

Recovering some, if not all, of the speaker's meaning

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In Gricean pragmatics, hearers are predicted to draw inferences based on the speaker's decision to use a particular utterance rather than alternatives. In the classic case of scalar implicature, the use of a weak scalar term such as 'some' implicates that the stronger term ('all') does not hold. However, this implicature goes through only when certain licensing conditions are met, including that the stronger statement would be relevant and the speaker knows whether or not it could truthfully be made. In typical interactions, the hearer may not be in a position to know whether these conditions are satisfied, and might therefore be restricted to drawing inferences in some probabilistic way.

In this talk I consider the relevance of this observation for the case of numerically-quantified expressions. I outline a model for the speaker's use of such expressions, arguing that this can be treated as a problem of multiple constraint satisfaction. Then I consider this model from a hearer's perspective, drawing predictions about the pragmatic enrichments arising from the use of specific quantity expressions such as 'more than n', and how these enrichments can be attenuated by the preceding context. I present empirical data in support of these novel predictions. Finally I discuss the implications that this analysis might have for the more general case of implicature, and the relation between it and other forms of non-asserted content.