2016), this makes wrong predictions:

- (6) a. John's soup was tasty.
b. Mary's soup was warm. (\rightarrow not tasty)

The more robust implicature is the one based on the contextually-given alternative (*tasty*), while the lexically-given alternative can be ignored (the soup may or may not have been hot).

Third, Trinh and Haida (2015) propose that (iii) needs to be further restricted, such that contextually-given constituents cannot undergo syntactic operations before forming an alternative for implicature computation or *only*. They argue that this (together with a non-arbitrariness condition, as before) correctly allows only *Mary didn't smoke* to contribute to the meaning of (7b):

- (7) a. John went for a run and didn't smoke.
b. Mary only went for a run. ($\rightarrow \neg$ (Mary didn't smoke))

However, the following minimal pair shows precisely the opposite pattern (fixing the confound observed in (3a) by adding the missing additive particle):

- (8) a. John went for a drink but didn't smoke.
b. Mary also only went for a drink. ($\rightarrow \neg$ (Mary smoked))

As these three cases show, Sauerland's challenge still stands.

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