

**THE EFFECT OF POLITENESS ON PRAGMATIC INFERENCE AND ITS TIME
COURSE: A VISUAL-WORLD STUDY ON THE INTERPRETATION OF SCALAR TERMS
IN INTERPERSONAL CONTEXTS**

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In the recent decade, a growing body of research has been launched to investigate how scalar expressions like *some* and *or* are interpreted in contexts that involve interpersonal factors, especially those in which politeness concerns may arise (e.g., face-threatening contexts). Studies in this line of research have reached rather opposite conclusions with regard to the effect of politeness on the derivation of scalar implicatures (Bonneton et al., 2009; Holtgraves et al., 2018; Mazzarella et al., 2018; Terkourafi et al., 2020).

Previous work investigates the effect of politeness mostly by manipulating face orientations via two methods, one based on semantics of predicates in scalar utterances and the other based on situational affect in contexts. We argue that both methods fail to create the expected difference in face orientations, thus making the comparison between the two contexts less informative. In fact, politeness concerns may be relevant in the two contexts, contra the implicit assumption that politeness concerns only arise in the face-threatening contexts. A critical consequence of this is that participants may take the scalar utterances to perform distinct illocutionary acts (i.e., illocutionary pluralism) (Lewinski, 2021; Johnson, 2019; Witek, 2015) even in the same context. Given the inherent connection between intention(ality) and illocutionary forces (e.g., Searle, 1969, 1975), it could be potentially productive to examine the effect of politeness by incorporating the role of illocutionary forces and their associated intentions. At the same time, given the problems in the manipulation of face orientations, the time course of such an effect largely remains unclear, even though the existing evidence seems to show a downstream effect.

To this end, the present study, working within the intention-based framework of pragmatic inferencing (Grice, 1967; Bach & Harnish, 1979; Bach, 2004; Jaszczolt, 2002; Levinson, 2000; Carston, 2002; Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Searle, 1969, 1975), reinvestigates the interpretation of scalar quantifiers of “yixie” (some) and “huozhe” (or) in contexts with politeness concerns by employing a visual-world paradigm. We create the contexts by manipulating both the situational affect and semantics of predicates while considering the social variables associated with interactants. We record participants’ eye movements during the unfolding of scalar utterances in the presence of visual displays. We also ask participants to indicate their perceived illocutionary forces associated with the scalar utterances. We then offer explanations for the mechanisms underlying this interpretive process. Our findings could contribute to the understanding of pragmatic inferencing mechanisms and shed light on how humans make interpretive decisions in conversational situations.