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Scalar Implicature is Sensitive to Contextual Alternatives
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led by Zheng Zhang @ZZ77ZZ7Z, Leon Bergen, @ampaunov @raryskin



onlinelibrary.wiley.com
 Scalar Implicature is Sensitive to Contextual Alternatives
 The quantifier “some” often elicits a scalar implicature during comprehension: “Some of today's letters have ...”

11:13 AM · Feb 12, 2023 · 10K Views





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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:

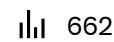
(1) Context:

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.



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G&S found that speaker knowledge affected these bets: when the speaker knew the contents of all 3 letters, participants think that "some of the letters" means "not all"; but when the speaker knew the contents of only 2 of the 3 letters, then "some" no longer means "not all"



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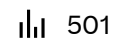
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We extend this work by showing that how the speaker produces other utterances also affects this inference. We follow Degen & Tanenhaus (2015, 2016) who showed that "some of the" is less natural when the speaker uses number words (e.g., "2 of the") in their other productions.



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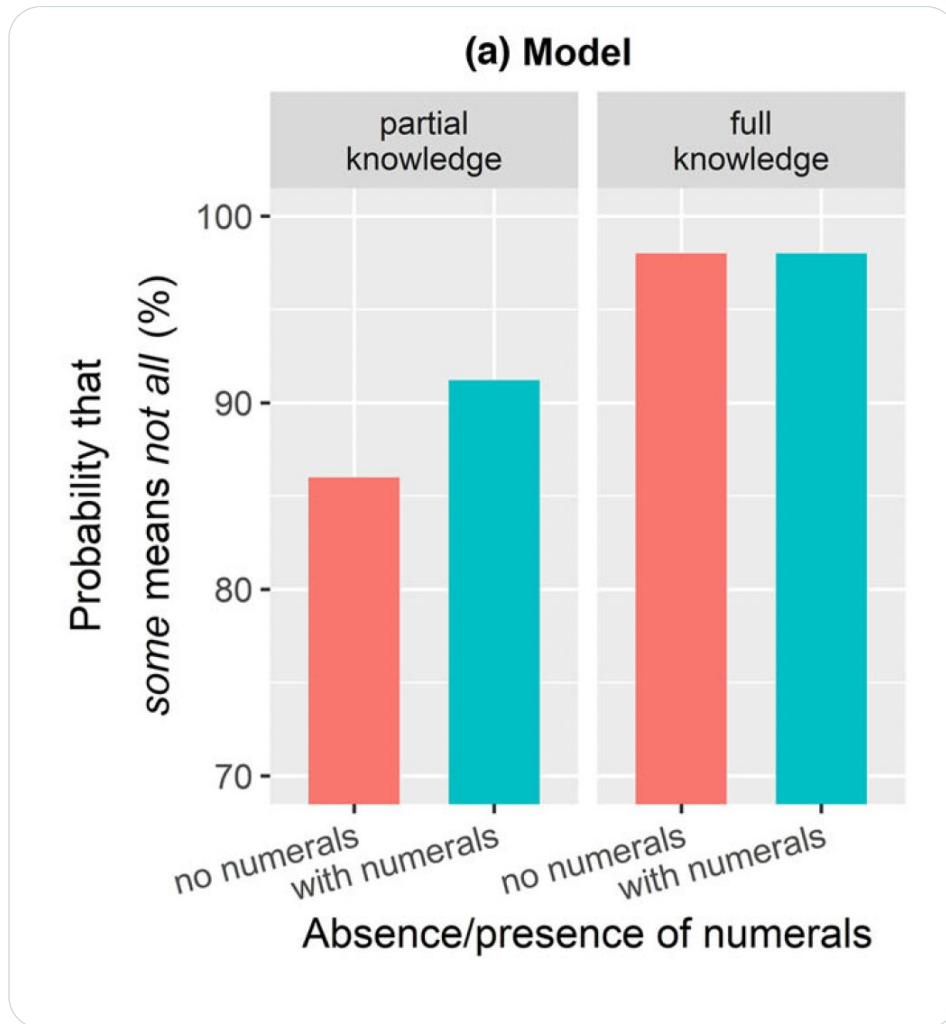




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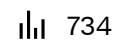
We provide a simple RSA model, building closely on Goodman & Stuhlmuller's, whose predictions are a main effect of knowledgeability, and an interaction.



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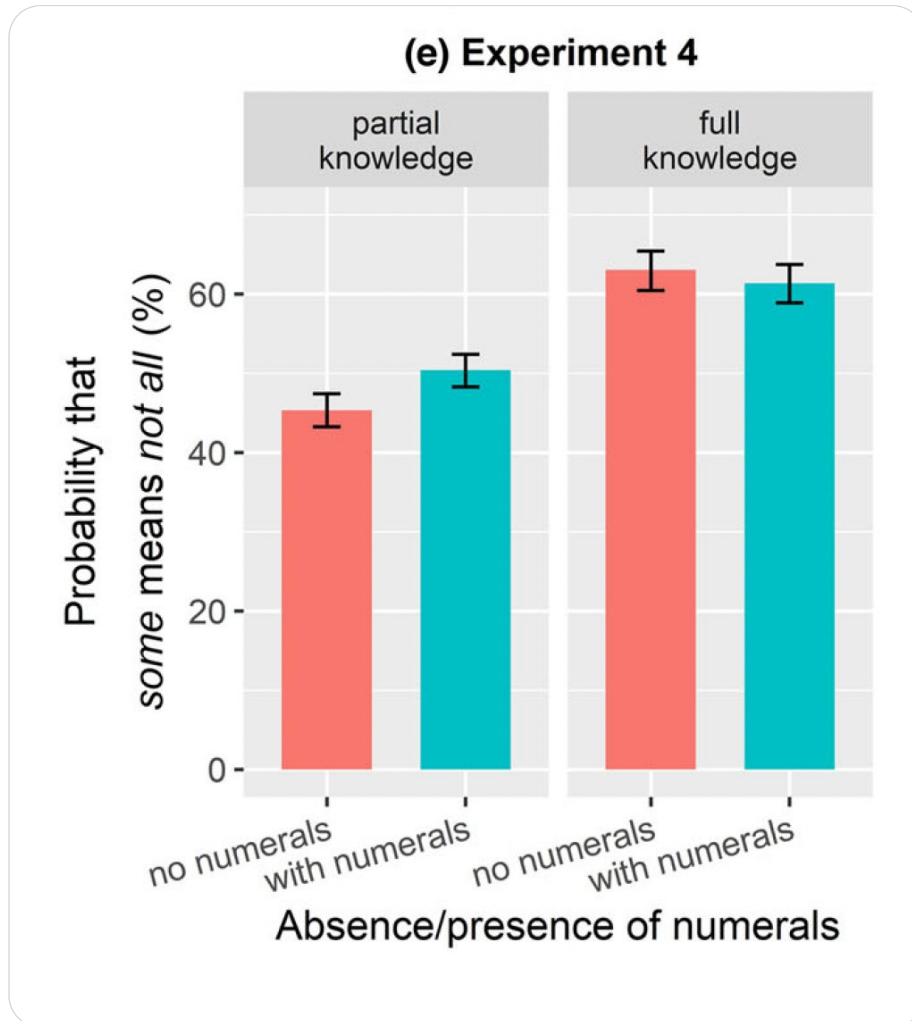




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We ran 4 2x2 preregistered comprehension expts. As predicted, we found (1) a strong knowledge effect in each; and (2) an interaction between knowledge and says-numerals, such that, in partial knowledge, people use what the speaker usually says to temper their interpretations



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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.

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