

What primes what – How priming research can be used to explore theoretical questions about scalar implicatures {Joint work with Paul Marty, Jacopo Romoli & Yasu Sudo}

There is a growing body of research that demonstrates a priming effect for scalar implicatures (Bott & Chemla, 2016; Rees & Bott, 2018; Waldon & Degen, 2020, Meyer & Feiman, 2021). To date, this work leaves open questions about whether scalar implicature derivation can be primed, or an absence of scalar implicature can be primed, or both. In addition, there are open questions about whether priming can result from preceding trials involving the Alternatives for scalar implicature. In the first part of the talk, I will present some studies which indicate that scalar implicature priming effects are inverse frequency effects (Bock, 1986; cf Jaeger & Snider, 2013). As our results show, this means that sometimes SI derivation is primed and sometimes absence of derivation is primed. We also establish that priming by Alternatives is possible, though the effect is weaker (cf Rees & Bott). In the second part of the talk I discuss how we build on the results of our first set of studies to explore questions about what can serve as an alternative for scalar implicatures. According to some accounts, alternatives have to be more informative than (entail) the target sentence, other proposals allow sentences which neither entail nor are entailed by the target. In a study designed to test what kind of Alternatives can prime SI, we found that only stronger alternatives are effect. I discuss alternative interpretations of these results in light of a deeper dive into the priming effects themselves.

References:

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