

Tales of the unexpected. Incongruity-resolution in humor comprehension, scientific discovery and thought experimentation

Tim De Mey

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/LLP.2005.006>

Abstract

Some scholars suspect that thought experiments have something in common with jokes. Moreover, Thomas Kuhn has suggested that what happens to someone who thinks through a thought experiment "is very similar to what happens to a man, like Lavoisier, who must assimilate the result of a new unexpected experimental discovery" (1964: 321). In this paper, I pinpoint the presumed commonalities. I identify, more specifically, what cognitive linguists call "incongruity-resolution" as the problem-solving process not only involved in humor comprehension, but in scientific discovery and thought experimentation as well.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim De Mey
Ghent University
Belgium

Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science

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SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION

Mathematics Subject Classification

Raskin, Victor (1985), *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Dordrecht, Boston, Lancaster: D. Reidel.

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ISSN: 1425-3305 (print version)

ISSN: 2300-9802 (electronic version)

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Some scientific discoveries come about after painstaking, goal-oriented lab work finally yields the result that a researcher is trying to find. But many of the most incredible discoveries in world came about when someone found something they weren't looking for. In some cases, these are the result of a true accident. Lucky accidents have allowed people to discover unexpected but useful side effects from drugs, which is what happened with Viagra. Saccharine - the artificial sweetener in "Sweet'N Low" - was found by a Russian chemist who forgot to wash his hands after a days work. Perhaps more often, world-changing discoveries are the result of a creative mind realising that a material or invention could be repurpose Some scholars suspect that thought experiments have something in common with jokes. Moreover, Thomas Kuhn has suggested that what happens to someone who thinks through a thought experiment "is very similar ... Tales of the Unexpected: Incongruity-Resolution in Joke Comprehension, Scientific Discovery and Thought Experimentation. Tim De Mey. *Logic and Logical Philosophy* 14 (1):69-88 (2005). Abstract. Some scholars suspect that thought experiments have something in common with jokes. Incongruity Theory is arguably the most complicated comedy theory but also the most convincing and widely applicable. We will be focusing on understanding it in this article. This seems fair- to think about something as a human is to have a certain understanding or perception of that thing. But the Incongruity Theory says that our perceptions of things in the real world only ever relate to part of that thing- they are incomplete. Your perception of the item is incomplete. According to Incongruity Theory, things that are funny- or 'ludicrous'- show us the differences between how we perceive the world and how it in fact exists. If you were to see a character brushing their teeth with a toilet brush in a slap-stick comedy show, it would be amusing.