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INTRODUCTION

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Introduction: Defaultness, affect, and figurative language

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There has been a recent explosion of research into figurative language, with exciting new theoretical developments regarding how figurative expressions are processed, understood, and represented in the brain, as well as the social and emotional consequences of using this kind of language. This special issue focuses on the novel proposal that the key aspect influencing processing is that of "defaultness." It also considers issues relating to affect, representation, and creativity, as well as ultimately how these processes may fit together.

Within the framework of the Defaultness Hypothesis (Giora, Givoni, & Fein, 2015), defaultness is defined in terms of an unconditional, automatic response to a stimulus. Such responses include coded but also noncoded responses, constructed rather than accessed directly from the mental (linguistic, affective, auditory, imagistic, etc.) lexicon. Defining defaultness in terms of an unconditional, automatic response to a stimulus, allows the Defaultness Hypothesis to predict the speed superiority of default even if novel responses over equally novel nondefault counterparts, regardless of degree of figurativeness (literal–figurative), degree of negation (negation–affirmation), degree of novelty (salience-based–nonsalient, see Giora, 2003), or degree of contextual strength (weak–strong). Indeed, in Giora et al. (2015), studies, run in Hebrew, attest to the speed superiority of default yet constructed interpretations over nondefault counterparts (established as such by pretests). Specifically, default negative sarcasm (*He is not the most restrained person possible*) was shown to be processed faster than nondefault negative literalness and faster yet than nondefault affirmative sarcasm (*He is the most restrained person possible*), all embedded in equally strong contexts, supportive of their respective interpretations; similarly, default affirmative literalness (*He is the most restrained person possible*) was shown to be processed faster than nondefault negative literalness (*He is not the most restrained person possible*) and faster than nondefault affirmative sarcasm, all embedded in equally strong contexts, supportive of their respective interpretations. Given their speed superiority (see also Filik, Howman, Ralph-Nearman, & Giora, this issue; Giora, Cholev, Fein, & Peleg, this issue), default responses will feature dominantly in processing nondefault counterparts, which will lag behind. To facilitate the activation of nondefault interpretations when intended, speakers will try to prompt them to varying degrees by using different markers (Giora, under review; Veale, this issue).

As well as investigating these important issues relating to processing, there has been increasing interest in the impact that using figurative language might have on the perceiver (see, e.g., Filik et al., 2016; Filik, Brightman, Gathercole, & Leuthold, 2017; Thompson, Mackenzie, Leuthold, & Filik, 2016; for recent overviews). In the current issue, Pickering, Thompson, and Filik explore the important functions that sarcasm may serve in preserving social relationships, for example, through softening the impact of criticism, and adding a humorous element to task-related feedback. Other ways in which figurative language may enhance the communicative experience, for example, through evoking mental imagery, are also explored (see Carston, this issue).

Finally, we aim to draw together these recent advances by considering how processing operations relating to defaultness may give rise to affective responses in relation to the experience of appreciation of a stimulus. Specifically, we explore how aesthetic or hedonic affect is also the by-product of the involvement of defaultness in nondefault responses to linguistic as well as to visual stimuli (Giora

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et al., 2004; Giora, Givoni, Heruti, & Fein, 2017), including abstract artworks (Ball, Threadgold, Marsh, & Christensen, this issue).

Defaultness

Filik, Howman, Ralph-Nearman, and Giora's contribution, "The role of defaultness and personality factors in sarcasm interpretation: Evidence from eye-tracking during reading," supports the findings of Giora et al. 2015), while further corroborating them in English; they attest to the speed superiority of default over nondefault counterparts, regardless of contextual strength. Importantly, they use eye-tracking during reading— a technique that allows identification of the point at which specific interpretations are instantiated (Experiment 1). In addition, this study suggests that characteristics of the readers themselves, as well as the content of the text, can influence online processing of sarcastic comments. Specifically, in Experiment 2, participants' scores on the malicious humor subscale of a questionnaire assessing levels of indirect aggression were shown to correlate with the speed superiority of the negative stimuli (*He isn't the most popular hairdresser*) over affirmative counterparts (*He is the most popular hairdresser*). That is, participants who had a greater tendency to use malicious humor in their own interactions showed a greater tendency to adopt a sarcastic interpretation of a negative utterance.

In "On the superiority of defaultness: Hemispheric perspectives of processing negative and affirmative sarcasm," **Giora, Cholev, Fein, and Peleg** provide further support to the superiority of defaultness over nondefaultness, as predicted by the Defaultness Hypothesis. They tested the cerebral hemispheres' sensitivity to default sarcastic interpretations (*messy*) of negative (*He is not the most organized student*) compared to affirmative (*He is the most organized student*) targets. Measures involved response speed and response accuracy to probes, applied while using the divided visual field paradigm. Faster and/or more accurate responses to probes related to the sarcastic interpretation in the negative than in the affirmative condition would substantiate the defaultness of these items' interpretation. Furthermore, given that the left hemisphere (LH) is known to be more narrowly focused than the right hemisphere (RH), this superiority of defaultness over nondefaultness is expected to be more pronounced in the LH than in the RH. Findings indeed show that negative targets were interpreted sarcastically by default: When presented outside of context, default negative targets were processed faster in the LH than nondefault affirmative counterparts (Experiment 1). When embedded in contexts equally strongly supportive of their sarcastic interpretation, both hemispheres attested to the superiority of default negative sarcasm over nondefault affirmative sarcasm, either in terms of processing speed or accuracy rates (Experiment 2). Default negative sarcasm, then, exhibits its superiority over nondefault affirmative counterparts via response speed and response accuracy.

In "The 'default' in our stars: Signposting non-defaultness in ironic discourse," **Veale** focuses on nondefaultness. He highlights the need to cue nondefaultness, so that, when intended, nondefault meanings and interpretations will not escape comprehenders' attention. (On the need to cue nondefaultness, see also Giora, submitted). Discussing affirmative irony, Veale emphasizes the need to alert comprehenders to evasive nondefault ironic interpretations by using all kinds of markers, such as scare-quotes (often inviting a specific tone of voice), internal incongruity (Partington, 2011), or hashtags, unique to social media, such as *#irony*. (For uses of other such markers, as #Sarcasm and #Not, see Sulis, Hernandez-Farias, Rosso, Patti, & Ruffo, 2016). To test the various markers' effects on deriving the intended, nondefault ironic interpretations, Veale came up with creative machines that produced automated tweets. Rating results show that dis-analogy (i.e., internal incongruity), on its own, was most effective in allowing comprehenders to derive the intended nondefault sarcastic interpretation. Next were scare-quotes, which, when alone, offered real insight into the intended yet nondefault interpretation. Least effective was the explicit *#irony* tag. Do these results suggest that defaultness is a scalar rather than a polarized notion?

Figurative language and its impact on the experiencer

In "Examining the emotional impact of sarcasm using a virtual environment," **Pickering, Thompson, and Filik** explore the emotional impact of sarcastic criticism (e.g., *Wow! Your History is great!*) and sarcastic praise (e.g., *Wow! Your History is awful!*) in comparison to equivalent task-related feedback that is delivered literally. The key aim of this article was to investigate the emotional impact of using sarcasm versus literal language in a more conversational setting, rather than the written texts employed by most previous research. Pickering et al. show that sarcastic criticism was viewed as less negative than literal criticism, and sarcastic praise was viewed as less positive than literal praise. This evidence for a "muting" effect of sarcasm provides support for the Tinge Hypothesis (e.g., Dews & Winner, 1995). In addition, results indicated that sarcastic feedback in response to task performance is viewed as being more humorous than literal feedback (see also Filik et al., 2017; Giora et al., 2004, 2017), further highlighting the important functions of figurative language in maintaining social relationships.

In "Figurative language, mental imagery, and pragmatics" **Carston** assesses the role of mental imagery in language comprehension, focusing particularly on nondefault creative and novel metaphors. She distinguishes consciously experienced mental imagery from other kinds of perceptual simulation. In the case of creative metaphors (and some other effort-demanding uses of language), mental imagery could be a default response. She claims that, while it is not essential to metaphor comprehension, mental imagery is nevertheless often experienced by readers, and can be impactful and memorable. It may also function as a cue that encourages comprehenders to further explore the speaker's intended effects (her "weak implicatures," in relevance-theoretic terms) and what she expected her audiences to experience and enjoy. Results, based on behavioral studies (e.g., Gibbs & Bogdonovich, 1999) and neurocognitive (mostly functional magnetic resonance imaging) studies (e.g., Desai, Binder, Conant, Mano, & Seidenberg, 2011; Just, 2008), which distinguish nondefault novel metaphors from default familiar ones, allow Carston to conclude that, mental imagery evoked by metaphors, although not necessarily an essential component in their comprehension, can play a significant role in the cognitive and experiential effects achieved.

Defaultness, figurative language, and the origins of aesthetic appreciation

In "Broadly reflexive relationships, a special type of hyperbole, and implications for metaphor and metonymy," **Barnden** explores but goes beyond two special types of hyperbole he had previously brought to light, introducing new ones and putting them all under the new, unifying heading of *reflexive hyperbole*. Those previous types are centered on the possible interpretation of, say, "John is Hitler" as hyperbolic for John and Hitler being exceptionally alike; or of, say, "Sailing is Mike's life" as hyperbolic for sailing being an exceptionally important part of Mike's life. The hyperbolic quality here depends on the likeness and part-importance relationships having the special property of being reflexive. For instance, likeness is reflexive because *any* entity bears this relationship to itself with *maximum* strength. As a direct result, apparent identity between two things can be used as hyperbole for exceptionally strong likeness between them; moreover, this result holds without any need to find specific grounds of likeness. In the present article, Barnden departs from strict reflexivity by introducing *broad reflexivity*, where maximum strength is relaxed to extreme strength and an *"under normal circumstances"* rider is included. This broadening enables the notion of reflexive hyperbole to encompass hyperbole about a variety of relationships other than likeness and part-importance. Reflexive hyperbole appears not to have been systematically explored before, but provides a deep unity between some otherwise apparently disparate, prominent ways of interpreting "A is B" statements.

Barnden argues that reflexive hyperbole about likeness is a distinctive addition to metaphor theory, partly because metaphor is not hyperbolic in the sense of systematically conveying an exceptionally high degree of likeness. As for metonymy, Barnden argues that reflexive hyperbole

about part importance cannot be reduced to whole-for-part metonymy, even though such metonymy hinges on important parts of wholes. Barnden also discusses the question of whether some subtypes of reflexive hyperbolic interpretation could be default interpretations or at least have some features of defaultness.

In "The effects of stimulus complexity and conceptual fluency on aesthetic judgments of abstract art: Evidence for a default–interventionist account," **Ball, Threadgold, Marsh, and Christensen** focus on non/defaultness in visual perception. They examined abstract artworks in terms of aesthetic liking and creativity judgments. Their findings lend support to Graf and Landwehr's (2015) dual-process theory, predicting a default, automatic, stimulus-driven phase and a nondefault deliberative phase. The interplay between the default and nondefault processes resulted in aesthetic liking, reflected in participants' beauty judgments (see also Giora et al., 2004, 2017). While manipulations of conceptual fluency and complexity triggered hedonic effects, creativity judgments were found to be insensitive to these factors. Creativity might not be always associated with aesthetic liking.

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