

Insights into scales and relevance from disjunction in child Romanian

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Abstract:

Children are known to derive more implicatures when the stronger alternative is made available through contrast or contextually relevant through a story/QUD. We extend this investigation to the exclusivity implicature of disjunction in child Romanian, an understudied language, targeting the prosodically marked *sau* 'or', *sau...sau* and *fie...fie* 'either or'. We conducted 3 TVJTs, where 5-year-olds evaluated a puppet's guesses. In Experiment 1, participants saw only disjunctive statements (*The hen pushed the train or the boat*), supported contextually by a story. In Experiment 2, participants additionally saw conjunctive statements. In Experiment 3, the disjunctive statement answered a conjunctive question (*Did the hen push the train AND the boat?*) making the stronger conjunctive alternative available and contextually relevant through an explicit QUD. While Experiments 1 and 2 showed no implicatures, in Experiment 3, access to alternatives and explicit contextual relevance jointly boosted implicature derivation – but strikingly only for *sau* and *sau...sau*, not for *fie...fie*.

Bio: Adina Camelia Bleotu currently teaches at the English Department of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest. She earned her PhD in 2015 from Ca'Foscari University, Venice, with a thesis on denominal verbs. She then shifted to experimental linguistics, being awarded multiple grants (a Fulbright grant at UMass Amherst, a fellowship in semantics and pragmatics at ZAS Berlin, a.o.). She has conducted psycholinguistic experiments on agreement attraction in adults, as well as language acquisition studies on a wide number of topics, such as simple and embedded implicatures, the interaction between modality and negation, recursion, a.o. Together with a team of researchers, she is currently investigating the acquisition of disjunction in Romanian (see more details at <https://sites.google.com/view/acquisitiondisjunctionromanian/>).

Bio: Mara Panaitescu currently teaches linguistics at the University of Bucharest. She is one of the few formal semanticists in Romania, having worked extensively on the semantics of free choice in the nominal domain (Panaitescu 2017, 2019), analyzing free choice determiners in a framework of possible worlds semantics within an alternative-based model, on a par with analyses of free choice disjunction.