

Brown Bag L2C2

The distinction between comprehending and accepting: Implications for experimental pragmatics

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The distinction between comprehension and acceptance (or belief) has been vigorously debated in philosophy and, more recently, in psychology. While comprehension involves the pragmatic ability to infer the speaker's meaning from linguistic and contextual cues, acceptance involves what Sperber et al. (2010) call a capacity for 'epistemic vigilance', which enables hearers to avoid being accidentally or intentionally misinformed.

Crucially, the comprehension/acceptance distinction appears to have been neglected within the flourishing literature on experimental pragmatics, with important methodological implications. In this talk, I discuss the shortfalls of this approach with regard to a set of studies on the derivation of scalar inferences in face-threatening contexts (Bonneton et al., 2009; Feeney & Bonneton, 2012) and pro/contra-attitudinal contexts (Heyman et al., 2012).

Finally, I outline the design of two studies which I am planning to run in order to investigate the following hypotheses: (i) epistemic vigilance mechanisms towards the source decrease the acceptability of scalar inferences in face-threatening contexts; (ii) epistemic vigilance mechanisms towards the content decrease the acceptability of scalar inferences in pro-attitudinal contexts.

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