Defaultness and no other animals
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The talk will focus on the Defaultness Hypothesis, with emphasis on constructed interpretations rather than lexicalized meanings (Giora et al., 2015a, 2016). Within this framework, defaultness is defined in terms of an unconditional, automatic response to a stimulus. According to the Defaultness Hypothesis, default responses will prevail, irrespective of factors known to affect processing such as degree of novelty, degree of nonliterals, degree of negation, or degree of context strength. The Defaultness Hypothesis is an umbrella theory, encompassing both the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora, 1997, 2003) and the View of Default Nonliteral interpretations (Giora et al., 2013, 2014, 2015b), while reconciling their inconsistencies. It further invites the revisitation of the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (Giora et al., 2004, 2015c), extending it to default interpretations (on top of default meanings).

According to the Graded Salience Hypothesis, default interpretations are salience-based. Although noncoded, they are constructed compositionally, based on the default, coded and salient meanings of the stimuli components, regardless of degree of contextual support, nonliterals, or negation (Giora, 2006). However, noncoded interpretations not based on the default, salient meanings of the stimuli constituents (such as novel, nonlexicalized sarcasm) are nonsalient; they are learnt or derived, mostly on the basis of contextual information. Hence, they are nondefault. According to the Graded Salience Hypothesis, default, salience-based interpretations (‘he controls himself’) of stimuli (He is the most restrained person possible) will enjoy unconditional priority over nondefault, nonsalient, context-based alternatives (‘he is rude’), when otherwise (e.g., sarcastically) biased.

In contrast, according to the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations, some nonsalient interpretations are derived by default, regardless of contextual support or degree of nonsalience (He is not the most restrained person possible, meaning ‘he is rude’). These nonsalient yet default interpretations will enjoy unconditional priority over nondefault counterparts, even if salience-based (‘he is restrained but others are more restrained than him’).

The Defaultness Hypothesis, however, goes beyond the Graded Salience Hypothesis and the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations, predicting the superiority of defaultness, irrespective of degree of nonsalience, negation, nonliterals, or contextual strength. Having established degree of defaultness of novel negative and affirmative counterparts, presented in isolation (Exp. 1), Giora et al. (2015a) embedded them in contexts equally strongly supportive of their default and nondefault interpretations. They aimed to test the prediction that default responses will be prompted instantaneously, initially and directly, faster than nondefault counterparts, irrespective of degree of nonliterals, negation, novelty, or contextual strength. Results indeed attest to the superiority of defaultness (Exp. 2). They show that, as predicted, default interpretations, such as Negative Sarcasm (He is not the most restrained person possible) and Affirmative Literalness (He is the most restrained person possible) were processed faster than nondefault counterparts - Affirmative Sarcasm and Negative Literalness - the latter involving contextually incompatible default interpretations in the process. (Note, however, that only in the case of nondefault Negative Literalness, are these default interpretations distracting and will have to be suppressed; in the case of nondefault Affirmative Sarcasm, they will be retained and partake in the interpretation process). Defaultness, then, is speedy; nondefaultness is costly, disrupted by defaultness.

Still, when defaultness benefits nondefaultness (as in the case of Affirmative Sarcasm, see also Fein et al., 2015; Giora, 1995; Giora et al., 2007), it allows stimuli to meet the conditions for Optimal Innovation. As a result, the costliness of nondefaultness may be offset by pleasurable (Giora et al., 2004). Indeed, results collected from pleasure ratings indicate that Affirmative Sarcasm, the only candidate here qualifiable for Optimal Innovation, involving incompatible default but entertainable interpretations, is most pleasing: more pleasing than counterparts not qualifying for Optimal Innovations (Exp. 3). Replicating these rewarding effects with pictorial primes will also be attempted (Exp. 4).

Defaultness, then, and none other, will reign. Processing-wise, it is speediest (Giora et al., 2015a), which prompts its interference with nondefaultness, thereby allowing the latter to be more gratifying (Giora et al., 2016).
References


