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Scalar Implicature is Sensitive to Contextual Alternatives
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Scalar Implicature is Sensitive to Contextual Alternatives
The quantifier “some” often elicits a scalar implicature during comprehension: “Some of today's letters have ...
Goodman & Stuhlmuller (G&S, 2016) investigated the effect of *speaker knowledgeability* in scalar implicature of the word "some", by having people make bets on whether all or not all objects had the relevant property in scenarios like:

(1) Context:

Letters to Laura’s company almost always have checks inside. Today Laura received 3 letters. Laura tells you on the phone:

(a) Full knowledge condition: I have looked at 3 of the 3 letters. Some of the letters have checks inside.
(b) Partial knowledge condition: I have looked at 2 of the 3 letters. Some of the letters have checks inside.

We extend this work by showing that how the speaker produces other utterances also affects this inference. We follow Degen & Tanenhaus (2015, 2016) who showed that “some of the” is less natural when the speaker uses number words (e.g., “2 of the”) in their other productions.
We provide a simple RSA model, building closely on Goodman & Stuhlmuller's, whose predictions are a main effect of knowledgeability, and an interaction.
We ran 4 2x2 preregistered comprehension expts. As predicted, we found (1) a strong knowledge effect in each; and (2) an interaction between knowledge and says-numerals, such that, in partial knowledge, people use what the speaker usually says to temper their interpretations.

Overall the results provide further evidence for a social cognition view of implicature (such as the rational speech acts approach) and have implications for theories of which alternative utterances are considered in pragmatic reasoning.