

Dialogues to Think By

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Introduction

As you might have realized in your travels in life,
our language has problems — significant problems.
Songs like *Communication Breakdown* are around for a reason.

The following collection of short dialogues points out key areas at issue,
not only in linguistics, but also psychology and social psychology,
and shows how the culture within which we reside
affects our “cognitive webs”.

If you find some of the following dialogues confusing,
then you are getting the point.

Go For the Gold

Linus: (*shows Lucy a swinging pendulum*) Galileo deduced a law from this.

Lucy: (*grabs the pendulum and jerks the chain up and down, violently*) Let's see him deduce a law from this!

Actual Conversation

B has a Ph.D. in (college) educational administration.

A: So does my wife.

B: Secondary?

A: Yes.

B: Mine's higher.

The Evolution of Cooperation

A: Oink.

B: Quack.

A: *Oink!*

B: *Quack!*

C: Moo?

A and B beat up C.

A Problem With Analogy

Announcer refers to baseball game as a "rocking chair" game.

A: Because it goes back and forth?

B: No — because it's easy — you can lean back and relax.

Is the Glass Half-Empty or Half-Full?

Debtor: You say I owe you \$100. But I say I've paid you \$100.

Creditor: Give me the other hundred!

Tightrope Walker: They say I've lost half my balance, I say I still have half my balance.

Jesse James: They say I'm half-bad, but I know I'm half-good.

Doctor: You say we failed to give him half the oxygen he needed to live — but
 I say we gave him half the oxygen he needed to live.

The Undiscovered Disagreement

A: I like animals.
B: I like animals.

The Agreement Which Wasn't

A: It will never work.
B: You're probably right.

Give a Little

A: We should *treat kids fairly*.
B: We should *abuse* them.
C: Why not *compromise*?

Two Sides to Every Issue

A: We should use gas chambers.
B: No, we should use electricity — it's cheaper.

The Insult Which Wasn't

A: You have bacteria in your stomach.
B: So do you.

The Egotist

A: I'm the stupidest man alive.
B: You think you're so *special*!

Can't Win

- A: I'm always open-minded.
B: You're contradicting yourself.
- A: I'm open-minded enough to close my mind sometimes.
B: You're contradicting yourself.

No-Win

- Parent: Don't be like me — be like them.
Kid: You don't practice what you preach.
- Parent: Be like me.
Kid: You want me to be your clone.

Examine Every Gift Horse

- Liberator: (to slave) Take off your chains!
Slave: You just want me to be like you.

The Winner

- A: Five.
B: Ten.
A: Seven-fifty.
B: Okay, seven-fifty.
A: (*thinks to himself*) I won.

The Loser

- A: Bet you can't crush this egg in your hand.
B: Bet I can. (*he does, and it splatters all over him*)
A: Oops — guess I was wrong.

No Cigar

- A: It is *possible* that I have five one thousand dollar bills in my pocket.
 B: No, it isn't.
 A: (pulls out four thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollar bills)

They Can't Both Be Right

- A: The rain will stop.
 B: The rain will continue.

A Palpable Sense of Confusion

- A: They should put strong warning labels on cigarette packages.
 B: Do you think people actually read those warning labels?
- A: You need to discriminate between right and wrong.
 B: You said it wasn't right to *discriminate*.
- A: I didn't like the Judy Chicago exhibit.
 B: I thought you were a *feminist*.
- A: Should we . . .
 B: Shh . . . don't say anything.
 A: (starts humming)
 B: Shh!
 A: I'm not saying anything — I'm *humming*.

Proof by Proof

- A: Why do they say no two snowflakes are alike?
 B: Well, they say no two fingerprints are alike.

Frame-Shift in Mid-Sentence

- A: What time do you have?
 B: 1:32, but my watch is two minutes fast.

Metaphor Me the Object

- A: *Hand* me the screwdriver.
B: *Nose* me the perfume.
C: *Waste* me the Manilow record.

Frame Battles

- A: I want all play and no work. I want *pure* experience.
B: You want *narrow* experience.

- A: I'm *adaptable*.
B: You're *submissive*.

- A: I'm *unpretentious*.
B: You *have no taste*.

Return of the Duck-Rabbit

- A: Is a crab a *fish*?
B: No, it's a *seafood*.

What Do You Call It?

- A: What do you call it when a person laughs, screams, cries, etc.?
B: Noise.

Information Theory, In a Nutshell

- A: Shot to *smitharoons*.
B: That's *macaroons*.
A: No, it's *macareens*.

Jumping To Generalizations

- A: I don't like Falwell.
 B: You hate *ministers*, do you?
- A: I don't like going to church.
 B: You're not *religious*.
- A: I didn't vote.
 B: Guess you don't believe in the concept of a *democracy*.
- A: I don't agree.
 C: Well, you never agree, so I'm not surprised.
 B: (*to C*) It's impossible for you to accept criticism, isn't it?
 C: Why does everyone attack me?

The Hierarchy of Hypocrisy

- A: (*tells lie*)
 B: (*who has lied in the past*) You liar!
 C: (*who has also lied in the past, and who knows B has also lied in the past*) You hypocrite!
 D: (*who has done all that C has done*) (*to C*) Who are you to call B a hypocrite?

Never Discuss Religion and Politics

- A: If you'll admit that God doesn't exist I'll admit Capitalism is the best system.
 B: Okay.
 A: Good — now we agree.

True Believers

Bumper Sticker: God must be a Tarheel — that's why the sky is Carolina Blue.

Slipping Between the Horns of a Dilemma

- Kid: Are you talking, or am I crazy?

Dog: Maybe both.

The Pathetic Neurotic

Psychiatrist: According to the circumstances, you should be *paranoid*, not a *manic-depressive*.

Patient: Can't I do *anything* right?

Get It Right, You Knucklehead!

A: What goes *ring!*, then goes *clunk*?

B: A person who rings a doorbell with a knife, then drops it on the ground.

A: You idiot — not a *knife* — it was a *screwdriver* — I can't believe you messed it up.

Subtlety

A: What's the opposite of *outsense*?

B: *Incense*.

A: I was going to ask, "What's the opposite of *incense*?", but that would have been too obvious.

At the Surrealist Restaurant

Man: Waiter, this pizza has *bones* in it!

Nocturnal Conversations

A: What's the moon?

B: A big white thing with Jackie Gleason's face on it.

A: Why don't plants eat meat?

B: They don't have teeth.

A: Why is the color red not green?

B: It doesn't fit in.

A: Can you smell music?

B: Yeah.

A: What does it smell like?

B: It's according to what mood you're in.

A: What did the tree say to the leaf?

B: Go buy some gum while you still have a chance.

Something's Rotten in the State of Mind

Hamlet: One may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

Psychiatrist: (*whispering in the ear of another psychiatrist*) Paranoia.

Seeing Through Scrim

Snob Scrim

A: Here's the ring I bought you.

B: (*The diamond's too small.*)

A: Here's the handbag I bought you.

B: (*It's not Gucci.*)

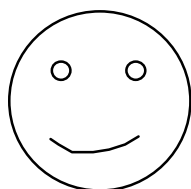
Insecurity Scrim

A: Here's the handbag I bought you.

B: (*Somebody likes me after all!*)

Reality is In the Eye of the Beholder

The Object



A: I see a “face”.
 Psychologist: You’re *projecting*.

Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

The Analogies

Blind man: I do not see red.
 Man with normal sight: I see red.

Man with normal sight: I do not see red.
 Color-blind man: I see red.

Schizophrenic: I see ants on my arm.
 Man: I see no ants.

Blind Man 1 (re: elephant): I “see” a leg.
 Blind Man 2 (re: same): I “see” a trunk.

The Reality

A: Can’t you see the possibilities?
 B: No.

Smelling Between the Lines

A: Don’t say no.
 B: I smell a “yes” in these “no’s”.

Zen Dissatisfaction

A: An insect bit me.
 B: We’re all *One*.
 A: I’d rather my arm were a different segment of the One.

The Teacher We Never Had

Teacher: (to class, holding up a jigsaw puzzle piece) To you this is a piece.
 (Teacher brings out almost completed puzzle) To me, it is the missing piece.

Teach Your Children Well

Mother to child (3 years old): Say “Coke is it.”

Back to the Drawing Board

Victim: What would your mommy say if she were here?
 Bully: She'd tell me to beat you up.
 Victim: You do everything your mommy says?

The Beginning of Reason

*Ma would tell kid, “always do what your elders say.”
 Kid hangs out with some elder gang members, who tell him to spray paint a car.*

Ma: Why did you do it?
 Kid: They told me to.
 Ma: And if they told you to jump off a bridge, would you do that?

*The smell of inconsistency was in the air.
 Just at that moment, an idea entered the boy's mind.
 This was the beginning of reason.*

Kid: Now wait just one second. You've instructed me to obey my elders, haven't you?
 Ma: Yes, I have.
 Kid: Hmmm — well, let's extend this argument. Shouldn't we apply your *jump-off-a-bridge* analysis not only to elder *gang members*, but elders in *general*, such as parents and teachers? And if you claim that we *should* broaden the scope of your analysis, as I believe consistency would dictate, why did you fail to raise this analysis in these alternative contexts? Why did you wait until now to raise the issue?
 Ma: I think you've been seeing too much of that “missing-piece” teacher.

Why History Takes So Long

A: Let's have equal opportunity for all.
 B: No.

Think Harder

- A: Slavery is wrong.
B: Can you think of a better system?
A: No.

Beautiful Ideas Destroyed.

- A: The world will be at peace.
B: You have no proof of that.
- A: Our love will last forever.
B: You call this love?
- A: I can't thank you enough for all you've done.
B: Just fork over the bucks.

Another Actual Conversation

- A: Why don't you accept his answer?
B: Because we don't want to (*laughs*).

A Romantic Interlude

- A: I like kissing you.
B: You're not so bad yourself . . . is that what you wanted to hear?

Go For It

- A: What will you do with a diamond if you get it?
B: Hide.

Why Not?

- A: Why conform?
B: Doesn't everybody?

Facing the Muzak

Kid: I don't want to go to work.
Zombie: If I did it, you can do it too.
Kid: But look what it did to you!
Zombie: You have to face reality.

The Hole-Digger

A: Dig this hole.
B: (digs hole)
A: Now you're a *hole-digger*. What do hole-diggers do?
B: Dig holes.
A: Go to it. I'll bring you food.

Patience

A: Man will have a great society.
B: (*after Armageddon*) What do you say now?
A: The future isn't over yet.