

Some implicature theories beat some (other) implicature theories

Examining sentences in which certain scalar items are in the scope of others can help us distinguish between current rival theories of implicature. The formal treatment given by Gazdar and modified by Hirschberg cannot account for a number of cases involving multiple scalar items. That is to say, they don't solve the implicature projection problem: how are the implicatures of a sentence related to the implicatures of its constituents? As a consequence of this shortcoming, several authors have recently proposed novel theories aiming to explain these cases of interacting implicatures.

Chierchia has proposed a treatment that works in parallel with the semantics and enriches what is said with implicatures in situ, while Sauerland has proposed to extend the original Gricean mechanism. In many cases the theories make the same prediction, however there are a number of constructions that illustrate where the theories diverge. One such case is shown in (1), which is distinguished not only by scalar items taking scope over others, but also by the scalar items being quantifiers.

(1) Some girls hit some boys.

Chierchia predicts that what is meant by uttering (1) is (2), while Sauerland predicts that uttering (1) means (3).

(2) Some but not all girls hit some boys.

(3) (Some girls hit some boys) \wedge \sim (All girls hit some boys) \wedge \sim (some girls hit all boys)

By examining our intuitions in these and other cases, we can better judge which framework comes closer to answering the questions raised by the implicature projection problem.

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