The Developmental Trajectory of Scalar Implicatures
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We often derive pragmatic inferences for a full comprehension of an utterance (e.g., metaphor, irony). Scalar implicatures, are a subtype of pragmatic inference that attribute an implicit meaning beyond the literal meaning of an utterance triggered by the speaker's use of a weaker quantifier (e.g., some) instead of a stronger quantifier (e.g., all). For example, when we hear 'Some of the students passed the exam" we typically understand that not all of the students did, even though the semantics of 'some' are lower-bounded (i.e. "at least some"). Young children are shown to behave differently with scalar implicatures. Consider an utterance like "some airplanes can fly". Young children generally do not object to such an utterance, while it would raise eyebrows in adults. Children younger than 10 years of age generally struggle to derive scalar implicatures on their own without experimenter intervention (Papafragou & Musolino, 2003; Barner et al., 2010; Katsos & Bishop, 2011; Skordos & Papafragou, 2016). However, the exact age where children start to exhibit an adult-like reasoning without any experimenter intervention is still unknown. We present a cross-sectional study with 120 5- to 12-year-old children and 30 adults, where participants evaluate statements containing different types of scalar terms. The statements are provided by a puppet watching short, animated clips with the participants and children are asked to evaluate what the puppet says. Our data shows that children begin to show similarity to adult comprehension at the age of 7 but are not fully adult like until 11.

Word Count: 249

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