

7.3.1. Pragmatics Problems: Non-Literal Speech, Indirect Speech, and the Grice Maxims

Answer the following questions concerning **non-literal** and **indirect** speech and the **Grice Maxims**.

1. Jake: Is this a good time to talk to Dr. Slim about my new investment idea?

Kitty: Eh – he’s a bear before he’s had his morning coffee.

(a) Jake assumes Kitty’s sentence should **not** be read **literally**, because if it were Kitty would be violating the Maxim of _____.

(b) Jake assumes Kitty also intends an answers to her question, because if Kitty had just been pointing out Dr. Slim’s pre-coffee mood she’d be violating the Maxim of _____.

2. Neko: I’m starving! If I don’t get something to eat soon I’m gonna chew off Jack’s leg and swallow it whole.

Rex: Settle down – we’ll be in Barstow in five minutes.

(a) Neko assumes that there’ll be something to eat in Barstow, because if she was sure there wouldn’t be food there Rex would have been violating the Maxim of: _____.

(b) What sort of non-literal communication is Neko engaging in when he says he’s “starving”?

3. Lucretia: Does your can-opener have a remote control?

Letitia: Yeah, it’s on the living room table. It’s the small black one with the red button in the middle.

Given the detail Letitia gave about the remote control, Lucretia assumes there’s probably more than one remote control on the living room table – because if there weren’t, Letitia’s response would violate the Maxim of _____.

4. Rex tells his student: Well, there are four Grice Maxims, and in the first three problems we've gone through all but the Maxim of Manner. I leave it to you to figure out the answer to the fourth problem.

The student assumes that the fourth problem uses the Maxim of Manner, because otherwise Rex would be violating the Maxim of _____.

5. Letitia: I won't stand here and listen to any more of your Debbie Downer depressing discourse!

Lucretia: Well, there's the door.

Letitia assumes that Lucretia is **indirectly** communicating that she should leave, because if Lucretia had only been, 'out of the blue,' pointing out the door location she'd be violating the Maxim of _____.

6. Jack: Do want this last sardine?

Neko: That does sound good. On the other hand we'll be having dinner soon, and I don't want to spoil my appetite. But then again, a sardine would be a nice appetizer. Oh, but I should probably be watching my weight more....

Jack (impatiently): Look, you either want it or you don't.

(a) Does Jack mean his sentence to be interpreted **literally**? (That is: does Jack think it's true that Neko either wants it or doesn't want it?)

(b) What **second, unspoken message** is Jack communicating here?

(c) If Jack hadn't intended any second, unspoken message, he'd be violating the Maxim of _____.

7. “She’ll [Barbara Walters will] remain executive producer of the show even after her announced retirement next May from what Salon’s Alex Pareene calls, ‘...journalism, a profession she claims to have practiced for 50 years’.”

– David Kroll, *Jenny McCarthy Is A Dangerous Example of Medical Celebrity* **Forbes** 7.16.13; <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkroll/2013/07/16/jenny-mccarthy-the-danger-of-medical-celebrity/2/>

(a) By using the phrasing “a profession she claims to have practiced for 50 years,” what is the speaker indirectly communicating?

(b) What Grice Maxim would have been violated if this indirect message hadn’t been intended?

8. Rex: Where’s that last California roll?

Suki: Somebody ate it.

As a matter of fact (and as Suki knows), Suki ate the last California roll. Now given that she ate the last California roll, it is true that somebody ate it – so she didn’t tell a lie. Still, it seems that she **mised** Rex with her answer. What Grice Maxim is Suki violating in order to mislead him?

9. Dr. Slim: I’m not sure Letitia’s the right person to go onstage with you at the Vegas trade show. We need someone who will really get the buyers excited about our new product.

Kitty: Don’t worry: as a trained cheerleader, she’s a real ball of fire.

(a) Does Kitty mean her sentence to be read literally? (That is: does she think that Barbie is a sphere of flame?)

(b) What is the further indirect (unspoken) second message Kitty intends here?

10. Dr. Slim: If you act now I can let you in on this special business opportunity.

Neko: Oh yeah, I'll invest my money with you. I wasn't born yesterday, you know!

Jack: You should ask Rex to invest. He's as dumb as a rock.

(a) Is Neko speaking literally or non-literally when she says "I'll invest my money with you"?

(b) Is Neko speaking literally or non-literally when she says "I wasn't born yesterday"? (That is: does she believe it's true that she wasn't born yesterday?)

(c) What further, unspoken message is Neko (indirectly) communicating when she says "I wasn't born yesterday"?

(d) If Neko hadn't intended any such further, indirect communication, she would have been violating the Maxim of _____.

(e) What sort of non-literal communication is Jack engaging in when he says that Rex is "as dumb as a rock"?

11. Jack: What did Barbie make for dinner?

Rex: Something she claims is lasagna.

(a) By the phrasing of his reply, what is Rex indirectly communicating?

(b) What Grice Maxim would have been violated if this indirect message hadn't been intended?