Defaultness, and none other!
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Part I: The Defaulness Hypothesis
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My first talk (Part I) will focus on the Defaultness Hypothesis (Giora, Givoni, & Fein, 2015a), with emphasis on default constructed interpretations rather than default lexicalized meanings. 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 nonliteralness, 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 prompts the revisitation of the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (Giora, Fein, Kronrod, Elnatan, Shuval, & Zur, 2004; Giora, Fein, Kotler, & Shuval, 2015c), extending it to default interpretations (see Part II).

According to the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora, 1997, 2003), 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, nonliteralness, 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 (Giora et al., 2013, 2014, 2015b), 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 (Giora et al., 2015a), however, is a more general theory, extending beyond the Graded Salience Hypothesis and the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations. It predicts the superiority of defaultness, irrespective of degree of nonsalience (salience-based vs. nonsalient), negation (affirmation vs. negation), nonliteralness (literal vs. nonliteral), or contextual strength (weak vs. strong). Accordingly to the Defaultness Hypothesis,

(i) default responses will be prompted instantaneously, initially and directly, faster than nondefault counterparts, superseding factors known to affect
processing (such as degree of nonliterals, negation, novelty, and contextual bias).

(ii) Invoked unconditionally, default responses will be further involved in retrieving nondefault counterparts, slowing them down in the process.

(iii) Still, when this interference of default interpretations renders nondefault counterparts qualifiable for Revised Optimal Innovations (see art II), such nondefault interpretations will be more entertaining than default and nondefault yet non-optimally innovative counterparts.

Predictions (i–ii) were tested by Giora et al. (2015a). 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. The aim was to test the prediction that default responses will be prompted instantly, 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 inappropriate default interpretations in the process. (Note, however, that only in the case of nondefault, Negative Literalness, will these default interpretations be disruptive and will have to be suppressed; in the case of nondefault Affirmative Sarcasm, they will be retained and partake in the interpretation process).

In all, defaultness shapes but also misshapes our understanding. Being automatic and speedy, it is prompted unconditionally, often rendering nondefault counterparts costly by disrupting their derivation. Will the costliness of nondefaultness be offset by pleasurability? In my second talk (see Part II), I will discuss Giora et al. (2016), who tested prediction (iii) related to pleasurability.

Part II: The Revised Optimal Innovation Hypothesis
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Can defaultness benefit nondefaultness, while, in fact, slowing it down? Indeed, defaultness may benefit nondefaultness, as in the case of Affirmative Sarcasm, when it allows such stimuli to meet the conditions for Optimal Innovation. As a result, the costliness of nondefaultness may be offset by pleasurability. However, to allow that, The Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (Giora et al., 2004, 2015c) will have to be slightly revised (Giora, et al., 2016).

The Optimal Innovation Hypothesis

1 On defaultness interfering with nondefaultness, see also Fein et al. (2015), Giora (1995), Giora et al. (2007).
According to the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (Giora et al., 2004, 2015c; see also Brône & Coulson, 2010), pleasurability is sensitive to Optimal Innovation. A stimulus would be optimally innovative if

(a) it involves a *novel, noncoded* - less or nonsalient - response to a stimulus, which differs quantitatively (in terms of degree of similarity to the non-innovative stimulus) and qualitatively (i.e., conceptually-wise) from the *salient* response(s) associated with it,
(b) and, at the same time, allows for the automatic recoverability of *coded, salient* responses related to that stimulus, so that both kinds of responses may be weighed against each other, their similarity and differences assessable.

A case in point would be the novel *Low Court of Justice*,\(^2\) which conveys a nonsalient interpretation, deautomatizing a default, salient meaning (related to *High*, associated with ‘holding justice in high esteem’) of the familiar collocation (*High Court of Justice*), while promoting a new one (‘Court of Injustice’ or ‘the court that fails to pursue justice’). According to the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis such interpretations are most pleasing.

Still, is activating a default incompatible yet related *meaning* the only way to affect optimal innovations and hence gratification?

Indeed, the revised version of the hypothesis proposed by Giora et al. (2016) extends the scope of the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis in order to allow it to account for the de-automatization of both *default meanings* and *default interpretations*, and preserve the interplay between *default* and *nondefault* responses, regardless of degree of non/salience. Thus, according to the Revised Optimal Innovation Hypothesis, pleasurability is sensitive to Optimal Innovation defined in terms of degree of defaultness (rather than degree of salience):

**The Revised Optimal Innovation Hypothesis**

According to the Revised Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (Giora, Givoni, Heruti, & Fein, 2016), a stimulus would be optimally innovative if

(a) it involves a *nondefault* response to a given stimulus, which differs from the *default* response(s) associated with it, both quantitatively and qualitatively,
(b) and, at the same time, allows for the automatic recoverability of the *default* response(s) related to that stimulus enabling both responses to be weighed against each other, their similarity and differences assessable.

Indeed, collecting pleasurability ratings of the items used in Giora et al. (2015a) indicate that Affirmative Sarcasm, the only candidate here qualifiable for revised Optimal Innovation, involving incompatible *default* yet entertainable interpretations, is most pleasing; more pleasing than counterparts not qualifying for Optimal Innovations (Exp.

1). Replicating these hedonic values with pictorial primes replicated these results (Exp. 2).

Defaultness, then, and no other animals, reigns supreme. Processing-wise, it is speediest, which prompts its interference with nondefaultness; pleasurability-wise it allows the latter to be more rewarding than alternative counterparts (Giora et al., 2016). It’s defaultness, then, and nothing but!

References


