

Number Words and Aspectual Modifiers

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Much work (e.g., Musolino 2004) notes that number words in addition to having lower bounded readings have exact readings as well. I present additional evidence for this ambiguity stemming from interactions between number words and aspectual modifiers. Only lower bounded interpretations of number words can account for sentences like (1), while exact readings are needed to account for (2).

- (1) The White Sox still have a deficit of five runs.
- (2) The White Sox now have a deficit of five runs.

Example (1) can be used either if the White Sox remain down by five or if they decrease their deficit from six to five. In both cases, (1) conveys that in the past the White Sox had a deficit of at least five runs and currently their deficit is five runs. This is naturally accounted for if *five* has a lower bounded interpretation. In contrast, (2) can be used if the White Sox, down by six, bring their deficit down to five, or if the White Sox, down by only four, let a run increasing their deficit to five. I argue that this can only be accounted for if *five* has an exact interpretation. I argue against the possibility that this data can be accounted for by embedded scalar implicatures (Geurts 2009). I extend this treatment to modified numerals like *at least* and *at most* and other aspectual particles, e.g., *already*.

References

- Geurts, B. (2009, February). Scalar implicature and local pragmatics. *Mind & Language* 24(1), 51–79.
- Musolino, J. The semantics and acquisition of number words: Integrating linguistic and developmental perspectives. *Cognition* 93, 1–41.