

Interpreting irony **Will expecting it** **make a difference?**

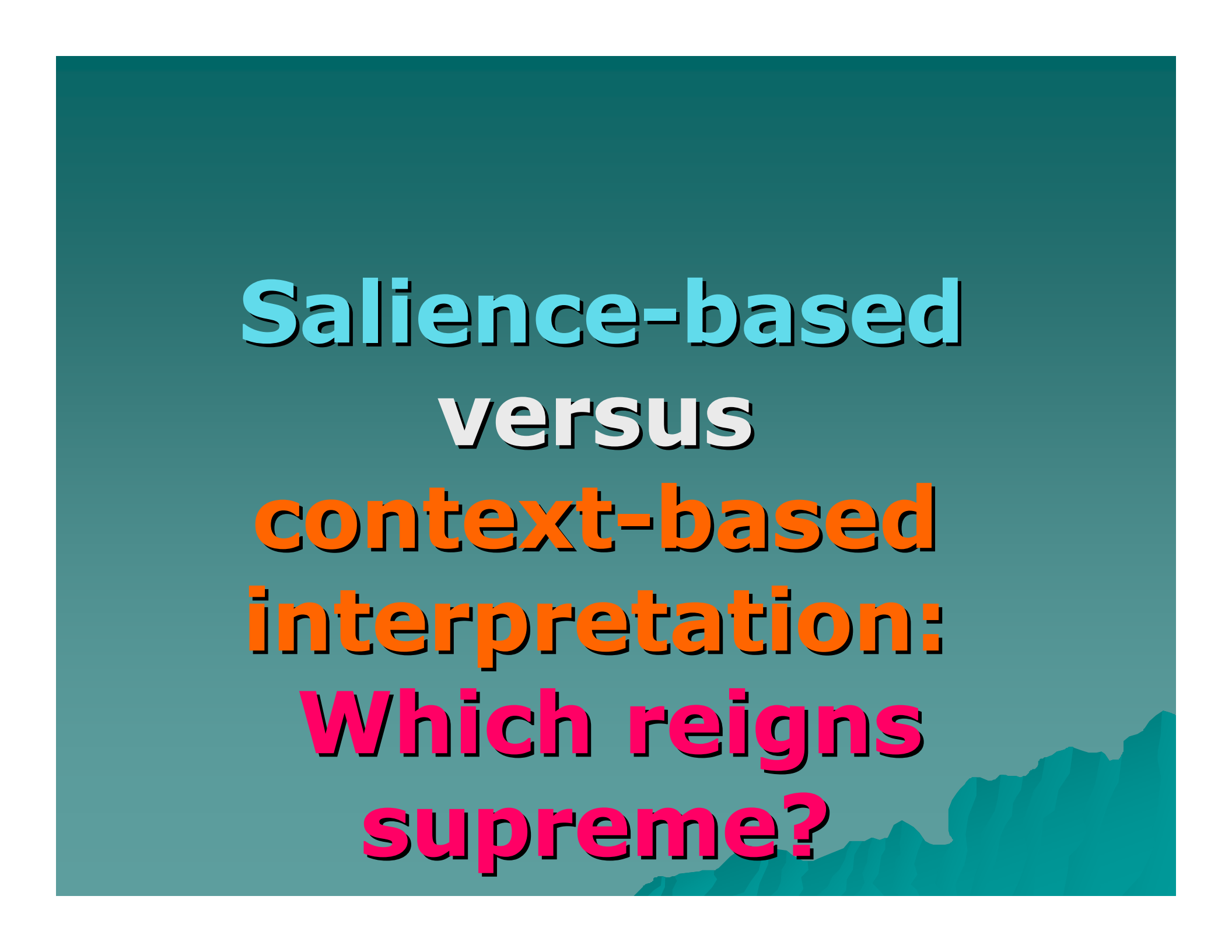
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Salience-based
versus
context-based
interpretation:
Which reigns
supreme?



Can
contextually
appropriate
interpretations
be facilitated
immediately or directly?

Can
a strong context
allow a smooth and
frictionless processing of
the **appropriate**
interpretation?

**Will expecting
irony make a
difference?**

The background is a solid teal color. In the bottom right corner, there is a silhouette of a mountain range in a slightly darker shade of teal.

Expecting



The Expectation Hypothesis

A strong **CONTEXT** should facilitate contextually compatible interpretations **INITIALLY** even if their **SALIENCE-BASED** interpretations are contextually incompatible.

A strong context

- Predictive of an oncoming message (**literal/ironic**)
- Induces an **expectation** for either an **ironic** or a **literal utterance**

Meaning Salience

The Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora, 1997, 2003)

is a graded notion.

It is a function of exposure:
it depends on factors such as
experiential familiarity,
frequency,
conventionality,
prototypicality, etc.

1. A meaning is **salient**

if it is **coded** in the mental lexicon and ranks high on these dimensions, regardless of degree of **literality**;

2. A meaning is **less salient**

if it is **coded** but ranks low on these dimensions, regardless of degree of **literality**;

3. A meaning is **non-salient**

if it is **non-coded** (e.g., inferred), regardless of degree of **literality**.

Access

Salient and **less salient** meanings are accessed automatically, regardless of context.

But access is ordered:
Salient meanings get activated faster.

SALIENCE-BASED **interpretations**

Salience-based interpretations are utterance interpretations based on the salient meanings of their components, regardless of degree of literality.

CONTEXT-BASED interpretations (irony)

**Rely primarily on contextual
information rather than on
lexical information**

The Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora, 1997, 2003)

Contextual information and lexical processes operate in **parallel** (see also Fodor, 1983), but **salient** meanings are stimulus-driven and will **not be blocked** by a strong context.

Irony interpretation

Which theories are we arguing against?

Gibbs' (1986, 2002)

**Expectation Hypothesis
according to which**

context reigns supreme

A strong context:

Gibbs' Expectation Hypothesis

According to Gibbs (2002), a strong context, such that induces an **expectation** for an ironic utterance will facilitate **ironic** interpretations immediately, without activating the utterance salience-based interpretation first.

In contrast

- According to **The Graded Salience Hypothesis**, a strong context will not allow bypassing **salience-based** interpretations.
- It will not facilitate **non-salient ironic interpretations** INITIALLY even when **expected**.

Expecting irony

1. What kind of context will induce an expectation for an ironic utterance?
2. Will expecting it make a difference?

Experiment 1-7

Predictions

Recall that according to the **Graded Salience View** (Giora, 1997, 2003) an **expectation** for an **ironic** utterance will not facilitate **irony** immediately because an **ironic** interpretation is **non-salient** (Giora & Fein, 1999).

Salience-based interpretations
will be easy to activate

Salience-based (often literal)
interpretations are closely
related to the **salient**
meanings of their
components and should
therefore be rather
accessible, **IMMEDIATELY,**
regardless of context!

Non-salient interpretations
will be hard to activate

Non-salient (ironic)
interpretations are removed
from the **salient** meanings
of their components and
should therefore be less
accessible, **INITIALLY**,
regardless of context!

Experiment 1: Materials

To induce an **expectation** for
an **ironic utterance**
we used dialogues featuring
an **ironic speaker**
in dialogue mid position

Ironically biased contexts + an ironic speaker

B: I finish work early today.

S: So, do you want to go to the movies?

B: I don't really feel like seeing a movie

S: So maybe we could go dancing?

B: No, at the end of the night my feet will hurt and I'll be tired.

S: You're really an active guy...

B: Sorry but I've had a rough week

S: So what are you going to do tonight?

B: I think I'll stay home, read a magazine, and go to bed early.

S: Sounds like you are going to have a really interesting evening.

B: So we'll talk sometime this week

Literally biased contexts + an ironic speaker

B: I was invited to a film by Amos Gitai.

S: That's fun. He is my favorite director.

B: I know, I thought we'll go together.

S: Great. When is it on?

B: Tomorrow. We will have to be in Metulla in the afternoon.

S: I see they found a place that is really close to the center.

B: I want to leave early in the morning.

S: I can't, I'm studying in the morning.

B: Well, I'm going anyway.

S: Sounds like you are going to have a really interesting evening.

B: So we'll talk sometime this week

Pretest 1: Establishing an **expectation for an ironic utterance**

Presenting these dialogues with either a **literal** or an **ironic** ending showed that in the given contexts, which featured an **ironic** speaker in mid-position, **ironic** endings were always **preferred** over **literal** alternatives.

Pretest 2: Establishing an **expectation for an ironic utterance**

B: I finish work early today.

S: So, do you want to go to the movies?

B: I don't really feel like seeing a movie

S: So maybe we could go dancing?

B: No, at the end of the night my feet will hurt and I'll be tired.

S: **You're really an active guy...** /

S: **You're really not an active guy...**

B: Sorry but I've had a rough week

S: So what are you going to do tonight?

B: I think I'll stay home, read a magazine, and go to bed early.

S: Sounds like you are going to have a really **interesting** / **dull** evening.

Pretest 2: Results

Readers **expected** more **ironic** endings following contexts featuring an **ironic** speaker in mid position compared to contexts not featuring such a speaker.

Reading times of targets in contexts inducing an expectation for an ironic utterance

Ironic targets **1703** msec

Literal targets **1570** msec
($t(23)=2.42$, $p<0.05$).

NO support for
the expectation hypothesis:
Expecting **irony** did not make a difference

Experiment 2

aim

- In Experiment 4 we aimed to replicate our previous findings (Giora & Fein, 1999; Giora, Fein & Schwartz, 1998). In these earlier studies we showed that **salient meanings** got activated before **nonsalient ironic interpretations**.
- This time we aim to show that **salience-based interpretations** are activated before **non-salient ironic interpretations**.

Experiment 2

Prediction

According to
The Graded Salience Hypothesis
in spite of an **expectation**
for an **ironic** utterance,
ironies will not be facilitated before
salience-based interpretations.

Specific Predictions

1. Longer reading times of words following critical words in **ironically biased** contexts (spill-over effects).
2. Longer response times in **ironically biased** contexts to **ironically** related probes even after a long delay.

Materials

(3a) 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!**

(3b) 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!**

Probes: **Saliency-based** related – winning;
ironically related – losses;
unrelated – meals; non-words

Pretest 1: Establishing **ironiness** and **literalness**

- Participants rated the items on a 7 point **ironiness** scale.
- Items scoring above 5 were considered **ironic**.
- Items scoring below 3 were considered **literal**.

Pretest 2: Probes' salience

Items were 60 neutral sentence contexts followed by 4 probes (**literally**/**ironically** related, unrelated, and nonwords) to which subjects made lexical decisions at a short (250 ms) ISI.

Results exhibited **no salience differences between probes.**

Pretest 3: Probes' relatedness to the interpretation of the target utterance

Participants rated

literally/ironically related probes as **similarly related** to the utterances' interpretation compared to unrelated probes which were rated as unrelated.

Pretest 4: Probes' relatedness to the utterance in its context

Could the meaning of the probes be exclusively derived from the context?

Participants mostly marked the **final sentence** as the point at which that meaning became **clearest**.

Results: Reading times

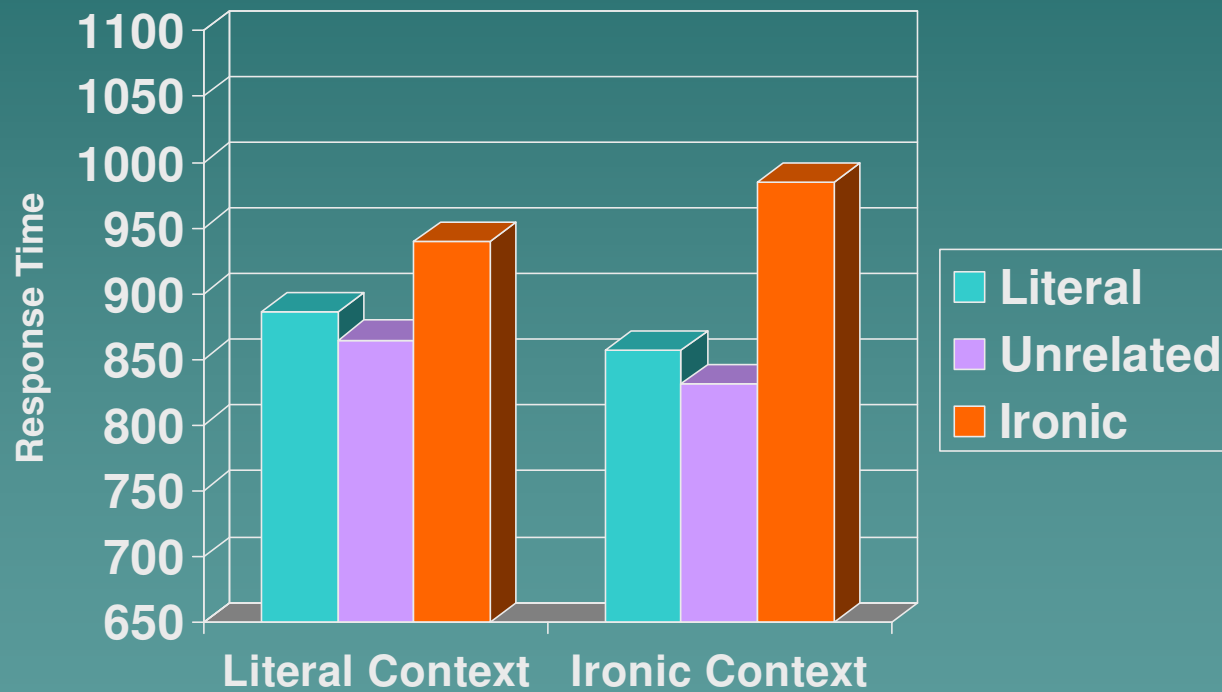
As expected

reading times showed **spill-over effects** for **ironies**:

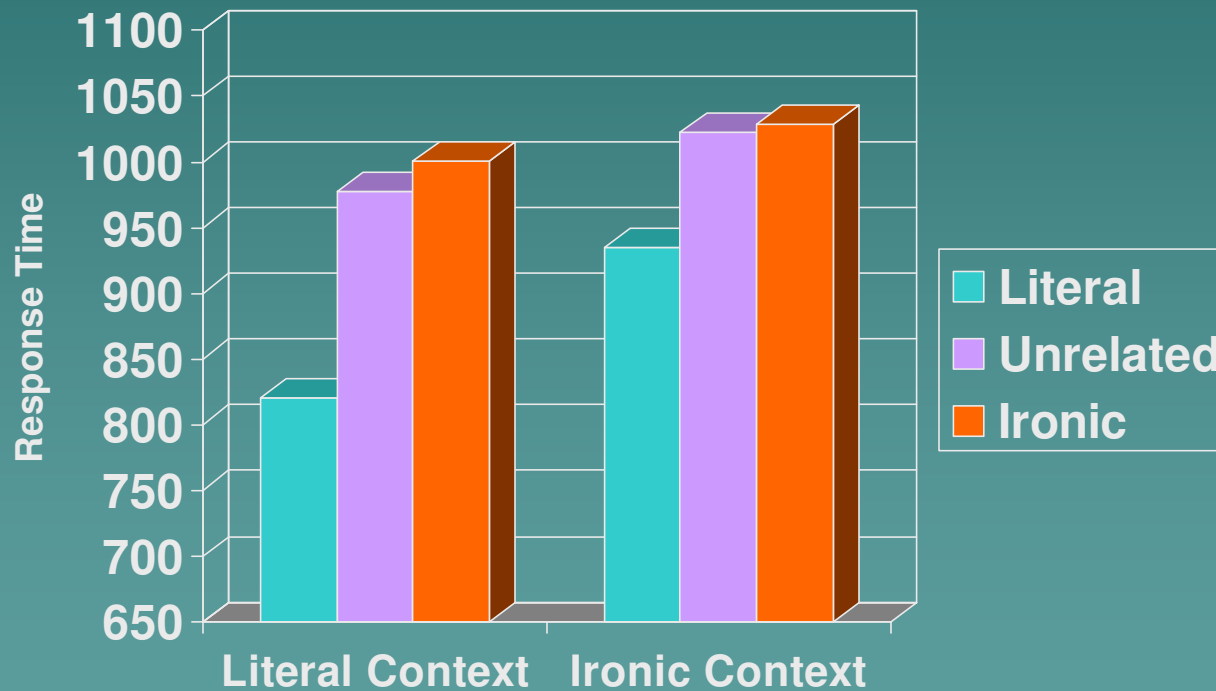
Ironic “news” (605) >

Literal “news” (549)

Mean response times at 250 msec ISI



Mean response times at 1400 msec ISI



Experiments 3-4

manipulated an **expectation** for an **ironic utterance** via the design of the experiment.

+Expectation condition – participants were presented items of Experiment 4, all of which ended in **an ironic utterance**

-Expectation condition – participants were presented items of Experiment 4, half of which ended in **a literal utterance** and half in **an ironic utterance**

+/- Expectation

Experiments 3 and 4

Predictions:

No expectancy effect on irony:

Longer response times to ironically related probes compared to salience-based literal ones after a fairly long delay, regardless of expectation for irony.

Pretest : Probes' salience

Since some of the probes were changed, we ran another pretest. Items were 60 neutral sentence contexts followed by 4 probes (**literally/ironically** related, unrelated, and nonwords) to which subjects made lexical decisions at a short (250 ms) ISI.

Results exhibited salience

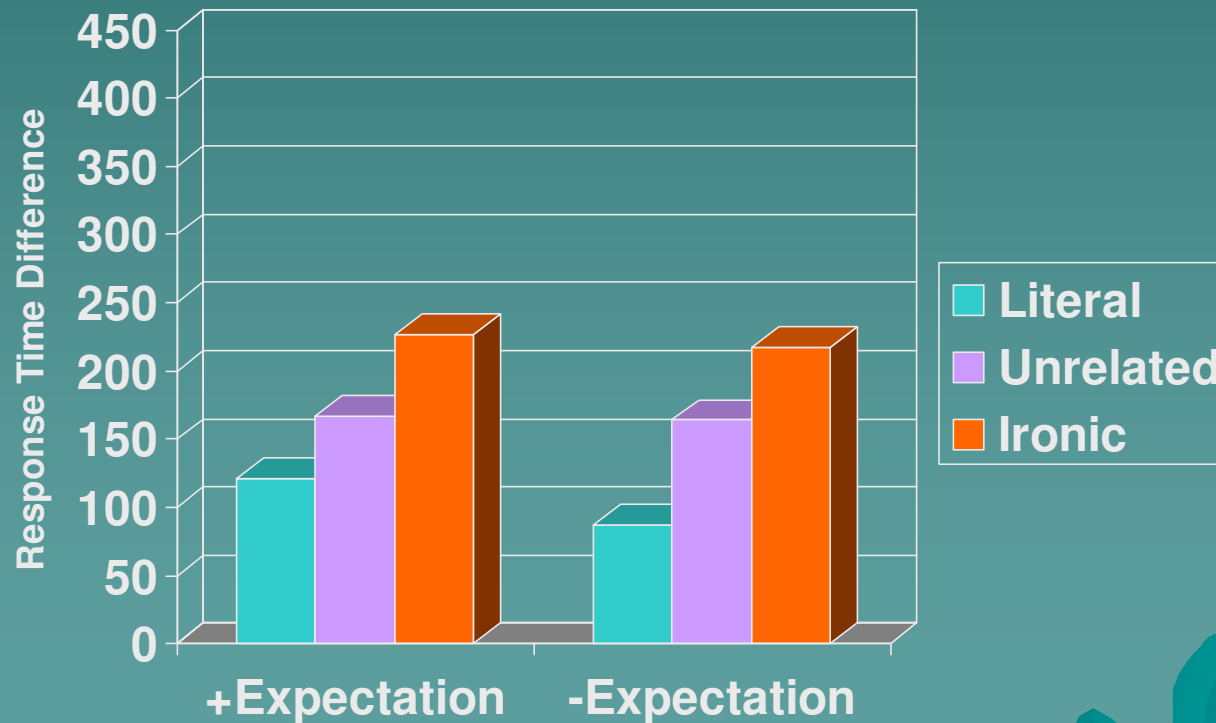
differences between probes. **Ironic** probes were read faster.

These results served as **baseline means.**

Experiment 3

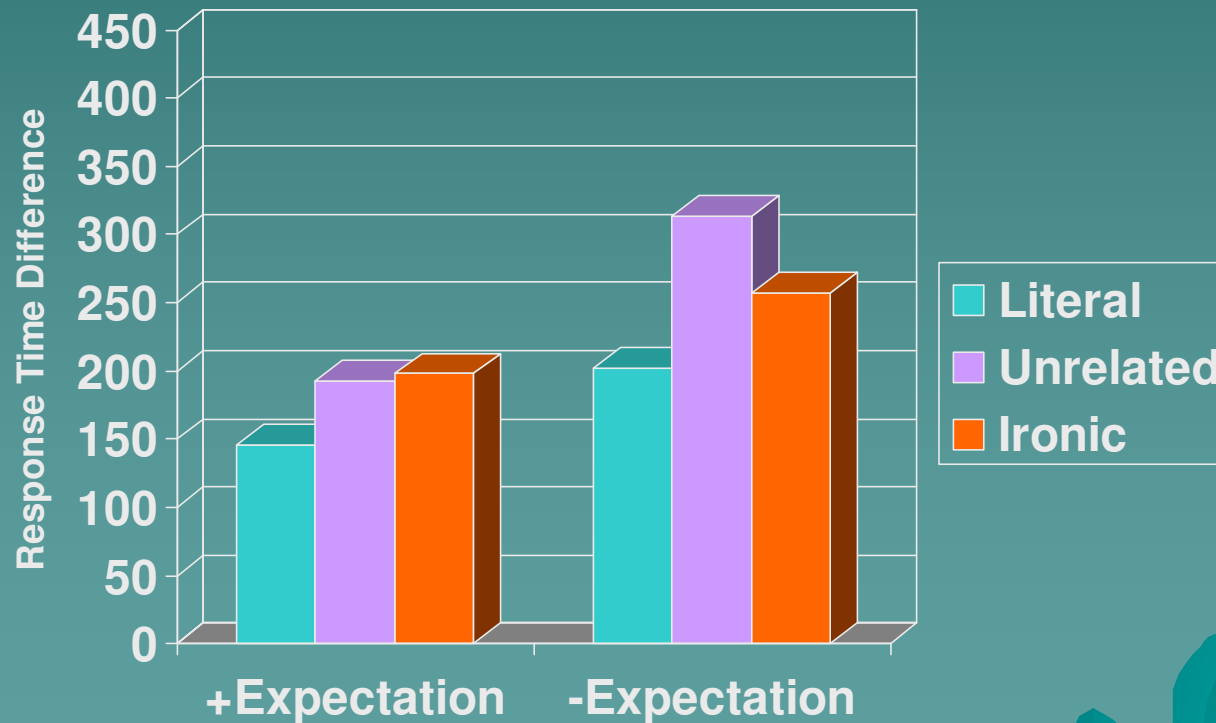
Mean response times at 750 msec ISI

(after subtraction of baseline means)



Experiment 4

Mean response times at 1000 msec ISI (after subtraction of baseline means)

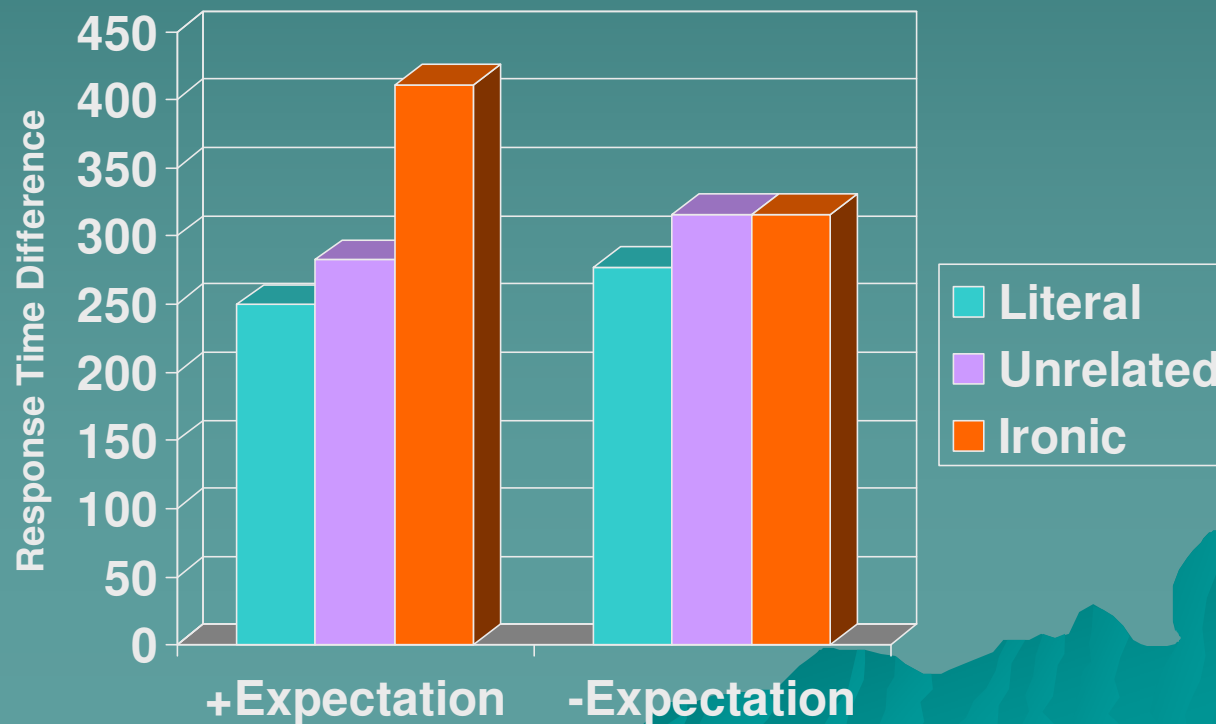


Experiments 5-6 + disclosure of aim

The aim of these experiments was to replicate previous results by strengthening **contextual expectation**. In the +Expectation condition, participants were told we were examining **irony interpretation**.

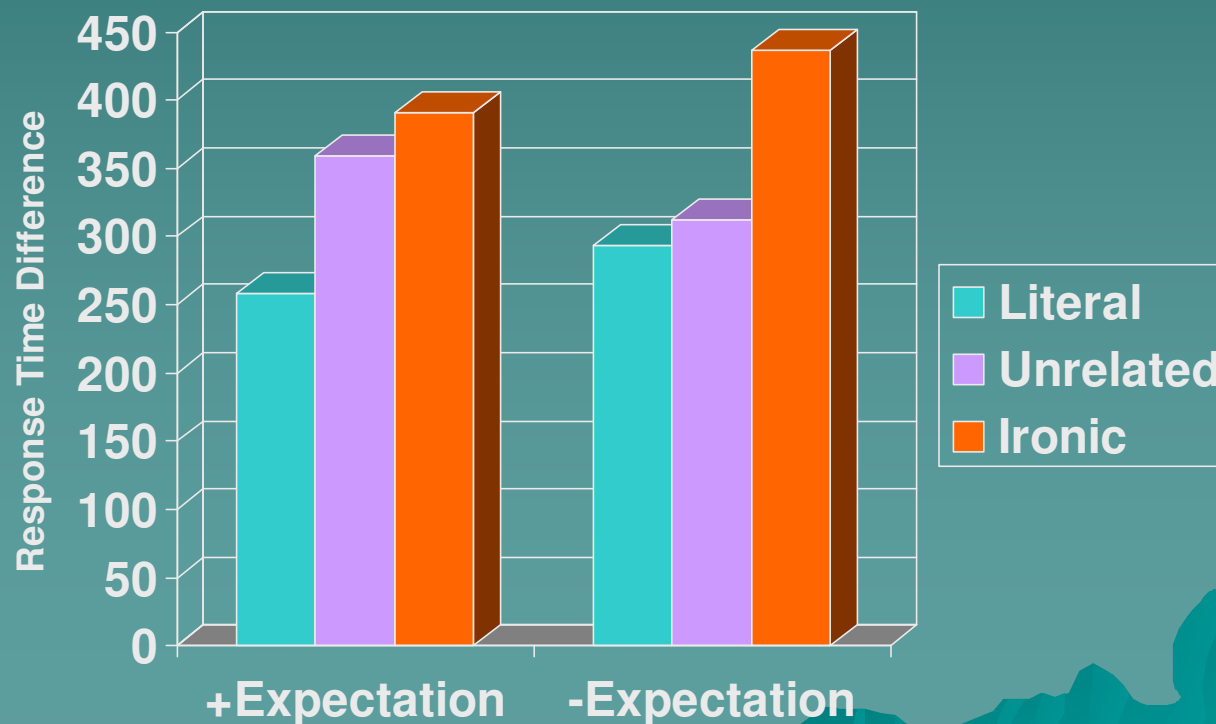
Experiment 5

Mean response times
at 750 msec ISI - (after subtraction of
baseline means) + disclosure of aim



Experiment 6

Mean response times at 1000 msec ISI (after subtraction of baseline means) + disclosure of aim

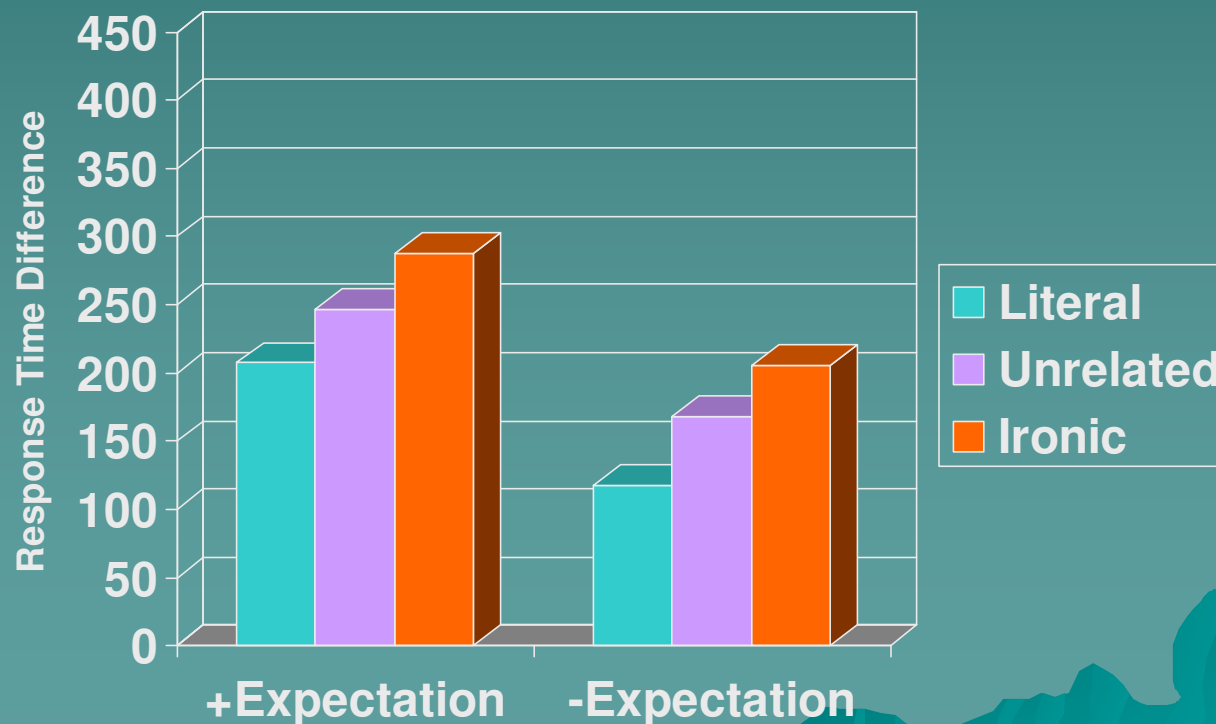


Experiments 7-8

The aim of experiments 7-8 was to replicate previous results by allowing additional processing time.

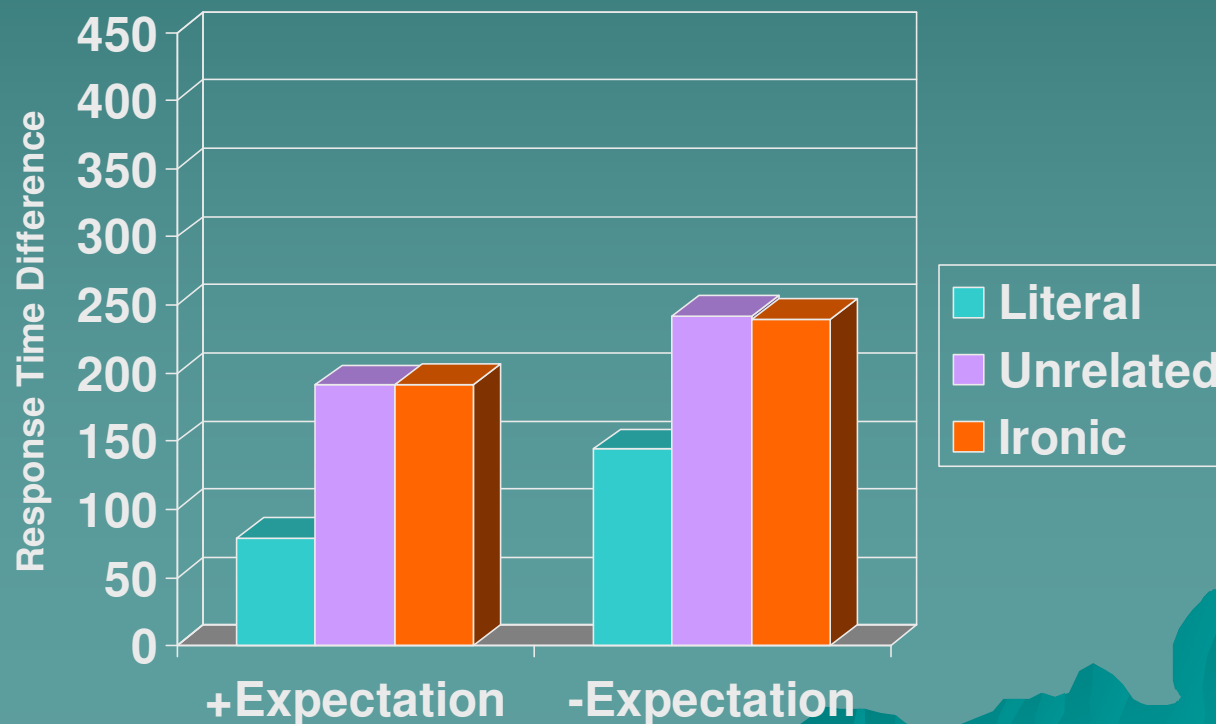
Experiment 7

Mean response times
at 1500 msec ISI (after subtraction of
baseline means) + disclosure of aim



Experiment 8

Mean response times at
2000 msec ISI (after subtraction of
baseline means) + disclosure of aim



Conclusions

No support for the **Expectation hypothesis!**
INITIALLY but even later:
Non-salient, ironic interpretations were not facilitated by a strong context, inducing an **expectation** for an **ironic** utterance.

Non-salient (ironic) interpretations

**Took longer
to process and to respond to
than**

Salience-based (literal) equivalents

Even when context was

highly predictive

of that interpretation

No support for strong-context effects

Instead:

**Support for theories that
assume the involvement of
salience-based (literal)
interpretations in the
processing of irony,
irrespective of their
contextual misfit.**

SO?

**When will
a strong context
facilitate
non-salient, ironic
interpretations?**

Maybe when men are **expecting**...



Thank you!



**Thanks to research
assistants
Ran Abramson
Inbar Golan
Amnon Lotan
Moshe Raphaelly**

Experiments 1-4 are based on

**Giora, R., Fein, O., Laadan, D., Wolfson, J.,
Zeituny, M., Kidron, R., Kaufman, R., &
Shaham, R. (2007). Expecting irony: Context
vs. salience-based effects. *Metaphor and
Symbol, 22*, 119-146.**