An Empirical Investigation of the Effects of Scale Type and Salience on the Interpretation of Scalar Implicatures

To identify factors affecting whether and when scalar implicatures are treated as part of truth-conditional meaning, we conducted an empirical study that measured the effects of scale salience and scale type on the interpretation of scalar implicatures. Results suggest that participants are more likely to interpret scalar implicatures as truth-conditional when alternate scalar values are discourse-old. Scale type also influences the treatment of scalar implicatures: open-ended scales with gradable values are the least likely to impact truth-conditional meaning and cardinal scales the most likely. These findings argue for a more nuanced view of scalar implicatures than is currently found in the literature.

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