Diversity in pragmatic inferences: experimental data, computational models, and the semantics/pragmatics interface

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Workshop description

The discussion on the distinction between Semantics and Pragmatics has a long tradition, and recent developments such as the Experimental Turn in Pragmatics and the implementation of computational models shed new light on our understanding of the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface. The goal of our workshop is to explore theoretical implications of recent experimental findings, and to broaden the discussion by taking into account a diverse set of pragmatic inferences. Research on conversational implicatures has largely focused on scalar implicatures, and, within the class of scalar implicatures, most research has been confined to a handful of Horn scales, including <some, all> and <or, and>. The focus on this narrow sample of conversational implicatures may be understood in terms of an implicit uniformity assumption assuming that all Horn scales behave alike. However, experimental research has shown substantial variability within the class of scalar inferences (Doran et al. 2009; van Tiel et al. 2016) and this variability has been found to interact with the degree semantics of different scales (Gotzner et al. 2018; Leffel et al. 2019). In addition, there is a broad class of other types of implicature such as R/I and Manner implicatures, that stand in competition with each other (Horn 1989; 2017; Levinson 2000), which up to now have received relatively little attention in the (experimental) literature. For example, the sentence *John is intelligent* may trigger the scalar implicature that *he is not brilliant*; however, *intelligent* may also be strengthened to *brilliant* (as a form of understatement). When a scalar term occurs under negation, as in *John is not brilliant*, two competing interpretation arise such that *not brilliant* may be understood as rather dumb (negative strengthening) or as *intelligent but not brilliant* (scale reversal). Research in this domain highlights the role of semantic factors in the computation of implicature and its interplay with politeness and other cognitive factors. However, not only the recent widening of the perspective to diverse types of scales and pragmatic inferences contributes to our growing understanding of the semantics and pragmatics of scales, there is also continuing progress in research on the prototypical <some, all> scale. In this workshop, there will be, for example, contributions considering the time course of scalar inferences and their interaction with specific aspects of discourse organisation such as turn taking.

Overall, this workshop will provide a forum for theoretical and experimental research on scalar diversity and the relevance of non-scalar implicatures to our understanding of the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface. A central aim is to gather researchers working in different theoretical frameworks, and to revive the *border wars* debate (Horn 2006), in light of new experimental evidence. Our keynote speaker is Laurence Horn who will speak about 'Implicature: A golden anniversary tour'.

References: Doran, R., Baker, R. E., McNabb, Y., Larson, M. & Ward, G. (2009). On the non-unified nature of scalar implicature: an empirical investigation. International Review of Pragmatics, 1, 1–38. Franke, M. & Degen, J. (2016). Reasoning in reference games: individual vs. population-level probabilistic modeling. PLoS One, 11 (5). Gotzner, N., Solt, S. & Benz, A. (2018). Scalar diversity, negative strengthening, and adjectival semantics. Frontiers in Psychology. Horn, Laurence R. (2006). The border wars. In Klaus von Heusinger & Ken P. Turner (eds.), Where Semantics Meets Pragmatics. Oxford: Elsevier. Levinson, S. (2000). Presumptive meanings. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. van Tiel, B., van Miltenburg, E., Zevakhina, N. & Geurts, B. (2016). Scalar diversity. Journal of Semantics, 33(1), 107–135.