

### 7.2.1 Pragmatics Problems: Types of Communication

A. Answer each of the following questions about **literal/non-literal communication**.

1. Suki: Can I have your french fries?

Neko (angrily): Sure, you can eat my whole dinner while you're at it!

Does Neko mean her sentence to be read **literally**? (*Based on what she said, does it seem like Neko is OK with Suki eating her French fries?*) (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is Neko engaged in?)

2. Elvis: I have to have my car's engine entirely rebuilt.

Rex: Man, that should cost a few bucks.

Does Rex mean his sentence to be read **literally**? (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is Rex engaged in?)

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3. Letitia is describing how hard it was to paint her room in the sorority house, and adds: "It took forever to finish it."

Does Letitia mean her sentence to be read **literally**? (That is: does she believe that *it took an infinite amount of time to finish the painting?*) (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is Letitia engaged in?)

4. Suki: I have literally a million things to do.

Does Suki mean her sentence to be read **literally**? (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is Suki engaged in?)

5. Student: Those chicks in the back of the room were talking all through your lecture today.

Rex: Yeah, and what else is new?

Rex asking “What *else* is new” suggests that *this event was new*; does Rex really (**literally**) mean to communicate that their talking in class was new? (Why?)

6. Two students wake up in class in Rex’s class a half-hour after everyone else has left.

First student: Damn, our professor is the sandman!

Is the student mean to be interpreted **literally**? (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is the student engaged in?)

7. Elvis: Jake accidentally stapled his hand to the roof with a staple gun.

Trixie: Wow – I’ll bet that stung a little!

Should Trixie’s response be read **literally or non-literally**? (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is Trixie engaged in?)

8. Suki: Dr. Slim is a real weasel.

Trixie: That’s the understatement of the century.

a) Does Suki mean her sentence to be read **literally**? (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is Suki engaged in?)

b) Does Trixie mean her sentence about understatement to be read **literally**? (If not, what kind of non-literal communication is Trixie engaged in?)

**B.** Answer each of the following questions about **literal/non-literal** and **direct/indirect communication**.

**1.** While planning the weekly luau, Rex worries that it might rain.  
Barbie shrugs and says: “If it rains, it rains.”

**a)** Does Barbie mean her sentence to be read **literally**? (That is: does Barbie believe that *if it rains, it rains*?)

**b)** If we translate “If it rains, it rains” into the formal language, what sort of formal sentence results? (What does the truth table for that sentence look like?)

**c)** Does Barbie intend some **further, unspoken message** as well? (If so, what?)

**2.** Jack: Hey, where’s that tuna sandwich I just made?  
(Neko shrugs, and tries to look innocent).  
Jack: Well, it didn’t grow legs and walk away!

**a)** Does Jack mean that last sentence **literally**? (That is: does he genuinely believe that *the sandwich didn’t grow legs and walk away*?)

**b)** What second, **indirect claim** is Jack making by uttering this last sentence?

**3.** Kitty holds a pose for several minutes while Dr. Slim fiddles with his camera.  
Finally she says: “Hey, I’m not getting any younger here.”

**a)** Does Kitty mean this sentence **literally**? (That is: does she genuinely believe that *she’s not getting any younger*?)

**b)** What second, **indirect claim** is Kitty making by uttering her sentence?

4. Dr Slim: Do you like making money?

Jake: Who doesn't?

a) Jake intends his question rhetorically – that is, takes the answer to his question to be obvious. What is the **obvious answer** to Jake's question?

b) Based on that intended answer, what is Jake's answer to Dr. Slim's question?

5. After Dr. Slim insists that he knows all about cultivating medicinal plants, Neko replies: "If you're an expert on botany, then I'm Albert Einstein."

a) While Neko believes the conditional she's directly communicated, she is obviously communicating a second (indirect) message. What is Neko **indirectly** communicating (i.e., without saying it in so many words)?

b) Note that the sentence Neko indirectly communicated – the answer to (a) – doesn't follow validly from the conditional she uttered. Find a **second (obvious but unstated) premise** (in the Common Ground) which, when added to the conditional, would **validly entail** the sentence she (indirectly) communicated.

That is: fill in the blank for Premise 2, to yield a **valid** argument.

1. If Dr. Slim is an expert on botany, then Neko is Albert Einstein.

2. **[Premise from the Common Ground]**

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∴ [Sentence (from (a)) which Neko indirectly communicated]

6. Letitia: You want a cup of coffee?

Lucretia: You read my mind.

a) Does Lucretia mean her sentence to be read **literally**?

b) Does Lucretia intend some **further, unspoken message** as well? (If so, what?)