

Tel Aviv University
School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies,
Department of Linguistics

THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 30/03/2023

16:15-17:45

Shirly Orr, Tel Aviv University
Webb 103

Scales and Inferences

Scalar Inferences (SIs) are pragmatically derived upper-bounding inferences associated with the use of semantically lower-bounded scalar expressions, such as *some*, or *warm*. One of the current debates regarding these inferences concerns their inferential pattern, and specifically whether SIs are uniform across all scales or whether different scales lead to different SI rates. Recent experimental evidence favors diversity. In this study, we reexamine the factors found by van Tiel et al. (2016) as accounting for SI diversity (Boundedness and Distance) and analyze our data using two different methods (a regression analysis and a cluster analysis). Our findings support and even strengthen the assumption that different scales lead to different SI rates (i.e., the diversity assumption). At the same time, we can actually reconcile the two conflicting assumptions in the literature: uniformity versus diversity. We show that scalar expressions whose scalar construal is not entrenched demonstrate SI diversity (in the absence of any contextual support), and that scalar expressions whose scalar construal is entrenched exhibit SI uniformity (normally). We argue that the scalar construal depends, among other things, on the structural properties of its scale mates, and more specifically, that boundedness can impose and fix distance, thus creating a scalar construal. We further argue that by acknowledging the unique inferential pattern of different scale-types and a necessary distinction between two related, but not identical, concepts: consistency and uniformity, we can obtain a more nuanced depiction of the relationship between scales and inferences.

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