Scalar and Non-Scalar Implicatures of *Might* and *Some*

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A statement of the form *might* \( \varphi \) tends to suggest not just that \( \varphi \) is technically possible, but that it’s a ‘live’ possibility—that it is relevantly likely:

(1)  
A: Paul might come to the party. B: Oh, I had no idea! I’ll get extra chips!

Similar strengthening behavior can be observed with *some*:

(2)  
A: Paul ate some of the cake. B: Well, I guess he’s not sticking to his diet after all!

Each of these strengthening inferences are cancellable:

(3)  
a. Paul might come to the party, but it’s extremely unlikely.
   b. Paul ate some of the cake, but it was like three crumbs.

I assume that the semantic contribution of *might* and *some* is existential quantification. Standard scalar implicatures add an upper bound—*might* implicates \( \neg \text{definitely} \); *some* implicates \( \neg \text{all} \). The non-scalar strengthening inferences shown in (1) and (2) coexist happily with standard scalar implicatures; their contribution is the strengthening of the lower bound.

![Semantic contribution of the existential scalar implicature](image)

Both scalar and non-scalar implicatures of existentials can be targeted by **DISMISSIVE AGREEMENT**:

(4)  
**Dismissive Agreement with Lower-bound Strengthening**
   a. A: Paul might come to the party. B: Sure, he *might*, but it’s extremely unlikely.
   b. A: Paul ate some of the cake. B: Sure, he ate *some*, but it was like three crumbs.

(5)  
**Dismissive Agreement with Standard Scalar Implicatures**
   a. A: Paul might come to the party. B: Yeah, he *might*—in fact, he’s definitely coming!
   b. A: Paul ate some of the cake. B: Yeah, he ate *some*—in fact, he ate the whole thing!

In dismissive agreement, a speaker agrees with the existential claim, but goes on to reject the implicature. Despite the fact that both species of implicature is targetable by dismissive agreement, only standard scalar implicatures are targetable by metalinguistic negation:

(6)  
**Metalinguistic Negation Targets Standard Scalar Implicatures**
   a. A: Paul might come to the party. B: No, it’s not that he *might*—he’s definitely coming!
   b. A: Paul ate some of the cake. B: No, he didn’t eat *some*—he ate it *all*!

(7)  
**Metalinguistic Negation Fails with Lower-bound Strengthening**
   a. A: Paul might come to the party.
      B: #No, you’re wrong that he *might*, because it’s extremely unlikely.
   b. A: Paul ate some of the cake.
      B: No, you’re wrong that he ate *some*, because it was like three crumbs.

Relatedly, the two species of implicature interact differently with focus; focusing an existential foregrounds the scalar implicature, but if anything backs away from the lower-bound strengthening implicature. Focus interacts with existential operators in two ways: first, it brings to salience the weak semantics of the operator, neutralizing lower-bound strengthening implicatures; second, it brings to salience the set of scalar alternatives to the operator, reinforcing the scalar implicature and licensing metalinguistic negation.