Experimental Pragmatics

How does a listener understand a sarcastic “That was a wonderful speech” when the words point to a positive review? Why do students of introductory logic interpret “Some cabs are yellow” as “Not all cabs are yellow” when the meaning of “some” is compatible with “all”? Pragmatics aims to explain how listeners draw out a speaker’s meaning from utterances, an astonishing feat when one considers that the words in a sentence hardly suffice for fully comprehending what the speaker intended. Given the nature of pragmatics, it is going to take the interdisciplinary firepower of many cognitive sciences – including philosophy, experimental psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience – to fully appreciate this uniquely human ability. In this book, Ira Noveck, a leading pioneer in experimental pragmatics, engagingly walks the reader through the phenomena, the theoretical debates, the experiments, as well as the historical development of this growing academic discipline.

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