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

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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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References


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 the 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 to the process of making a scientific discovery." 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. The journal content is indexed in CrossCheck, the CrossRef initiative to prevent scholarly and professional plagiarism.