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Different Kinds of Pragmatic Factors Explain Failures of Default-to-Stereotype Inferences

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Abstract: Connolly, Fodor, Gleitman, and Gleitman (2007) present theoretical and empirical evidence against the Default-to-Stereotype (in short: DS) inference and argue that prototype theories of concepts predict (DS)-inferences. Hence, they conclude that prototype theories are inadequate. Jönsson and Hampton (2008) and Hampton, Jönsson, and Passanisi (2009) argue that (1) prototype theories do in general not predict (DS)-inferences, and that (2) Gricean pragmatic effects can largely account for Connolly et al.'s empirical results. They, however, interpret a minor but still substantial part of the findings as a genuine deviation from the (DS)-inference rule. In this paper we first argue that the results of Connolly et al. (2007) pose a greater threat to prototype theories of concepts than Jönsson and Hampton (2008) suggest. Second, we present an experiment which implies that Connolly et al.'s findings can be solely explained by following Gricean pragmatic factors: (a) non-redundancy preferences and (b) informativeness suppositions.