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Task Variation in Scalar Implicature Computation

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Abstract

Experimental research on the processing and acquisition of Scalar Implicatures (SIs) relies on behavioral tasks that purport to measure the rate at which SIs are computed. Two paradigms, the Truth Value Judgment Task (TVJT) and the Picture Selection Task (PST) have dominated the experimental pragmatics literature; however, it is still unclear how the selection of experimental paradigm affects the estimates of implicature rate. We report the results of two studies testing participants in both TVJT and PST using three different linguistic scales in English: “ad-hoc”, “or-and”, and “some-all”. In Experiment 1, the task variation was manipulated within subjects while in Experiment 2, it was manipulated between subjects. We found that the estimated rate of SI computation varied noticeably between these tasks. This suggests that the experimental paradigm itself has a significant impact on our estimates of the implicature rate and consequently psycholinguistic theories of implicature computation.