

## Lying and Irony

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Although most sarcastic ironies trick comprehenders into misapprehension (Giora 2003; Fein, Yeari and Giora 2015; Giora, Fein, Laadan, Wolfson, Zeituny, Kidron, Kaufman, and Shaham 2007), irony is not lying<sup>1</sup>. Admittedly, some ironies do share some resemblance with lying. In most cases, when uttered, ironists do not explicitly say what they believe to be true or relevant to the issue at stake. But, then, they do not intend comprehenders to take “what is said” at face value, but instead reinterpret it vis à vis contextual information. (On lying involving an intention to deceive, see e.g., Meibauer 2011, 2014). And even if untrue, irony is not a lie but, for instance, an act of Joint Pretense – a mutual recognition of a pretense shared by speakers and addressees, albeit not necessarily by the uninitiated (Clark 1996; Clark and Gerrig 1984). Even by Grice (1975), according to which irony involves a breach of the Quality maxim, which on the face of it might entitle it to the label of “lying”, it is not. Given that this breach of truthfulness is *overt*, it cues comprehenders as to the need to reinterpret what is explicitly communicated in keeping with contextual information and authorial intent. Indeed, if comprehenders could tap the ironic interpretation directly or, at least, instantly revise

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<sup>1</sup> Irony and sarcasm are used here interchangeably to refer to ‘verbal irony’.

their initial misapprehension, it might not resemble lying. Most of the evidence, however, indicates that comprehenders do not fully understand irony initially, even when it is cued and even when they detect incompatibilities. Rather, irony interpretation is fallible, especially when in the affirmative, where it is most misleading. Hence the resemblance to lying.<sup>2</sup> However, when interpreted directly, as when it is in the negative, irony bears no resemblance to lying.

In what follows, comprehenders' optional gullibility is considered, while weighing affirmative (28.1) and negative (28.2) sarcastic ironies against each other.

### **28.1 Affirmative irony – the Graded Salience Hypothesis**

Generally speaking, (nonconventional, non-lexicalized) irony or sarcasm is viewed as conveying or implicating the opposite or near opposite of what is explicitly communicated (Carston 2002; Giora 1995). In this sense, irony is an implicit or “indirect” negation (Giora 1995). Most of the ironies tested so far are in the affirmative, implying, rather than making explicit, that the opposite is invited, whether via the speaker's dissociative, ridiculing attitude (Carston 2002; Sperber and Wilson 1986) or via contextual misfit (Grice 1975).<sup>3</sup> And although under such conditions irony should be easy to process, it seems that deriving the opposite of what is said when invited by implicit

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<sup>2</sup> On “lie” being the most common error among brain damaged individuals who understand irony, see Giora, Zaidel, Soroker, Batori, and Kasher (2000); on the preference for the “lie” choice among children, see e.g., Ackerman (1981).

<sup>3</sup> Although not in the affirmative, echoic negated utterances are processed along similar lines.

cues often eludes comprehenders. Having activated the default, compositionally derived, salience-based interpretation of the target utterance – the interpretation based on the salient (coded and prominent) meanings of the utterance components (Giora 2003) – moving beyond that to constructing the ironic interpretation proves difficult.<sup>4</sup> And the idea that interpreting (non-lexicalized) sarcastic remarks immediately and directly, without going through its salience-based yet incompatible interpretation first (Gibbs 2002), has hardly gained support (but see Gibbs 1986a).

#### 28.1.1 Experimental evidence

In a recent study, Fein et al. (2015) aimed to replicate previous results (Giora et al. 2007) showing that irony is interpreted initially via its *default*, salience-based yet contextually inappropriate interpretation. Note that according to the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora 1997, 1999, 2003), salient meanings and hence salience-based interpretations are default responses. Therefore, they will get activated unconditionally, regardless of contextual information, degree of negation, or degree of nonliteralness. In contrast,

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Colston and Gibbs (2002); Dews and Winner (1999); Fein et al. (2015); Filik, Leuthold, Wallington, and Page (2014); Filik and Moxey (2010); Giora and Fein (1999b); Giora et al. (2007); Giora, Fein, and Schwartz (1998); Giora, Fein, Kaufman, Eisenberg, and Erez (2009); Ivanko and Pexman (2003: Exp. 1); Kaakinen, Olkonien, Kinnari, and Hyönä (2014); Katz, Blasko, and Kazmerski (2004); Pexman, Ferretti, and Katz (2000); Tartter, Gomes, Dubrovsky, Molholm and Stewart (2002); Schwoebel, Dews, Winner, and Srinivas (2000); see also Akimoto, Miyazawa, and Muramoto (2012) on intentional irony.

nonsalient interpretations – interpretations not based on the lexicon but mostly on contextual cues – are nondefault; they will therefore lag behind. Findings in Giora et al. (2007) indeed support this view. They show that default salience-based interpretations were made available early on in both salience-based biased contexts as well as in contexts biasing the same targets toward their nonsalient sarcastic interpretation. However, nondefault nonsalient albeit contextually appropriate interpretations were not facilitated.

To replicate these results under stricter context-strength conditions, Fein et al. (2015) used revised dialogs used in Giora et al. (2007). These dialogs were found to strongly support an ironic interpretation, since they induced an expectation for ironic utterances. This expectation was shown to be raised by featuring an ironic speaker in dialog midposition who also uttered the ironic target in dialog prefinal position. (On prior stimulus sequences building up expectancy for another such occurrence, see e.g., Jentzsch and Sommer 2002).

In Fein et al. (2015), these contexts were reinforced even further in an attempt to make the anticipation of an ironic utterance stronger. To this end, speakers' ironic utterances were prefaced by explicit ironic cues (*winking*, *mocking*), as shown in (1); nonironic speakers' utterances, in the nonironic counterpart texts, were prefaced by nonironic explicit cues (*worrying*, *impressed*), as in (2):

(1) Dani (rubbing his stomach): Do you have anything to eat around here?

Iris: Want me to make you a sandwich?

Dani: I'd like a proper meal, I'm starving.

Iris: Haven't you eaten anything today?

Dani: I've had a couple of chocolate bars and two donuts.

Iris (winking): **I see you're on a strict diet.**

Dani: Since I quit smoking I'm gobbling sweets all the time.

Iris: I didn't even know you used to smoke.

Dani: Well, I started smoking so I could quit sniffing glue.

Iris (mocking): **I see you've developed some great habits.**

(2) Dani (rubbing his stomach): Do you have anything to eat around here?

Iris: Want me to make you a sandwich?

Dani: I'd like a proper meal, I'm starving.

Iris: Haven't you eaten anything today?

Dani: Not really. A few snacks.

Iris (worrying): **You really should be more careful about what you eat.**

Dani: Don't worry. Today was not a typical day. Usually I am very strict with myself.

Iris: I'm happy to hear that.

Dani: I go to the gym three times a week, and eat only low fat foods.

Iris (impressed): **I see you've developed some great habits.**

Results from reading times and lexical decisions replicated previous findings. They show that strengthening the context did not affect the pattern of results. Rather, in spite of the fact that the addition of the explicit cues prompted a stronger expectation for another sarcastic utterance than found in Giora et al. (2007), default salience-based biased targets

were activated initially, faster than nondefault nonsalient (ironic) alternatives (see also footnote 4). Such results, demonstrating the priority of default salience-based yet incompatible interpretations over nondefault yet compatible alternatives, might account for irony's apparent "deceptiveness".

Still could an even stronger, more explicitly biasing context affect a significant change? In Fein et al. (2015), another attempt was made to raise an expectation for a sarcastic utterance in the hope that this explicit cuing will make a difference. Here, another set of contexts used in Giora et al. (2007) was employed, where expectancy for a sarcastic remark was built up by manipulating the experimental design. Specifically, two types of item sequences were designed. In one, participants were presented texts, all of which ended in an ironic utterance (3) (the +Expectation condition). In the other, participants were presented texts half of which ended in a sarcastic utterance and half – in a nonsarcastic alternative (4). However, diverging from the 2007 study, here, in the +Expectation condition, expectation for a sarcastic utterance was boosted further by explicitly informing participants that sarcasm interpretation was examined:

(3) John was a basketball coach. For the past week he was feeling restless, worrying about the upcoming game. It was yet unclear how the two teams matched up, and he was anxious even on the day of the game. When he got a call telling him that the three lead players on his team will not be able to play that night, John wiped the sweat off of his forehead and said to his friend: **"This is terrific news!"**

(4) John was a basketball coach. For the past week he was feeling restless, worrying about the upcoming game. It was yet unclear how the two teams matched up, and he was anxious even on the day of the game. When he got a call telling him that the three lead players on the opposing team will not be able to play that night, John wiped the sweat off of his forehead and said to his friend: “**This is terrific news!**”

Regardless, results from lexical decisions, collected at various delays, replicated previous patterns of behavior. In both (+/-Expectation) conditions, only the default salience-based interpretations were facilitated, despite their contextual inappropriateness. Explicit contextual cuing, then, did not allow comprehenders an access, let alone a direct access to the *nondefault* ironic interpretations. Nondefault, nonsalient affirmative irony, relying on implicit negation, involves a contextually inappropriate interpretation, which might make it associable with lying.

#### 28.1.2 Corpus-based evidence

According to the Graded Salience Hypothesis, the involvement of salience-based albeit contextually inappropriate interpretations in processing affirmative irony should be reflected by the environment of such utterances when used in natural discourses.

Previous evidence indeed supports this prediction. They show that neighboring utterances of such ironies bear similarities to the ironic utterances; they thus “resonate” (à la Du Bois 2014) with these interpretations, despite their contextual misfit (Giora 2003, 2011; Giora and Gur 2003; Kotthoff 2003).

In a recent study, Giora, Raphaely, Fein, and Livnat (2014b) investigated the contexts of ironic utterances in newspaper articles. Findings show that the environment of such utterances indeed echoes their default, salience-based (often literal) interpretations rather than their nondefault contextually appropriate sarcastic alternatives. Of the 1612 ironies inspected, 689 (42.7%) were not echoed by their environment; 64 (3.9%) were addressed by reference to both their ironic and salience-based interpretations; 160 (9.9%) were extended ironies - ironies extended on the basis of their salience-based interpretation; 589 (36.5%) were addressed only via their salience-based interpretations; 122 (7.5%) were echoed only via their ironic interpretations. As predicted, neighboring utterances of nondefault affirmative irony resonate with their default salience-based yet incompatible interpretation to a significantly greater extent than their nondefault yet compatible alternative. Resonance with default interpretations is the norm even when misleading, which renders affirmative sarcasm comparable to lying.

## **28.2 Negative irony - the view of Default Nonliteral Interpretations**

Will negative irony be understood directly and thus be dissociable from lying? According to the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations the answer to this is in the affirmative.

The View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations (Giora, Fein, Metuki and Stern 2010; Giora, Livnat, Fein, Barnea, Zeiman and Berger 2013; Giora, Drucker and Fein 2014a; Giora, Drucker, Fein, and Mendelson 2015) diverges from the Graded Salience Hypothesis. It proposes that *nonsalient* interpretations derived from certain novel (here, negative) constructions (*Friendliness is not her best attribute*), are *default* interpretations. Such nonsalient yet default interpretations will be activated unconditionally – *initially*



and *directly* – even though a salience-based interpretation might be available, which, however will lag behind. In contrast to the Graded Salience Hypothesis, the Joint Pretense, and the Gricean model, then, the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations does not assume an initial inappropriate, misleading phase. When *default* sarcasm is considered, the semblance, noted earlier between sarcasm and lying, is now rendered vacuous.

What, then, is a default nonliteral interpretation? To be considered nonliteral *by default*, an interpretation must be derived under conditions which guarantee that nonliteralness cues, whether utterance internal (28.2.1a-b) or external (28.2.1c) are excluded:

#### 28.2.1 Conditions for Default Nonliteral Interpretations

To be *nonliteral* by default,

- (a) Constituents (words, phrases, constructions, utterances) have to be unfamiliar, so that salient (coded) nonliteral meanings of expressions and collocations would be avoided. Items should therefore exclude familiar idioms (*Blow his horn*), metaphors (*Heartless*), sarcasms (*Tell me about it*), mottos, slogans, or any conventional formulaic expression (*hang in there*) (Gibbs 1980, 1981, 1994; Giora 2003), prefabs (*I guess*) (Erman and Warren 2000), or conventionalized, ritualistic, situation bound utterances, such that occur in standardized communicative situations (*Break a leg*; Kecskés 1999, 2000). And if negative utterances are considered, they should not be negative polarity items (*no wonder*), but should have an *acceptable* affirmative counterpart, so that conventionality is avoided.

(b) Semantic anomaly, known to trigger metaphoricalness (Beardsley 1958), such as

*Fishing for compliments*, or any kind of internal incongruency, any opposition between the components of a phrase or proposition (known to trigger a sarcastic reading, see Barbe 1993) such as *he has made such a good job of discrediting himself* (Partington 2011) should not be involved, so that both literal and nonliteral interpretations are permissible. As a result, “epitomizations” – negative object-subject-verb constructions (“X s/he is not”) – in which the fronted constituent is a proper noun (*Elvis Presley he is not*) – must be excluded. Such constructions are primarily metaphorical, even in their affirmative version. (On “epitomization”, see Birner and Ward 1998; Ward 1984; Ward and Birner 2006; on the pragmatic functions of such constructions, see Prince 1981).

(c) Explicit and informative contextual information must be excluded, so that pragmatic incongruity – any breach of pragmatic maxims or contextual misfit on the one hand (Grice 1975) – and supportive biasing information, on the other (Campbell and Katz 2012; Gibbs 1981, 1986a,b, 1994, 2002; **Katz et al.** 2004), may not invite or obstruct a nonliteral or literal interpretation. Contextual or pragmatic cues such as explicit discourse markers (*literally speaking, metaphorically speaking, sarcastically speaking*; Katz and Ferretti 2003; Kovaz, Kreuz, and Riordan 2013), explicit interjections, such as *gee* or *gosh*, shown to cue sarcastic interpretation (Kovaz et al. 2013; Kreuz and Caucci 2007; Utsumi 2000), and marked intonation or prosodic cues, whether nonliteral, such as sarcastic, effective even outside of a specific context (Bryant and Fox Tree 2002; Rockwell 2000, 2007; Voyer and Techentin 2010), or corrective, such as assigned to metalinguistic negation (Carston 1996;

Chapman 1993, 1996; Horn 1985, 1989: 375), or nonverbal (such as gestures or facial expressions Caucci and Kreuz 2012) should be avoided, so that nonliteralness would neither be invited nor disinvited.

To qualify as default nonliteral interpretations, then, targets and alternative counterparts should prove to be novel (28.2.1a) and potentially ambiguous between literal and nonliteral interpretations (28.2.1b), when presented in isolation or in a neutral non-vocalized discourse (28.2.1c).

### 28.2.2 Predictions

According to the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations, some constructions, modifying favorable concepts (often in the superlative), such as "X s/he is not" (*Friendly she is not*), "X is not his/her forte (*Friendliness is not my forte*), "X is not his/her *best attribute*" (*Friendliness is not her best attribute*)", "X is not particularly/the best/the most Y" (*She is not particularly friendly; He is not the friendliest neighbor*)<sup>5</sup>, conforming to the conditions for default nonliteral interpretations specified above (28.2.1a-c),

- (a) will be interpreted sarcastically and rated as more sarcastic than affirmative counterparts (to be rated as literal) when presented in isolation, regardless of structural markedness;
- (b) as a result, they will be processed sarcastically directly, irrespective of contextual information to the contrary or its absence thereof. They will, therefore, be activated faster in contexts biasing them toward their *default* nonsalient sarcastic interpretation

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<sup>5</sup> For constructions involving affirmative rhetorical questions and modifiers affecting sarcastic interpretations by default, see Paolazzi

(2013) and Zuanazzi (2013).

than toward their *nondefault* (yet equally strongly biased) salience-based (literal) interpretation;

(c) notwithstanding, they will also be processed faster than their affirmative counterparts, embedded in equally strong contexts, biasing them toward their *nondefault*, nonsalient, sarcastic interpretation;

(d) and when biased toward their *nondefault* salience-based, literal interpretation, they will be slower to process compared to the salience-based, literal but *default* interpretation of their affirmative counterpart (predicted also by negation theories);

(e) as a result, when in natural discourse,

(i) they will be interpreted sarcastically, conveying their *default* nonsalient rather than their *nondefault*, salience-based interpretation; their affirmative counterparts, however, will convey their *default*, salience-based interpretation;

(ii) hence, more often than not, when echoed by their neighboring utterances, the latter will resonate with their *default* yet nonsalient sarcastic interpretation rather than with their *nondefault*, salience-based (e.g., literal) interpretation; their affirmative counterparts, however, will be referred to via their *default*, salience-based interpretation.

In sum, according to the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations, some non-coded nonliteral interpretations of specific constructions will be generated by default. They will therefore supersede their literal yet *nondefault* alternatives alongside their *nondefault*, nonliteral, affirmative counterparts. Defaultness, then, reigns supreme: Default interpretations will spring to mind unconditionally, regardless of context strength, degree of negation, degree of nonliteralness, and degree of nonsalience (Giora in prep; Giora et

al. 2010, 2013, 2015; and Giora, Givoni and Fein in prep; in the latter, negative constructions and their affirmative counterparts are compared directly).

### 28.2.3 Experimental evidence

The View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations allows us to test the predicted superiority of default interpretations over nondefault counterparts, whether affirmative or negative, literal or nonliteral, salience-based or nonsalient. In what follows, I review our studies comparing default sarcastic and literal interpretations with their nondefault sarcastic and literal alternatives. The following comparisons are considered:

- (i) *Default*, nonsalient, sarcastically biased **negative** constructions (5 below) vis à vis their *nondefault* salience-based, literally biased versions (6 below);
- (ii) *Default*, nonsalient sarcastically biased **negative** constructions (5 below) vis à vis their *nondefault* nonsalient, sarcastically biased **affirmative** versions (7 below);
- (iii) *Default* salience-based, literally biased **affirmative** utterances (8 below) vis à vis their *nondefault*, nonsalient, sarcastically biased versions (7 below);
- (iv) *Default* salience-based, literally biased **affirmative** utterances (8 below) vis à vis their *nondefault* literally biased **negative** versions (6 below).

In our studies, Hebrew constructions (whose novelty was established by a pretest) were examined. For instance, Giora et al. (2013) tested the "X s/he is not" (*Friendly she is not*) construction; Giora et al. (2015) tested the "X is not his/her forte" (*Friendliness is not my forte*) and "X is not his/her best attribute" (*Friendliness is not her best attribute*)

constructions; in Giora, Givoni et al. (in prep), we tested the “X is not particularly/the best/the most Y” (*He is not the friendliest neighbor*) construction.

As predicted by the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations (28.2.2a-b), findings in Giora et al. (2013) show that, when presented in isolation, novel negative constructions of the form “X s/he is not” (*Supportive she is not*), controlled for novelty, involving no semantic anomaly or internal incongruency, were interpreted sarcastically by default and were further rated as more sarcastic than their similarly novel affirmative counterparts (*Supportive she is yes*)<sup>6</sup>, which were rated as literal. Weighing degree of structural markedness (+/-fronting) against degree of negation (not/yes) revealed that structural markedness played a role in affecting sarcasm. However, it was negation that rendered negative constructions significantly more sarcastic than their affirmatives versions, regardless of markedness. Hence, when embedded in contexts biasing them toward their default nonsalient sarcastic interpretation, they were read faster than when embedded in contexts (equally strongly) biased toward their salience-based but nondefault literal interpretation.

Similarly, as predicted by the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations (28.2.2a-b), findings in Giora et al. (2015) show that, when presented in isolation, novel negative constructions of the form “X is not his/her forte/best attribute” (*Friendliness is not my forte/best attribute*), controlled for novelty, involving no semantic anomaly or internal incongruency, were interpreted sarcastically by default and were also rated as more sarcastic than their similarly novel affirmative counterparts (*Friendliness is my forte/best*

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<sup>6</sup> In Hebrew, the affirmative version is obligatorily marked for affirmation by an explicit marker.

*attribute*), which were perceived as literal. Weighing degree of structural markedness (+/-fronting) against degree of negation (not/yes) revealed that structural markedness did not play a role at all. Instead, and regardless of markedness, it was negation that affected sarcasm significantly, rendering the negative constructions significantly more sarcastic than their affirmatives versions, which were rated as literal. Consequently, when embedded in contexts biasing them toward their default nonsalient sarcastic interpretation, they were processed faster than when embedded in contexts (equally strongly) biased toward their salience-based yet nondefault literal interpretation.

In Giora et al. (in prep), we tested predictions (28.2.2a-d). The construction examined was “X is not particularly/the best/the most Y” (*She is not particularly friendly/the friendliest neighbor*). As predicted by the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations (28.2.2a-d), findings show that, when presented in isolation, the negative constructions, controlled for novelty, involving no semantic anomaly or internal incongruency, were interpreted sarcastically by default and were rated as more sarcastic than their similarly novel affirmative counterparts, which were rated as literal (28.2.2a). Consequently, when embedded in contexts biasing them toward their *default* nonsalient sarcastic interpretation (see 5 below; target in bold, the next two-word spillover section in italics<sup>7</sup>), they were read faster than when embedded in contexts, equally strongly biased toward their salience-based albeit *nondefault* literal interpretation (28.2.2b; see 6 below; target in bold, spillover section in italics). In addition, they were also processed faster than their affirmative counterparts, embedded in equally strong contexts, biasing them

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<sup>7</sup> Spillover sections allow to measure difficulties spilling over from a target segment to the next segment.

toward their *nondefault*, nonsalient sarcastic interpretation (28.2.2c; see 7 below; target in bold, spillover section in italics). And when biased toward their *nondefault* salience-based, literal interpretation, they took longer to process than the *default* salience-based, literal interpretation of their equally strongly biased affirmative counterparts (28.2.2d; explainable also by negation theories; see 8 below; target in bold, spillover section in italics):

- (5) During the Communications Department staff meeting, the professors are discussing their students' progress. One of the students has been doing very poorly. Professor A: "Yesterday he handed in an exercise and yet again I couldn't make any sense of the confused ideas presented in it. The answers were clumsy, not focused, and the whole paper was difficult to follow." Professor B nods in agreement and adds: "Unfortunately, the problem isn't only his assignments. He is also always late for class, and when it was his turn to present a paper in class he got confused and prepared the wrong essay! I was shocked. What can I say? **He isn't the most organized student.** *I'm surprised* he didn't learn a lesson from his freshman year experiences.
- (6) The professors are talking about Omer, one of the department's most excellent students. Professor A: "He is a very efficient lad. Always comes to class on time with all of his papers in order and all his answers are eloquent, exhibiting a clearly structured argumentation. I think that explains his success." Professor B: "Yes, it's true. Omer is simply very consistent and almost never digresses from the heart of the matter. But there are two other students whose argumentation and focus surpass his,



so that I'd say that, only in comparison to those two, **he isn't the most organized student**. *I'm surprised* he asked to sit the exam again.”

- (7) During the Communications Department staff meeting, the professors are discussing their students' progress. One of the students has been doing very poorly. Professor A: "Yesterday he handed in an exercise and yet again I couldn't make any sense of the confused ideas presented in it. The answers were clumsy, not focused, and the whole thing was difficult to follow." Professor B nods in agreement and adds: "Unfortunately, the problem isn't only his assignments. He is also always late for class, and when it was his turn to present a paper in class he got confused and prepared the wrong essay! Professor C (chuckles): In short, it sounds like he really has everything under control." Professor A: "What can I say? **He is the most organized student**. *I'm surprised* he didn't learn a lesson from his freshman year experiences.”

- (8) During the Communications Department staff meeting, the professors are discussing their students' progress. One of the student's has been doing very well. Professor A: "He is the most committed student in the class. Always on time, always updated on everything. Professor B: "I also enjoy his answers in class. He always insists on a clear argumentation structure and is very eloquent. In his last exam, not only was each answer to the point but also very clear. In my opinion, **he is the most organized student**. *I'm surprised* he asked to sit the exam again.”

Default interpretations, then, rule. Whether in the negative (where the default interpretation is sarcastic, superseding an equally strongly supported nondefault ironic

interpretation of an affirmative counterpart), or in the affirmative, (where the default interpretation is salience-based, here literal, superseding an equally strongly biased nondefault literal interpretation of a negative counterpart), default interpretations prevail.

In sum, some constructions, hedging a favorable concept (often in the superlative) by means of explicit negation, which allows them to be interpreted sarcastically *by default*, do not resemble lying. Instead, they activate their default sarcastic interpretation immediately and directly. They therefore differ from affirmative sarcastic counterparts, which are interpreted vicariously, involving initially an incompatible misleading phase (28.1).

Given their defaultness, will natural discourse reflect these constructions' sarcastic interpretations rather than their nondefault salience-based literal alternatives, as predicted by the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations (28.2.2e)?

#### 28.2.4 Corpus-based evidence

Using Hebrew constructions, Giora et al. (2013, 2014a) tested the predictions specified in (28.2.2e) above. Accordingly, when in natural discourse, (i) the negative constructions under scrutiny here are expected to be used sarcastically, communicating their *default* nonsalient sarcastic interpretation rather than their nondefault, salience-based literal alternative; their affirmative counterparts, however, will communicate their *default*, salience-based literal interpretation. As a result, (ii) their environment will resonate with their *default* sarcastic interpretations rather than with their nondefault, salience-based literal alternatives; their affirmative counterparts, however, will be echoed via their *default*, salience-based interpretation.

Giora et al. (2013) examined constructions of the form “X s/he/it is not” and their affirmative counterparts “X s/he/it is yes”. Findings from 281 naturally occurring negative utterances, collected from Hebrew blogs (*Smart he is not*) indeed reveal that, as predicted, most of them (95%) were intended sarcastically; the 77 affirmative counterparts found (*Smart he is yes*) communicated only their salience-based literal interpretation.

How would their neighboring utterances resonate with these interpretations? What might the various resonance options be? For an illustration of exclusive resonance with the default sarcastic interpretation, consider example (9) (sarcastic target in bold, resonance with this sarcastic interpretation in italics):

(9) *Dumb* he is **Smart he is not**.<sup>8</sup>

For exclusive resonance with the nondefault salience-based literal interpretation of the construction, consider example (10) (target utterance in bold, resonance in italics):

(10) “*Intelligence*”<sup>9</sup>: **Smart it is not**. (Levin 2014)

In (11), it is resonance with the nondefault salience-based literal interpretation of such sarcastic construction (in bold) is exemplified (underlined), alongside resonance with the default sarcastic interpretation (in italics):

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/3p4faf> Retrieved on February 20, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> “Intelligence” is a TV series.

(11) Netanyahu – smart he is not

Today the following news item has been published: Netanyahu announces that Turkel commission will prove that we have acted appropriately. It's really frustrating... Any time you think he may this time act sensibly, again [he proves you wrong]. What an *idiotic* advisor allowed him to say that sentence? And if he came up with it on his own, how *stupid* can a prime-minister be? (Schwartz 2010).

In (12), exclusive resonance with the default salience-based, literal interpretation of the affirmative counterpart is exemplified (target construction in bold, resonance in italics):

(12) **Smart she is (yes)**, *cleverness* flows out of her mouth in all directions...  
(Amir2008).

In all, findings support the predictions of the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations. They show that in 109 of the 169 naturally occurring instances examined, the environment resonates either with the sarcastic or with the literal interpretation. However, in 100 (92%) of these 109 cases, it resonates exclusively with their sarcastic interpretation; in 9 cases (8%), it resonates exclusively with their salience-based literal interpretation. Out of the remaining 60 cases, the environment of 37 utterances reflects both their sarcastic and literal interpretations, while in 23 cases the environment does not resonate with any of the interpretations. As shown in Giora et al. (2013), most of the

findings attest that the environment of such negative constructions reflects their default sarcastic interpretation.

Giora et al. (2014a) examined constructions of the form “X is not his/her forte/most pronounced characteristic” (*Patience is not her forte/most pronounced characteristic*) and their affirmative counterparts “X is his/her forte/most pronounced characteristic” (*Patience is her forte/most pronounced characteristic*). Findings from 141 naturally occurring negative exemplars, collected from Hebrew and English blogs (*Humor is not his/her/my forte*), reveal that, as predicted, most of the naturally occurring negative items (90%), were intended sarcastically; by contrast, most of the 155 (~ 97%) affirmative items were intended literally.

How would their neighboring utterances relate to these interpretations? For an illustration of exclusive resonance with the default sarcastic interpretation, consider the hotel review in example (13) (sarcastic target in bold, resonance with this sarcastic interpretation in italics):

- (13) Far from the City Centre and restaurants, crappy area, by far the worst complaint would be the *unprofessional conduct* of the staff. They have *no concept on how to behave in front of their clients* for e.g. Such as *shouting* at each other from across the room, in the restaurant and lobby area. You ask for something, they *pretend* to know what you’re asking for and bring you something completely different... **Politeness is not their forte ...**<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.expedia.ca/Shanghai-Hotels-Radisson-Blu-Hotel-Shanghai-Hong-](http://www.expedia.ca/Shanghai-Hotels-Radisson-Blu-Hotel-Shanghai-Hong-Quan.h2064105-p4.Hotel-Reviews)

For an illustration of exclusive resonance with the nondefault salience-based literal interpretation, consider example (14) (sarcastic target in bold, resonance with this literal interpretation in italics):

(14) I fumbled with my bag, phone and music. The vehicle parallel to mine moved ahead just a bit, stopped at an odd angle, and a man sitting in the front passenger seat *smiled* and the one driving said something. I didn't quite appreciate the *smile* but gave a *polite smile* murmured, 'hello'. **Synthetic politeness is not my forte** but I live and work in an environment of 'oral and visual *civility*' so in order to be *culturally adaptable I try to conform*. Anybody with less air in the head can see through my *polite pleasantries* though.<sup>11</sup>

For an illustration of resonance with both the default nonsalient sarcastic interpretation and the nondefault salience-based literal interpretation, consider example (15) (sarcastic target in bold, resonance with its sarcastic interpretation in italics, and resonance with its literal interpretation underlined):

(15) ... what you said "they DESERVED" to die... You are, in plain and simple language, **WRONG**... Learn to accept the fact that what you said was *hurtful and very MEAN* (to put it politely). Because "YOU DON'T LIKE BUILDERS" doesn't entitle you to make a *mockery* out of someone's death... If you still have some sense of respect,

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<sup>11</sup> [http://chhayapath.blogspot.no/2010\\_12\\_05\\_archive.html](http://chhayapath.blogspot.no/2010_12_05_archive.html) Retrieved on February 4,

you will realize what you said was wrong in more ways than one... I was being as polite as I could when I put my point across to you, but as evident, **POLITENESS is definitely not your forte.** :).<sup>12</sup>

Finding regarding discourse resonance reveal that, out of the 127 naturally occurring negative instances examined, the contexts of 83 cases either resonated with their default nonsalient sarcastic interpretation (13) or with their nondefault salience-based literal alternative (14). Of these, the environment of 73 cases (88%) exhibited exclusive resonance with the default nonsalient sarcastic interpretation as opposed to 10 cases (12%) in which neighboring utterances exclusively resonated with the nondefault salience-based literal interpretation. For each of the constructions examined, then, resonance with the default nonsalient sarcastic interpretation was the rule, as predicted. In addition, of the remaining 44 cases, the environment of 35 constructions reflected both their default sarcastic interpretation and their nondefault literal interpretation (15). In 9 cases, the environment did not resonate with any of the interpretations. Such findings support the superiority of default, nonsalient, contextually compatible sarcastic interpretations of some negative constructions over their nondefault, salience-based, yet contextually incompatible alternatives. Natural uses of negative sarcasm, then, highlight the significant extent to which such ironies differ from lying.

### **28.3 Discussion and conclusion: Defaultness rules**

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<sup>12</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/Builder-wife-die-in-ghastly-mishap/articleshow/7940306.cms> Retrieved on February 4, 2015

Can irony, then, be somehow related to lying? The answer to this is both “yes” and “no”, depending on whether we are dealing with default or nondefault irony. According to the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora 1997, 1999, 2003), nonsalient ironic interpretations are *nondefault*; instead, salience-based interpretations – interpretations derived compositionally, based on the lexicalized meanings of the utterance components – are generated *by default*. They are, therefore, activated unconditionally, immediately and directly, irrespective of context, which allows them to be initially involved in processing nondefault counterparts, such as sarcastic irony. This initial processing phase might mislead sarcasm interpretation down the wrong garden path. Hence the semblance to lying.

However, according to the View of Default Nonliteral Interpretations (Giora 2015; Giora et al 2010, 2013, 2014a, 2015), some interpretations of e.g., negative constructions, modifying favorable concepts (*Friendly he is not, Friendliness is not his forte, Friendliness is not her best attribute, She is not particularly friendly*), albeit nonsalient, are derived *by default*; they are interpreted sarcastically immediately and directly, regardless of contextual information to the contrary. In contrast to affirmative sarcasm, then, default sarcastic interpretations of some negative constructions will not be misled down a garden path; therefore, they will not bear any resemblance to lying.

It is not irony, then, that might be associable with lying but *nondefault* interpretations.



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