
Original Paper

Scalar Implicature in Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind*: A Neo-Gricean Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines scalar implicature in Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind* using Levinson's neo-Gricean model. Drawing on Grice, Horn, and Levinson's core ideas and incorporating insights from recent empirical investigations, the approach investigates how scalar phrases like "some," "few," "most," and modal verbs contribute to implicit meanings that go beyond literal interpretation. The study investigates both qualitatively and quantitatively how Zafón's narrative uses scalar implicature to enhance character relationships, elicit subtextual tensions, and reflect larger societal dynamics. A total of 522 scalar implicatures were identified across seven semantic-pragmatic categories in *The Shadow of the Wind*. These implicatures were examined to understand how they reflect pragmatic strategies such as politeness, epistemic hedging, and speaker intention within varied narrative contexts. The findings reveal that scalar choices—particularly those involving quantifiers like some, pronouns like others, and modifiers like almost—serve not only to manage informational precision but also to encode subtle interpersonal dynamics and thematic depth. This distributional and interpretive analysis contributes to literary pragmatics and offers pedagogical insights for ESL and teacher training.

Key words: Communication Scalar implicature, Neo-Gricean pragmatics, Levinson's theory, Horn scales

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, there has been a resurgence of interest in implicatures, specifically scalar implicatures. Scalar implicature is the pragmatic inference that occurs when a speaker chooses a weaker term from a scale (e.g., "some"), meaning that stronger options do not apply (e.g., "not all") (Grice, 1975; Horn, 2004). Take for example, Consider this scenario. A student says, "I finished some of my homework." This comment suggests that she has finished some or all of her schooling. Nonetheless, it's probable she didn't do all of her schoolwork. Scalar inference is frequently defined as conversational implicature, as follows: Instead of saying "I did all of my homework," the speaker may have been more cooperative and educational. Why didn't she? Due to unfinished schoolwork, most likely (cf. Horn, 1972, 1989). Semantic and pragmatic arguments have focused on these implicatures, which are derived from conversational maxims, especially the maxim of quantity (Levinson, 2000; Sauerland, 2004). According to experimental paradigms including eye-tracking (Huang & Snedeker, 2009), sentence verification (Bott & Noveck, 2004), and ERP investigations (Nieuwland et al., 2010), scalar implicatures require cognitive effort and are context-sensitive (Chevallier et al., 2008; Spychalska et al., 2016).

Depending on whether implicatures are calculated by linguistic processes (Chierchia et al., 2012), generated through relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), or default (Levinson, 2000), theoretical explanations vary (Geurts & Poussoulous, 2009; Katsos & Bishop, 2011). Scalar terms vary in their triggering implicatures based on lexical scale, context, and speaker intent (Doran et al., 2009; van Tiel et al., 2016).

For instance, implicatures with varying speeds and intensities are produced by quantifiers like "some" and modals like "might" (Marty & Chemla, 2013; Tomlinson et al., 2013). However, there is a gap in

our knowledge of the empirical distribution of implicatures since few research have methodically documented their frequency and type across a variety of scalar expressions (Katsos & Cummins, 2010; Breheny et al., 2006).

Furthermore, studies have ignored ad hoc or contextually emergent scales in favor of traditional scalar items (e.g., <some, all>) (Papafragou & Tantalou, 2004; Bergen & Grodner, 2012). This limited breadth hinders computer modeling attempts and restricts generalizability (Frank & Goodman, 2012; Goodman & Stuhlmüller, 2013). Theoretical models remain underconstrained as well as and potentially idealized (Grodner et al., 2010; Noveck & Posada, 2003) in the absence of a thorough empirical description of the frequency and circumstances in which certain scalar implicatures occur.

Despite this complex theoretical landscape, empirical research frequently reduces scalar implicature to binary judgments—whether an implicature is drawn or not—without quantifying its distribution across contexts and lexical scales (Geurts & Poussoulous, 2009; Katsos & Bishop, 2011). Also This paper fills a gap by providing a large-scale empirical analysis of scalar implicature production and interpretation, focusing on the number and distribution of each implicature type by analyzing scalar implicatures in *The Shadow of the Wind* using Levinson's (2000) framework and Horn's concept of lexical scales. We use a broad experimental dataset to measure implicature rates across distinct scalar expressions and settings. In literary discourse, such implicatures can subtly affect character dynamics and thematic resonance. Our research aims to improve theoretical models, guide computational methods to pragmatic inference, and contribute to a better understanding of scalar implicature as a dynamic, context-sensitive phenomena (Hunt et al., 2013; Politzer-Ahles & Husband, 2018).

The research questions are:

R.Q1: How do scalar implicature utterances in *The Shadow of the Wind* reflect pragmatic strategies such as politeness, epistemic hedging, and speaker intention, and how do they contribute to narrative depth, character psychology, and thematic resonance across different contexts

RQ2: S.What is the frequency and proportional distribution of scalar implicature triggers across seven linguistic categories (cardinals, quantifiers, connectives, modals, adjectives/adverbs, verbs, and negatives) in *The Shadow of the Wind*?

Theoretical Framework

Grice's theory of meaning and implicature (1975), which makes a distinction between natural meaning and non-natural meaning (meaning_{NN}), is the foundation of the theoretical framework for this investigation. The latter is essential to pragmatic inference. Figure 1 shows that non-natural meaning is divided between what is implicated (which includes both conventional and conversational implicatures) and what is expressly declared. Generalized conversational implicature, which includes scalar implicature, is a category that emerges when a speaker's lexical choice—for example, using "some" rather than "all"—causes pragmatic enrichment depending on the listener's expectations of informativeness. In addition to providing the analytical basis for analyzing how scalar implicatures function in literary discourse, specifically in terms of politeness, epistemic hedging, and speaker intention, this framework allows for the systematic classification of implicature types, including scalar, alternate, and clausal forms.

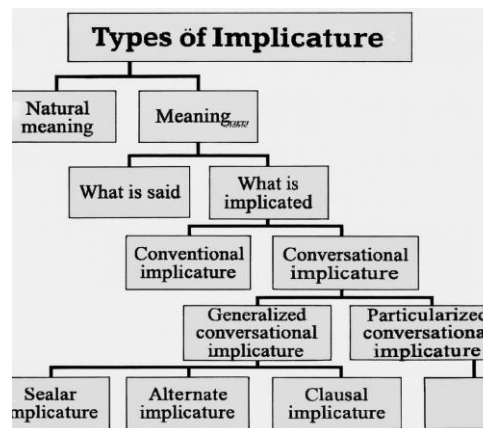


Figure 1. Taxonomy of Pragmatics

Source: Adapted from Grice (1975) and Levinson (1983), illustrating the taxonomy of implicature types within the Gricean framework.

Since the late 1990s, scalar implicatures (SIs) have garnered renewed attention in semantics and pragmatics, particularly in relation to Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and conversational maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. Scalar implicature arises when a speaker flouts the maxim of Quantity by selecting a less informative term, prompting the listener to infer that stronger alternatives are untrue (Horn, 1972; Levinson, 2000). Horn scales, such as {all, most, many, some, few} and {must, should, may}, represent ordered sets of expressions varying in informativeness. Levinson (2000) expanded Horn's taxonomy, emphasizing the contextual role in implicature generation, while Hirschberg (1991) argued that scalar implicature is a context-sensitive variant of particularized implicature.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that scalar implicatures are cognitively demanding and context-sensitive. Bott and Noveck (2004) used sentence verification tasks to show that deriving SIs requires processing effort. Huang and Snedeker (2009) employed eye-tracking to reveal real-time pragmatic computation, and Nieuwland et al. (2010) used ERP methods to explore the neural correlates of implicature processing. These studies collectively underscore the dynamic interplay between semantics and pragmatics.

Literature Review

Theoretical accounts diverge on whether scalar implicatures are default (Levinson, 2000), relevance-driven (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), or grammatically computed (Chierchia et al., 2012). Chierchia & Fox, (2011) focused on the distinction between primary and secondary Scalar Implicatures (SI) in sentences like "Some of the students are home". The study used an experimental paradigm to distinguish between these three readings: literal reading, primary SI, and secondary SI. The secondary SI can be accessed even in contexts where the speaker is not well-informed, which contradicts classical neo-Gricean pragmatic approaches to SI. The study also compared standard scalar items like some and expressions involving SIs, such as almost, numerals, and plural morphology. The results suggest that the pragmatic and semantic mechanisms at play are different for both types of items. Chierchia, Fox, and Spector (2012) distinguished between literal, primary, and secondary readings of scalar items, showing that secondary implicatures can be accessed even when the speaker lacks full knowledge.

Dieuleveut et al. (2019) further challenged neo-Gricean assumptions by demonstrating item-specific variation in implicature derivation, especially for numerals and plural morphology.

Baker et al. (2009) examined how scale type influences implicature perception. Their findings implied that the kind of scale used influences whether or not speakers believe a certain scalar implicature to be a component of an utterance's truth-conditional meaning. Furthermore, they discovered that aspects of the conversational context in which the implicature was used were also significant. In particular, they

discovered that the perception of scalar implicatures produced by gradable adjective scales, but not by other scale types, is significantly influenced by the quantity of scalar values evoked in the discourse environment. Regarding the effects of scale type, they discovered that ranking orderings, cardinals, and quantificational items were more commonly used in truth-conditional meaning than gradable adjectives.

In literary pragmatics, Dewi, Erfiani, and Utami (2020) conducted a descriptive-qualitative study on implicature in *Into the Magic Shop* by Doty (2016), identifying scalar implicature as the most frequent type among 27 utterances, 5 were classified as generalized conversational implicature, 14 as scalar implicature, and 8 as particularized conversational implicature. Scalar implicature is the most common type. Their work highlights the pedagogical potential of implicature analysis in narrative contexts.

Building on this foundation, the present study investigates scalar implicature distribution in *The Shadow of the Wind*, applying a semantic categorization framework to a literary corpus. It identifies distributional asymmetries across seven categories—cardinals, quantifiers, connectives, modals, adjectives/adverbs, verbs, and negatives—and proposes a pedagogically adaptable model for EFL/ESL/ and teacher training. This contribution bridges empirical pragmatics and stylistic linguistics, filling a gap in implicature research within literary fiction.

Methodology

This research examined scalar implicature patterns in Carlos Ruiz Zafón's Spanish novel, *The Shadow of the Wind* adopting a qualitative linguistic approach. The analysis is grounded in pragmatic theory, particularly the frameworks proposed by Grice (1975), Horn (1972, 1989), Levinson (2000), and Hirschberg (1991), which inform both the identification and interpretation of implicatures. The novel was chosen because of its narrative intricacy, character-driven discourse, and extensive use of evaluative and epistemic terminology. Scalar implicature occurrences were retrieved from direct speech and narrative exposition to account for conversational and stylistic differences. Scalar triggers were described as lexical objects that represent ordered sets and encourage pragmatic inference via contrast or gradability. The retrieved utterances were divided into seven scalar groups according to semantic kind and theoretical importance. A sample of the tables for consolidating each category is given below in Table 1.

Table 1. Occurrences of Scalar Implicature in Adjectives/ Adverb Type

Adjectives	No.of Occurrences	Page Nos
excellent	3	62,119,159,
good	41	22,25, 26,34, 35,37,39,47,48(3), 53(2), 54,60,61,68,69(2),74,77, 86, 89(2), 96,97(2),99,100,101,102, +16+12+11+10
bad	24	47, 60, +22
None	7	81
always	45	16,25,65,68,69,70,76,93,96,101(3),116,126,133(2),134(2),135(2),144, 186(3), 187,188,189(3),+16
often	7	40,152, 173, 188,196, 219,289,
sometimes	29	40,+16+12,

The analysis used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, demonstrating distributional tendencies across categories and offering qualitative comments to help comprehend the pragmatic function of scalar words.

Results

R. Q 1. How do scalar implicature utterances in *The Shadow of the Wind* reflect pragmatic strategies such as politeness, epistemic hedging, and speaker intention, and how do they contribute to narrative depth, character psychology, and thematic resonance across different contexts?

In the novel "The Shadow of the Wind," there are examples of scalar implicature with the use of the word "others."

Data 1. When someone says "I gave some books to others," it implies that they did not give books to everyone, but only to some people. The word "others" also suggests that there are not many people who did not receive books, without explicitly stating this fact. This implication is based on the alternative phrasing of "I gave books to everyone," which would mean that all individuals received books.

Data 2. It made me wonder about the power dynamics at play in the world of publishing and who gets to decide which stories are worth telling and preserving for future generations. How many voices have been silenced or ignored because they didn't fit into the dominant cultural narrative?

The material above discusses the publishing industry and how particular stories are picked out to be shared and treasured for posterity. Who deserves the responsibility for the choices and what structures of power exist at work are questions the author has. They also inquire as to the number of voices that have been disregarded or silenced since they differed to the prevailing cultural narrative.

The author's main concern is that some people's tales would not be acknowledged because those who decide which stories are published might only select those that fit with what's mainstream or popular. This implies that crucial viewpoints might be excluded if they conflict with what society as its entirety deems typical or appropriate.

Data 3. This realization sparked a desire within me to seek out these forgotten stories and give them a voice once more. To use my own platform as a writer to amplify those voices that have been silenced for too long.

The speaker realized that there are narratives out there that were lost and should be heard again. They are driven to discover such narratives and then pass those with the world through the words they compose. The writer wishes to capitalize on their writing platform to provide vent to individuals who have been left hushed for a lifetime, to make sure others get to hear their tales again. Basically, the author wishes to refocus attention on significant stories that may have been forgotten or abandoned in previous generations.

Data 4. "He was thrilled when you wrote him back," my father said with a smile before taking another swig of wine.

"So you mentioned."

"I hope you don't mind."

"Why should I?"

"No reason," he said before changing course as though he'd thought better of pursuing this line any further. There were things on his mind last night at dinner; now they seemed less pressing than others lurking just beyond our ability to see them clearly.

Explanation: In this context, the word 'others' serves as a scalar implicature highlighting something more significant than what's immediately visible in their conversation/interaction: perhaps hidden tensions or concerns that aren't voiced but exist between them sub-textually (i.e., unsaid thoughts).

In summary, scalar implicature involves understanding what is being suggested by a particular choice of words in relation to other possible options. In this case, using "others" implies exclusion from receiving something given out while suggesting more than one person was involved in receiving it.

Examples from "The Shadow of the Wind"

Data 5. "The Cemetery of Forgotten Books is a secret place to hide books that no one cares about

anymore," he said, like a magician pronouncing an incantation. "Until someone remembers them again." I imagined a labyrinth of libraries, far underground or in the heart of some isolated forest, where lost books could be found again -- by me if by nobody else.

Explanation: Here, the scalar implicature arises from the word "nobody" implying that there might be others who remember and find these lost books except me. This interpretation enhances the sense of mystery behind the Shadow Library and adds depth to it.

Scalar implicatures occur frequently in Carlos Ruiz Zafón's novel *The Shadow of the Wind*.

Data 6. As an illustration, Daniel remarks about Nuria Monfort's language prowess: "She was amazing with languages; she spoke English and French like angels." "Like angels" indicates that Nuria had excellent language abilities in this context.

Data 7. Another instance is when Fermn Romero de Torres discusses his prior role as a spy throughout the Spanish Civil War with Daniel. "I did some work for our secret services back then," Fermn claims. Instead of offering particular information about his espionage efforts, Fermn here merely says, "Some work." This shows that he might be hiding facts or attempting to minimize his participation in these activities.

RQ2: How do scalar implicature utterances in *The Shadow of the Wind* reflect pragmatic strategies such as politeness, epistemic hedging, and speaker intention across different narrative contexts?

The examination of scalar categories indicated a noticeable imbalance in their distribution throughout the sample (see Table 2). The Adjectives/Adverbs category was immensely dominating, accounting for 206 tokens. Quantifiers accounted for 151 occurrences, with smaller but significant numbers for Verbs ($n = 42$) and Negatives ($n = 46$). The remaining categories, Cardinals ($n = 25$), Connectives ($n = 23$), and Modals ($n = 29$), were quite scarce. The (Table 2) clearly summarizes these data.

Table 2. Frequencies of scalar categories in the data set

Category	Frequency
Cardinals	25
Quantifiers	151
Connectives	23
Modals	29
Adjectives/Adverbs	206
Verbs	42
Negatives	46
Total	522

As shown in Table 2, a total of 522 Scalar Implicature were identified in this study.

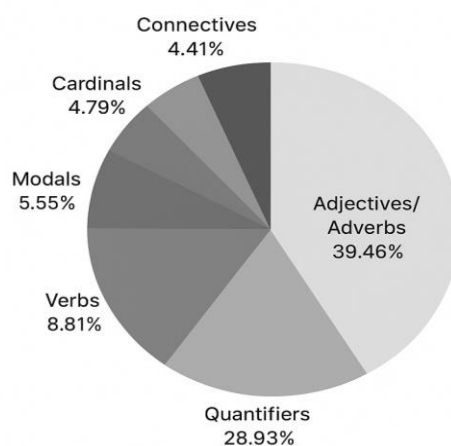


Figure 2. Percentage of Scalar Categories

Figure 2 illustrates the relative distribution of scalar categories using a grayscale pie chart. Adjectives/Adverbs make up the biggest part, followed by Quantifiers, with lower amounts for Verbs, Negatives, Cardinals, Connectives, and Modals.

Discussion

Cardinal numbers, such as "I can think of a dozen," indicate a limited set, but quantifiers, such as "some, few, and most," imply the rejection of stronger options. Connectives, such as "or and and," have scalar weight and can cause implicature by implying exclusivity or non-commitment. Modals, such as "may" and "must," express degrees of necessity and possibility, expressing epistemic stance and social orientation. Adjectives with emotional or moral weight, such as "wonderful, efficient, and appropriate," help to represent characters and emphasize themes. Scalar strength is encoded via verbs such as "believe, know, love, and remember," which are fundamental to character connections and narrative dependability, narrative reliability, offering insight into psychological depth and pragmatic nuance. Negative quantifiers, such as "no, none, and not all," suggest exclusion and rarity, and have face-saving or sarcastic roles, consistent with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. These constructs are effective for expressing restriction, denial, or emotional restraint. Overall, Zafón's narrative makes use of cardinal numerals, quantifiers, connectives, modals, adjectives, and verbs, which helps readers grasp character purpose and politeness methods.

Conclusion

Scalar implicature in *The Shadow of the Wind* is a strong pragmatic technique that allows Zafón to communicate subtext, sarcasm, and emotional depth. Levinson's neo-Gricean model provides a solid foundation for examining these findings. According to the study, scalar implicature is a literary construct that adds complexity to narratives rather than a language occurrence. This present study could identify 522 scalar implicature.

This work has implications for both literary analysis and pragmatic education, indicating that scalar implicature can be an effective lens for teaching inferential reading and discourse sensitivity. Future study might look into how readers from various language backgrounds understand scalar signals, enhancing cross-cultural pragmatics and ESP training.

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