Be timely: How turn-taking gaps influence implicatures

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Most studies of implicatures focus on how lexical items, and to a lesser extent intonation, trigger implicatures. Less work has examined how implicatures arise from speaker delivery and conversational interaction with their interlocutor. Consider the following examples:

(1) a. Sam: Hey, can you come to my party tonight?
   b. Ben: **No I can't #**   vs.   ...No, I'cant
(2) a. Sam: Hey, do you think that it is about time to shave my head?
   b. Ben: No, you have plenty of hair.   vs.   ...**No, you have plenty of hair. #**

In (1), a "no" response with a short gap is generally received as less polite than one followed by a longer gap (see Bögels et al. 2015). This supports the *maximize agreement hypothesis* (Pomerantz & Heritage 2012), questions are tailored towards agreement and predicts a bias for affirmations and short pauses and one for disaffirmations and longer pauses. Example (2), does not seem to be driven by question bias and invites additional implicatures: the longer pause makes the statement less sincere. This has been found to suppress scalar implicature rates (Bonnefon et al. 2015), but like maximize agreement, this is driven by politeness considerations. Our investigation examines whether implicatures from pause meaning are determined by question bias or whether pauses take on meaning independent of question bias.

We conducted two *Wizard of Oz* experiments, in which one author acted as a live confederate in an interactive picture matching task. Unbeknownst to the interlocutor, the confederate's answers to critical items were pre-recorded to insure control over the timing of the answer and the participant's response. All experimental items had three different pause types (short pause, long unfilled pause, long filled pause. In Experiment 1, some trials had affirmative questions (3a), whereas *no* trials had negated questions (4a), but no trials received both question types in Experiment 2:

(3) a. Participant: Waren Tomaten hinüber? *(Were tomatoes broken?)*
   b. Confederate: Einige *(some)* waren hinüber (SP)(....LP) (..ehh...FP)
(4) a. Participant: Waren Tomaten nicht hinüber? *(Were tomatoes not broken?)*
   b. Confederate: Nein *(no)* (SP)(....LP) (..ehh...FP)

In Experiment 1, implicature rates and processing times for *some* trials did not differ between long unfilled and filled pauses. This was not the case for *no* trials: listeners choose affirmative interpretations for *no* under negated questions for in the no-pause and filled pause conditions, but were more likely and quicker to choose the disaffirmative interpretation in the unfilled pause condition. This suggests that question bias only extends to polar answers, but pause length can alter polarity in ambitious answers.

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References: Bögels, Kendrick & Levinson (2015). Never say no... How the brain interprets the pregnant pause in conversation, PLOSone. Bonnefon, Dahl & Holtgraves (2015). Some but not all preferred turn markers help to interpret scalar terms in polite contexts. Thinking & Reasoning.