

STORY COMPREHENSION TASK

The original task was designed for use with non-clinical adults and results were reported in Langdon & Coltheart (2004). The task comprised 12 practice stories (6 'yes'/6 'no') followed by 96 experimental stories. Each participant saw 96 stories with 48 stories requiring a 'yes' response (16 irony, 16 metaphor and 16 literal) and 48 requiring a 'no' response. 6 different versions of this task were used, and the items included in each version are outlined in this document. If you use this task in your research, we ask that you reference the task appropriately in any publications.

Reference:

Langdon, R., Coltheart, M., (2004). Recognition of metaphor and irony in young adults: the impact of schizotypal personality traits. *Psychiatry Research*, 125(1), 9-20.

The original version of this task was computerised to record reaction times. If you are not interested in recording RTs for individual trials you could put together balanced subsets of stories into different booklets (for each version) which participants would work through at their own pace. As well as the participant's responses, you could then also record the total time taken for a participant to complete the task.

Practice Trials

Participants practiced with the 12 practice stories listed below and were provided with correct/incorrect feedback after each response. They were not explicitly told about the inclusion of indirect speech, they were simply told that: "In this section you will be reading short stories and deciding whether what a story character says is something that a person might say in that situation. Here are some examples of the sorts of stories that you will see. Read each story at your own pace and then press NEXT when ready to read what the story character said. After you have responded the computer will tell you if you are correct or incorrect."

'Yes' Practice Trials:

1y. Helen has gone to watch a football game with her boyfriend Jim. Helen does not like football very much. The crowd behind Helen and Jim are noisy and someone spills a drink all over Helen. Jim has not seen what has happened. He asks Helen if she is having a good time. Helen replies

"Can't you see I'm having a great time." (sarcasm)

2y. Jim goes over to Clare's house. He wants to see Clare's new dog. When he arrives, the dog jumps up to greet him and licks him all over the face. Jim laughs loudly and says

"Wow, what a ferocious animal you've gotten yourself." (banter)

3y. Jason is helping his mother set the table. She asks him to carry the dinner plates over to the table. Unfortunately, he trips and drops all the plates. Jason's mother is annoyed and says

"You've got two left feet." (figure of speech)

4y. Kate's mother has had a serious operation. Kate's going to look after her mother at her own house for a few weeks. When they get home from the hospital, Kate helps her mother have a bath and get ready for bed. When Kate's mother is lying comfortably in bed, she says

to Kate

“Thanks for being a lamb.” (figure of speech)

5y. Kathy has just been for her driving test. Unfortunately, poor Kathy failed her test. Kathy is very disappointed. Kathy's mother tries to cheer her up. She says to Kathy

“Better luck next time.” (literally appropriate)

6y. Michael is very disappointed. His girlfriend has just broken off their engagement. He tells his friend Jim what has happened. Jim sympathises with poor Michael and says

“I'm sorry to hear that.” (literally appropriate)

‘No’ Practice Trials.

1n. During a fierce army battle, a group of soldiers have become trapped. Luckily, their sergeant has thought of a plan of escape. After explaining his plan to his men, one of the soldiers replies

“What bad manners!”

2n. A nurse is talking to her patient. The poor patient is frightened because he has to have a serious heart operation. The nurse says

“You're such a liar.”

3n. As Mary rushes through the house, she knocks over and breaks a vase. It's her mother's favourite vase. When Mary's mother comes home, she sees the broken vase. She asks Mary 'What happened?' Mary answers

“You're a vulture.”

4n. Mr. Smith has just arrived home. He's had a bad day at work. He slams the front door and then yells at his children. His wife says

“I've lost the thread.”

5n. Mark wants a dog for a pet. On his way home, he sees a puppy in the pet shop window. He tells his mother all about the puppy. But Mark's mother does not want a dog. The family already has two cats. She explains to Mark why he cannot have the dog. She says

“It's a perfect day.”

6n. Michael and Trevor are playing. They have turned the kitchen table upside down and they are paddling along with rolled-up newspapers. Their mother comes into the kitchen. When she sees the boys playing, she laughs. Michael calls out to his mother

“Well, you're late”

Experimental Trials

The original 96 experimental stories used for the story comprehension task are presented below in pairs with the ironic comment in one story of a pair being the literally appropriate statement in the other story of the pair. Ironic comments are labelled as sarcasm, if there is any intention to criticise or to be derogatory, and are otherwise labelled as banter. The three comments listed with each story are the appropriate ironic comment, the appropriate figure of speech and the literally appropriate statement, respectively. Most story pairs comprise one story with a comment classified as sarcasm and one story with a comment classified as banter. However, that is not always the case.

1.a. Tim has pestered his older sister to let him help her make a cake. She asks him to add eggs to the flour and sugar. Instead of breaking the eggs first, Tim puts the eggs in, shells and all! When his sister sees what he has done, she gets angry and says

“How clever!” (sarcasm)

“You’re a goose.”

“I always knew you were really stupid!”

1.b. Sally rushes home from school. She has some exciting news to tell her family. Sally tells her brother that the headmaster picked her to be on a television quiz because she was the smartest in her class. Sally’s brother says

“I always knew you were really stupid!” (banter)

“You’ve got a head on your shoulders.”

“How clever!”

2.a. John should be getting ready for school. It is already 8.30am and he has to catch the bus at 9am. He keeps playing with his toys and watching television instead of getting dressed. John’s mother is worried that he will miss the bus. She says

“You don’t need to be in such a rush.” (sarcasm)

“Better put your skates on.”

“Dear me, you’re bound to be late at this rate.”

2.b. Peter has a date with Jane, a new girl at his high school. It’s their first date. He’s not supposed to meet Jane until 7pm. But he’s so excited. He’s already dressed and completely ready and it’s only 5pm. He rushes down the stairs to grab his keys and nearly trips over the cat. His mother calls out

“You’re bound to be late at this rate!” (banter)

“Hey put the brakes on!”

“You don’t need to be in such a rush!”

3.a. A maths teacher is explaining how to solve a maths problem. He tells his students to listen carefully as they have not studied this problem before. After writing out several examples on the board, the teacher turns around from the board. He sees all the confused faces of his students and says

“Going too slow for you, am I?” (sarcasm)

“Dear me, are you all in a fog?”

“Going too fast for you, am I?”

3.b. Kevin and his father are walking to the skating rink. Kevin has just been given new roller skates for his birthday. He is impatient to try them out and so he runs ahead of his father. Then he rushes back and starts to pull his father along by the arm. His father says

“Going too fast for you, am I?” (banter)

“Have I got lead in my shoes?”

“Going too slow for you, am I?”

4.a. A Company is in trouble. The company manager is trying to keep these problems a secret in the hope that business will improve. One morning he opens his newspaper to read headlines about his company going bankrupt. He rings the newspaper editor to complain about the story being published and says

“This is so much what I wanted to happen!” (sarcasm)

“The balloon’s gone up now!”

“Well that’s the worst news I could have had!”

4.b. Harry gives his friend Nick a tip for the stock market. He tells Nick to buy shares in the local insurance company. One week later, Harry rings Nick to tell him that they have made a huge profit. Nick says

“Well that’s the worst news I could have had!” (banter)

“You weren’t just flying a kite.”

“This is so much what I wanted to happen!”

5.a. A nurse is visiting the local school to immunise the children against measles. She asks the children to line up so that she can give them an injection. Laura is scared of needles. She is hiding behind the cabinet. The teacher comes up to Laura and says

“So, want to be first, do you?” (banter)

“So, have you got cold feet?”

“So, plan to be last, do you?”

5.b. An instructor has been teaching a class of learners how to parachute. Today is the first time that they will jump out of a plane. The plane has reached the right height. The instructor opens the door and asks the jumpers to line up. Bill is very keen and rushes to the front. The instructor says

“So, plan to be last, do you?” (banter)

“My, you are chaffing at the bit.”

“So, want to be first, do you?”

6.a. Angela has an exam tomorrow. Angela’s mother tells her to go to her bedroom to study. Two hours later, Angela’s mother pokes her head around the corner. Angela is lying on her bed listening to music. She hasn’t even opened a schoolbook yet. Angela’s mother says

“Well, you have been working hard.” (sarcasm)

“Well, you have been dragging your feet.”

“Well, I can see you’ve been taking it easy.”

6.b. John arrives home from school. He has lots of homework to do. He walks straight into his bedroom and starts working on his homework. Two hours later, his mother opens the door of his bedroom and says

“Well, I can see you’ve been taking it easy.” (banter)

“Well, you are a beaver.”

“Well, you have been working hard.”

7.a. Dave is going out to a party tonight. He comes downstairs to ask his mother if he can borrow the car. Dave’s mother is angry about the way he’s dressed. Dave hasn’t combed his hair. He’s wearing a dirty t-shirt and ripped jeans. She says to Dave’s father

“My, he’s going to attract all the girls.” (sarcasm)

“My, look at the dog’s breakfast.”

“My, he’s going to frighten all the girls away.”

7.b. Jane is going to her first formal dance. She has a new dress and new shoes and she’s been to the hairdresser. She spends two hours putting on her make-up and getting ready. When she walks down the stairs, her parents are so proud of how beautiful she looks. Her father says to her mother

“My, she’s going to frighten all the boys away.” (banter)

“My, look at the princess.”

“My, she’s going to attract all the boys.”

8.a. A businessman finishes his meal at an expensive restaurant. The waiter who had been

serving him is expecting a big tip. After all, the waiter had spent a lot of time making sure that the businessman had good service. But the businessman leaves no tip at all. The waiter says

“How generous!” (sarcasm)

“How tight!”

“What a miser!”

8.b. Mr. Jones is a very generous man. He has just donated \$10,000 to the local hospital. When he tells his friend, Peter, what he has done, Peter says

“What a miser!” (banter)

“What big pockets!”

“How generous!”

9.a. Tom is very disappointed. Tom’s boss has just told him that he will not get the promotion that he wanted. His boss gave the job to someone else instead. Poor Tom walks over to tell his friend Joe what has happened. Tom says

“Guess what, I’ve just had some great news.” (sarcasm)

“Guess what, I’ve got a bitter pill to swallow.”

“Guess what, I’ve just had some terrible news.”

9.b. Paul has just found out that he has won \$10,000 in a lottery. He rushes home to tell his family. He is very excited and bursts through the front door shouting

“Guess what, I’ve just had some terrible news.” (banter)

“Guess what, we’re in green clover.”

“Guess what, I’ve just had some great news.”

10.a. Jill has won a part in a new play and tonight is opening night. This will be the first time that Jill has ever been on stage. She is very nervous. She paces up and down and breathes deeply to try to relax. One of the other actors says to the director

“She’s very calm about it all, isn’t she?” (banter)

“Her heart is in her mouth, isn’t it?”

“She’s so anxious about it all, isn’t she?”

10.b. Karen has just finished her Higher School Certificate. Today the postman will deliver her results. Karen’s parents keep looking out the window to see if the postman has been. They are more nervous than Karen is. Karen is still in bed. She really doesn’t care one way or the other. Karen’s mother says to her husband

“She’s so anxious about it all, isn’t she?” (banter)

“She’s a cool cucumber, isn’t she?”

“She’s very calm about it all, isn’t she?”

11.a. Brenda meets her new neighbour Steve and tries to start a conversation so that she can get to know him better. But Steve is very shy. He hardly says a word. Brenda is getting frustrated and says

“Goodness, you’re a great talker.” (sarcasm)

“Goodness, you do keep pulling the shutters down.”

“Goodness, you don’t like talking about yourself.”

11.b. Carolyn sits next to an old lady on the bus. The old lady chats away for the whole trip and tells Carolyn all the details of her life - about being a nurse in the war, about having three husbands and about spending time in jail. Carolyn is fascinated by the old lady’s story and says

“Goodness, you don’t like talking about yourself.” (banter)

“Goodness, you are an open book.”

“Goodness, you’re a great talker.”

12.a. Mary and Betty are at their highschool reunion. It has been 20 years since they have all seen each other. Mary and Betty see Fay arriving. They are both shocked. Fay is huge. She has put on so much weight since when they were all at school together. Mary says

“My goodness, she’s such a tiny thing now.” (sarcasm)

“My goodness, look at the whale.”

“My goodness, she’s sure to split that dress.”

12.b. Kate has been on a diet for two months and has lost a lot of weight - 10 kilos! Today she is meeting her friends Jane and Alice for lunch. Jane and Alice have not seen Kate for months. When Jane sees Kate arrive, she is worried to see how much weight Kate has lost. Jane says to Alice

“My goodness, she’s sure to split that dress.” (sarcasm)

“My goodness, look at the bag of bones.”

“My goodness, she’s such a tiny thing now.”

13.a. Jenny has been shopping in town. She has bought herself a new dress. She likes it very much and rushes home to show her husband. When her husband sees her in the dress, he says “That looks terrible on you!” Jenny replies

“Thanks so much!” (sarcasm)

“You’re a goat.”

“So, trying to ruin my day!”

13.b. It’s Helen’s birthday but it does not look like it’s going to be a good day. Her flatmates have forgotten. Nobody has said happy birthday. But then her boyfriend arrives, carrying a huge bunch of flowers and a gift. He tells her that he is taking her out to an expensive restaurant. Helen gives him a hug and says

“So, trying to ruin my day!” (banter)

“You’re a prince.”

“Thanks so much!”

14.a. Robyn has spent hours cooking a new recipe for the family dinner. She hopes everyone will appreciate the trouble that she has gone to. However, Robyn’s son Thomas takes a very small serve and then hardly touches the food on his plate. Robyn says to Thomas

“Do leave some for the others.” (sarcasm)

“You are a sparrow.”

“Don’t starve yourself.”

14.b. Mark and Janice are at their friends’ wedding reception. The food has been organised as a buffet so that all the guests can help themselves. Mark is enjoying the food. He is eating a lot. After his third trip to the buffet table, Janice looks at the big serve of food on his plate and says

“Don’t starve yourself.” (sarcasm)

“Are your legs hollow?”

“Do leave some for the others.”

15.a. A young man has been convicted of theft. His lawyer has pleaded with the judge for mercy. The lawyer asked the judge to take into account that the young man was very poor and

that this was his first crime. The judge sentences the young man to 10 years. The lawyer is shocked by the harsh sentence and says

“There’s someone who really cares about people.” (sarcasm)

“There’s someone with cold blood.”

“There’s someone who obviously doesn’t give a damn about people.”

15.b. An elderly man has fallen over in the shopping centre. A kind woman goes over to help him. She helps him get up and then takes him over to her car so that she can take him to the local doctor. Two bystanders are watching. One says to the other

“There’s someone who obviously doesn’t give a damn about people.” (banter)

“There’s someone with a warm heart.”

“There’s someone who cares about people.”

16.a. It’s Greg’s birthday. He will be five. His grandmother is coming over to give him a gift. Greg hopes that it will be a toy truck. When his grandmother arrives, Greg opens the present. It’s a jumper, not a toy truck! Greg throws the jumper on the floor and runs out of the room. Greg’s grandmother says to Greg’s mother

“Well, he likes it a lot, doesn’t he?” (sarcasm)

“Well, he got out of the wrong side of the bed.”

“Well, he doesn’t like it very much, does he?”

16.b. It is Christmas morning. Terry unwraps the big present that his parents have given him. It is a train set. He is so excited. It is just what he wanted. Terry’s parents watch him as he happily plays with the train set. Terry’s father says

“Well, he doesn’t like it very much, does he?” (banter)

“Well, look at the bear in the honey pot.”

“Well, he likes it a lot, doesn’t he?”

17.a. Colin has just started University. His father is getting quite annoyed about how little work Colin does. Colin rarely goes to lectures. He is always out at parties. It is 11am on Monday morning and Colin has just gotten out of bed. Colin’s father says

Dear me, what a busy life you have. (sarcasm)

Dear me, you don’t have much on your plate.

Dear me, what an easy life you have.

17.b. Janet is telling her friend Sarah about all the work she has to do. Sarah thinks that Janet is trying to do too much. Janet has four young children, a full-time job and she is also president of the Parents’ and Citizens’ Association. Sarah says

“Dear me, what an easy life you have.” (banter)

“Dear me, you have too many balls in the air.”

“Dear me, what a busy life you have.”

18.a. Mark and Karen are out on their first date. Karen is very quiet. Mark is trying to make her relax so that they can have a conversation. He asks her if there is anything she wants to know about him. Karen shakes her head and turns away. Mark says

“You’re full of questions.” (banter)

“Did the cat bite your tongue?”

“You’re the shy type, aren’t you?”

18.b. Anna wants to know more about her new flatmate Paul. She starts to ask him some very personal questions. She asks him whether he has a girlfriend and what he does for a job. Paul answers her questions and says

“You’re the shy type, aren’t you?” (banter)

“I’m an open book.”

“You’re full of questions.”

19.a. Jane has invited her friend Bill to a dance at the Golf Club. The dance is very formal. All the women are wearing evening gowns and all the men are wearing suits. Jane and her friend Jenny see Bill arrive. Instead of a suit, Bill is wearing torn jeans and a t-shirt. Jenny says

“My, he wants to impress.” (sarcasm)

“My, look at the fish out of water.”

“My, he doesn’t care what he looks like.”

19.b. Joe has a new job and wants to make a good impression with his boss. He is wearing a new suit. While walking to work, Joe stops outside a shop and looks at his reflection in the window. Two friends, Peter and Tom, walk by and see Joe combing his hair and staring at his reflection for ages. They are surprised by how vain he is. Peter says to Tom

“My, he doesn’t care what he looks like.” (sarcasm)

“My, look at the peacock.”

“My, he wants to impress.”

20.a. A computer salesman is trying to talk Jim and Keith into buying a new computer. Jim and Keith know a lot about computers and so they are not fooled by the stories the salesman is making up. Finally the salesman gives up and walks away. Jim says to Frank

“Well, he sure knew what he was talking about.” (sarcasm)

“Well, that was all hot air.”

“Well, he didn’t know what he was talking about.”

20.b. A famous scientist is visiting a University and gives a lecture to the students. The students are fascinated by what the scientist has to tell them. They ask many questions and the scientist is able to answer every one. After the lecture, one of the students says

“Well, he didn’t know what he was talking about.” (banter)

“Well, he was a full bottle.”

“Well, he sure knew what he was talking about.”

21.a. It is the first day of school holidays. Luke has been up since the crack of dawn and has already been out skateboarding. His mother is in the kitchen making breakfast when he arrives home again. He is singing loudly as he comes in the door. Luke’s mother says

“Dear me, who dragged you out of your sick bed?” (banter)

“Dear me, you’re full of beans”

“Dear me, you sure sound fit and healthy.”

21.b. Emma is not feeling very well. She came home from school early and spent the afternoon resting in bed. When dinner is ready she comes downstairs to eat with the family. But all through dinner she sneezes and coughs and coughs. Her father is concerned and says

“Dear me, you sure sound fit and healthy.” (banter)

“Dear me, you have a frog in your throat.”

“Dear me, who dragged you out of your sick bed?”

22.a. Janet has talked her husband Bill into coming to the Parents’ and Citizens’ meeting at their children’s school. Bill hates these meetings. He gets bored because he is so tired in the evenings and he finds it hard to follow the discussions. When they arrive at the school, Bill says

“Bet this will a fascinating meeting.” (sarcasm)

“This is not my cup of tea.”

“Bet this will be a boring meeting.”

22.b. The new owner of a company calls a staff meeting to tell his workers about the big changes he is planning. The workers are anxious to find out how their jobs will be affected. Before the meeting, Greg and Frank are anxiously waiting outside the staffroom. Frank sees the new owner coming down the corridor and says

“Bet this will be a boring meeting.” (banter)

“Here’s the new broom.”

“Bet this will be a fascinating meeting.”

23.a. Wendy is complaining to her friend Jane about her ex-boyfriend. When Wendy’s ex-boyfriend broke up with her, he told Wendy that she was no fun any more and that he had found somebody much better looking. Jane says

“So, you think a lot of him then.” (sarcasm)

“He’s a snake.”

“So, you don’t think much of him then.”

23.b. Rick is reading a newspaper article about a young mountain climber who has just reached the top of Mount Everest. Rick is telling Ted how much he admires this young climber. The climber has faced many dangers and survived a near fatal fall. Ted says to Rick

“So, you don’t think much of him then.” (banter)

“He has a lion’s heart.”

“So, you think a lot of him then.”

24.a. Jason is in his final year of highschool. He has just done his mid-year exams. Jason brings his report card home to show his father. Jason has failed every subject. Jason’s father is angry because he knows that Jason has not been studying or doing any homework. Jason’s father says

“So, top of the class!” (sarcasm)

“You have half a brain.”

“Well, you’ll just have to do better next time.”

24.b. Karen is very proud of herself. She came top of her class and got 100% on her History exam. When she tells her mother how well she did, her mother says

“Well, you’ll just have to do better next time.” (banter)

“You are a bright spark.”

“So, top of the class!”

25.a. Two women are sitting on a bench in the local park while their children play. They hear a lot of noise and look across to see what’s happening. Their two sons are screaming at each other and rolling around on the grass fighting. One of the women says

“They get on well together.” (sarcasm)

“Look at those fireworks.”

“They don’t like each other much, do they?”

25.b. Fred and Dave are having a drink in a nightclub. They hear laughing and look across to the bar. They see their friend Steve with his arms around a woman they have never seen before. Steve and the woman are talking non-stop and staring lovingly into each others’ eyes. Fred says

“They don’t like each other much, do they?” (banter)

“Looks like a fire starting over there.”

“They get on well together.”

26.a. Brian and his younger brother Peter are at a party. Brian is supposed to be looking after Peter. He is getting a little worried. Peter has been drinking a lot. He is a little wobbly on his feet and trips over a chair. Brian picks him up off the floor and says

“I can tell you’re having a dreadful time.” (sarcasm)

“I’ll give you some stick when we get home.”

“I can tell you’re really enjoying yourself.”

26.b. Tom and his son David are driving in the country. Unfortunately their car breaks down miles from anywhere. They have to walk back along the highway to find a garage. After hours of walking, David starts to complain about how tired and thirsty he is. Tom says

“I can tell you’re really enjoying yourself.” (banter)

“Come on, you’re a soldier.”

“I can tell you’re having a dreadful time.”

27.a. Fred is telling Tim how fed up he is with his job. Fred thinks that the work he does is boring and dumb and he doesn’t like any of his co-workers. Fred asked his boss if he could move to another section but his boss said no! Fred complains a lot to Tim. Tim listens to all of Fred’s complaining and says

“I can see you just love your job.” (sarcasm)

“Your job is a jail.”

“So, I guess you’re planning to resign.”

27.b. Paul has just started his first job after finishing a law degree. Peter is working as a law clerk in a famous law firm. He is talking to his father after his first week of work. Paul tells his father how exciting the work is and how he plans to become a partner in the firm one day. Peter’s father says

“So, I guess you’re planning to resign.” (banter)

“There’s always room at the top.”

“I can see you just love your job.”

28.a. Jill has a new boyfriend. She is looking forward to telling Ruth all about him. But when she sees Ruth, Ruth starts to complain about everything. Ruth complains about the weather, about having a cold and then about sore feet. Poor Jill finally interrupts and says

“Being with you is a laugh a minute.” (sarcasm)

“You’re a wet blanket.”

“You’d spoil anyone’s day.”

28.b. Cheryl has had a lousy day at work. Her boyfriend Dave decides to cheer her up. He takes her roller-skating and makes her laugh at his silly tricks. Then he takes her to her favourite restaurant. All night he keeps Cheryl amused with funny stories. At the end of the night, Cheryl gives him a kiss and says

“You’d spoil anyone’s day.” (banter)

“You’re a live wire.”

“Being with you is a laugh a minute.”

29.a. Barry is a computer programmer. He is very frustrated because the program he is trying to write will not run properly. Barry’s boss has been keeping an eye on Barry’s progress. He can see that Barry has run out of ideas and comes across to see if he can help. Barry says to his boss

“Well, this looks like a simple problem.” (banter)

“Well, I’ve hit a wall?”

“Well, this is quite a challenge.”

29.b. Ken is a very experienced motor mechanic. When he comes home from work, his son gives him a toy truck to fix. All that has to be done is tighten a loose screw. Ken takes the truck from his son. He smiles at his wife who has been watching and says

“Well, this is quite a challenge.” (banter)

“Well, this is a piece of cake.”

“Well, this looks like a simple problem.”

30.a. Harry is having a great time at a party and so he decides to entertain everyone with a song. He jumps up on a table so that everyone can see him, puts a lampshade on his head and then sings at the top of his voice. When he finishes the song, Sharon comes up to him and says

“Have you always been this quiet?” (sarcasm)

“Your head is made of wood.”

“Have you always been the life of a party?”

30.b. Mark is hosting a party at his place. He wants all the guests to have a good time. But it doesn’t look like Greg is enjoying himself or trying to have much fun. Greg has been sitting in a corner by himself all evening. He has not said a word to anyone else at the party. Mark goes over to Greg and says

“Have you always been the life of a party?” (sarcasm)

“No one’s going to eat you.”

“Have you always been this quiet?”

31.a. A group of scouts are climbing a steep hill. About halfway up the hill, the scout leaders stop to check on the progress of the other scouts. They see that a new scout is not keeping up with the others. He is falling far behind and climbing very slowly. One of the leaders says

“He’s sure to beat us to the top at this rate.” (sarcasm)

“He’s got lead feet.”

“Do you think he’ll ever reach the top at the rate he’s going?”

31.b. Keith is an experienced rock-climber. Today he is climbing with Tom and Peter. Tom and Peter have only just started rock-climbing. They are going very slowly. Keith is much faster. Tom looks up to see that Keith is about 20 metres ahead of them. Tom says to Peter

“Do you think he’ll ever reach the top at the rate he’s going?” (banter)

“He has wings on his heels.”

“He’s sure to beat us to the top at this rate.”

32.a. Joe and Paul are having a party at their flat tonight. So much has to be done - the flat has to be cleaned, friends need to be invited, and someone has to buy the food and drinks. After discussing what needs to be done, Joe just goes off to the movies. Paul is left to do all the work alone. When Joe comes home again, Paul says

“You were such a great help.” (sarcasm)

“Well, I was left with the baby.”

“You’re not much of a helper, are you?”

32.b. A group of scouts have been camping but now it’s time to pack up and go home. All the scouts but Will rush off to have their last swim. Will stays behind to help the scout leader. Will takes down the tents, packs the equipment and tidies up the grounds. The scout leader is

impressed and says

“You’re not much of a helper, are you?” (banter)

“Thanks for lending a hand.”

“You were such a great help.”

33.a. Jim and Bill have gone to watch their favourite band play. Unfortunately they weren’t able to get in. The tickets were all sold out. However, they might still be able to see something through a window. Jim climbs up onto Bill’s shoulders to try to reach the window. But Jim is huge. Poor Bill nearly collapses under Jim’s weight. He says

“What a light-weight!” (sarcasm)

“You’re a lump of lead.”

“What a heavy-weight!”

33.b. A father is playing with his little one year-old daughter. She is very tiny for her age. To make her laugh, he lifts her high up over his head and twirls her around. He laughs and says

“What a heavy-weight!” (banter)

“You’re a feather.”

“What a light-weight!”

34.a. Kate and Betty see a gang of men standing on the other side of the road. A man and woman walk by and the woman accidentally brushes against one of the gang members. He gets angry and swears at her and pushes her over. The man who is with her gets scared and runs away. Kate says

“Now there’s someone you’d want on your side in a fight.” (sarcasm)

“Look at the jellyfish.”

“What do you think of that weakling?”

34.b. Graham and Peter are watching the weight-lifting competition at the Olympics. The Russian contestant has just walked onto the stage. He is enormous with huge bulging muscles. Graham says

“What do you think of that weakling?” (banter)

“Look at the ox.”

“Now there’s someone you’d want on your side in a fight.”

35.a. Len has invited his girlfriend Dianne over for a meal. When Dianne arrives she is disgusted by the state of the flat. Len hasn’t vacuumed. There are no curtains on the windows. Len has magazines and clothes all over the floor. The kitchen sink is full of dirty dishes. Dianne says

“You keep such a tidy place.” (sarcasm)

“This is a pig-sty.”

“What a hovel.”

35.b. Jane has invited her friend Gail to stay with her in her new house. Gail is looking forward to seeing Jane and the new house that Jane has told her so much about. Jane spends the week sewing new curtains and cleaning. When Gail arrives, she looks around the sparkling clean house and says

“What a hovel.” (banter)

“This is a picture.”

“You keep such a tidy place.”

36.a. Brett is planning his holiday to Queensland. He is comparing how much it would cost

to travel by plane or by train. His friend, Harry, sees all the travel brochures and asks Brett "How will you travel?" Brett answers

"Well, I'm still planning to walk." (banter)

"Well, I'm in two minds."

"Well, I'm thinking of going by plane or train."

36.b. Gary and Jim go to the same school. Each morning, Gary walks around to Jim's place and they go to school together. Today Gary is running late. When Gary finally does arrive at Jim's place, he says "How will we get to school? We're running late." Jim says

"Well, I'm thinking of going by plane or train." (banter)

"My, you've been dragging the chain."

"Well, I'm still planning to walk."

37.a. Dianne and Jane have met for lunch. Dianne is in a talkative mood and gossips for over an hour. Jane doesn't get a chance to say anything. Jane is getting very cross. She has some important news to tell Dianne but Dianne just keeps talking and talking. Finally, Jane interrupts Dianne and says

"Well, you don't have much to say." (sarcasm)

"My, you're such a babbling brook."

"Well, you really like to gossip."

37.b. A new salesman has joined the firm where Julie works. He's young and good-looking. Julie wants to know more about him. He's a friend of the firm's secretary, Anne. Julie makes Anne a coffee and tries to get some information out of her. Anne can tell what Julie's up to and avoids all of Julie's questions. Julie sighs and says

"Well, you really like to gossip." (banter)

"Well, your tongue doesn't wag."

"Well, you don't have much to say."

38.a. Frank has invited his boss home for dinner. During dinner, Lynn notices that Frank agrees with everything that his boss says. Frank also laughs loudly at every joke that his boss makes. Lynn does not like the way that Frank is behaving. When Frank's boss leaves, she says

"Well, you didn't care what he thought of you." (sarcasm)

"Well, you were walking on eggshells around him."

"Well, you were trying to create a good impression."

38.b. Jane has invited her boyfriend, Brad, home for dinner. Jane really likes Brad. She hopes that Brad will get on with her family. Unfortunately Jane's father is not in a good mood. During dinner, Jane's father ignores Brad and then leaves the table without saying a word to Brad. When Brad leaves, Jane says to her father

"Well, you were trying to create a good impression." (sarcasm)

"Well, you didn't roll out the red carpet."

"Well, you didn't care what he thought of you."

39.a. Jim and Bill are traffic policemen. They have been invited to a Boy's Highschool to talk about road safety. Jim is trying to convince the boys that speeding is dangerous. Unfortunately, the boys are being rude. They talk amongst themselves and ignore what Jim has to say. After the talk, Bill says to Jim

"They were hanging on every word." (sarcasm)

"You were feeding hay to a dead horse."

"Bet they found that boring."

39.b. Two teachers are taking their Grade 1 classes on an excursion to the museum. A guide is showing the children the dinosaur exhibition. All the children are fascinated. They listen carefully as the guide tells stories about what it was like when dinosaurs roamed the earth. After the talk, one of the teachers says

“Bet they found that boring.” (banter)

“They were sponges.”

“They were hanging on every word.”

40.a. Kate, Jane and Anne are at the movies. Two rows in front of them, Kate spots her ex-boyfriend with another woman. Kate is still very angry with her ex-boyfriend because he had been cheating on her with other women. All through the movie Kate glares at the back of her boyfriend’s head. Jane says to Anne

“She obviously thinks the world of him.” (sarcasm)

“Her eyes are daggers.”

“It’s obvious that she hates him.”

40.b. Three friends are watching a football game. Peter and Steve are there because they like football. Their other friend, Cheryl, is there to watch her boyfriend play. Cheryl isn’t really following the game. All Cheryl wants to do is watch everything that her boyfriend does. Peter says to Steve

“It’s obvious that she hates him.” (banter)

“Her eyes are glued on him.”

“She obviously thinks the world of him.”

41.a. An accountant has just prepared a report on the future of the company. The company has many debts and may go bankrupt. The accountant gives his report to his boss. After reading the report, the boss says

“Well, our future does looks rosy.” (sarcasm)

“It looks like black clouds ahead.”

“My, what a gloomy forecast.”

41.b. Jack owns a business and is planning to start exporting goods overseas. He has invested a lot of money advertising in Asia. Jack rings his head salesman in Asia. His head salesman tells Jack that their company has already won five big contracts and it looks like the business will have a big future in exporting. Jack says

“My, what a gloomy forecast.” (banter)

“So it’s plain sailing ahead.”

“Well, our future does looks rosy.”

42.a. A teacher leaves his classroom to answer a phone call. While he is away his students decide to have some fun. The principal hears loud laughing and shouting and walks towards the classroom to see what’s wrong. One of the students sees the principal coming and says

“Just the person we needed to see.” (sarcasm)

“Here comes a cold wind.”

“He’s the last person we wanted to see.”

42.b. Paul and Ken are at a party. It’s a very boring party. There are no interesting people. Paul sees their friend Bill arrive. Paul and Ken weren’t expecting Bill but they’re very glad to see him arrive. The party should pick up now. Bill is great fun to have around. Paul says

“He’s the last person we wanted to see.” (banter)

“Here comes a breath of fresh air.”

“Just the person we needed to see.”

43.a. Paul’s parents have planned a big surprise for his 21st. They’ve bought him a new car. Paul’s brother, Joe, knows all about the surprise. Joe has promised not to say anything, but two days before the birthday, Joe gives in and shows Paul a brochure about the new car. Paul’s mother says to Paul’s father

“He sure knows how to keep a secret.” (sarcasm)

“He let the cat out of the bag.”

“He doesn’t know how to keep a secret, does he?”

43.b. Two reporters are investigating a World War II soldier who they suspect killed one of his own men. Frank is the only person alive who knows what really happened and he has not spoken about it for 50 years. The reporters interview Frank but Frank refuses to say anything about the incident. One reporter says to the other

“He doesn’t know how to keep a secret, does he?” (banter)

“He’s been keeping a lid on it for years.”

“He sure knows how to keep a secret.”

44.a. Jason is telling Ken about his plans for the future. Jason has decided to quit his job and move to another state. Jason plans to invest his life savings in a new business. Ken is worried that Jason is being too hasty and says

“You’re really playing it safe.” (sarcasm)

“You’re heading into a minefield.”

“You’re a great risk-taker.”

44.b. Tom is setting up a new real estate business. He is trying to talk his friend Keith into investing money in his business. Keith says no! He doesn’t think Tom has enough business experience. Tom thinks Keith is being too cautious and so he says

“You’re a great risk-taker.” (sarcasm)

“Do you always wear braces as well as a belt?”

“You’re really playing it safe.”

45.a. Bill and his older brother Luke are discussing politics. They have very different views and they disagree strongly. Bill is annoyed because Luke keeps butting in and speaking over the top of him. Luke has gotten louder and louder until he is shouting. Bill interrupts and says

“You can stop whispering any time now.” (sarcasm)

“You’re a foghorn”

“You can stop shouting any time now.”

45.b. Angela needs to ask her university lecturer some questions. She is nervous about speaking to him. He has a bad reputation for being rude to students. When Angela does go to see him, she is very timid and speaks so quietly that the lecturer can hardly hear her. He gets irritated and says

“You can stop shouting any time now.” (sarcasm)

“You’re a mouse.”

“You can stop whispering now.”

46.a. Jill and her friend Gail are listening to music in Jill’s bedroom. The music is quite loud and Jill’s brother is trying to study. Jill’s brother knocks on Jill’s bedroom door and asks her politely to turn the music down. Jill screams at him to go away and throws a pillow at him. Gail is shocked by Jill’s behaviour and says

“My, it takes a lot to upset you.” (sarcasm)

“My, your blood is quick to boil.”
“My, what a quick temper you have.”

46.b. Barbara works in the complaints section of a department store. She has learned how to handle difficult customers without getting angry. Today an unhappy customer is being very rude and shouts insults at Barbara. Barbara stays calm and treats the customer very politely.

After the customer leaves, Barbara’s friend says

“My, what a quick temper you have.” (banter)
“My, you have the skin of a rhinoceros.”
“My, it takes a lot to upset you.”

47.a. While Will and Greg are walking home, they see a woman standing beside her car. The car has a flat tyre. Will offers to help change the tyre. The woman is very rude and tells Will to leave her alone. Poor Will walks back to Greg. Greg says

“She took a real liking to you.” (banter)
“You got your wrist slapped.”
“She didn’t take to you much.”

47.b. This is Brad’s first day working at a new firm. He meets his boss Jane. Jane spends the morning showing Brad around the office and introducing him to everyone. Then she takes him to lunch as a welcoming gesture. After they return from lunch, one of the other workers says to Brad

“She didn’t take to you much.” (banter)
“She’s taken you under her wing.”
“She took a real liking to you.”

48.a. Frank is over at Jim’s place. He is trying to assemble new speakers for Jim’s stereo. Frank cannot follow the instructions. He has pieces of equipment all over the floor. Jim looks at the mess and says to Frank

“You’ve got this well under control.” (sarcasm)
“You can’t see daylight, can you?”
“You’re obviously a complete amateur at this.”

48.b. John is filling in his tax-return form. Unfortunately John is not very good at figures. He is confused and he’s making lots of mistakes. Luckily his friend Bill arrives. Bill is an experienced accountant. Bill grabs a pen and starts filling in the form for John. With Bill’s help, they’ve nearly finished. John says

“You’re obviously a complete amateur at this.” (banter)
“You’re head’s screwed on.”
“You’ve got this well under control.”

The 96 stories were allocated to different conditions to create six versions of the task. Note in the following summary, ‘a’ indicates the sarcastic item in a pair and ‘b’ indicates the ironic (playful banter) item in a pair. The items requiring a ‘NO’ response were created by mismatching the stories and correct responses in each allocated set.

VERSION 1

SARC/IRONY

Correct answer ‘YES’

SET 1.1

1a
2a
3a
4a
5a
6a
7a
8a
9b
10b
11b
12b
13b
14b
15b
16b

Correct answer ‘NO’ (stories & correct responses were mismatched)

SET 1.2

9a
10a
11a
12a
13a
14a
15a
16a
1b
2b
3b
4b
5b
6b
7b
8b

METAPHOR

Correct answer ‘YES’

SET 2.1

17a
18a
19a
20a
21a
22a
23a
24a
25b
26b
27b
28b
29b
30b
31b
32b

Correct answer ‘NO’ (stories & correct responses were mismatched)

SET 2.2

25a
26a
27a
28a
29a
30a
31a
32a
17b
18b
19b
20b
21b
22b
23b
24b

LITERAL

Correct answer ‘YES’

SET 3.1

33a
34a
35a
36a
37a
38a
39a
40a
41b
42b
43b
44b
45b
46b
47b
48b

Correct answer ‘NO’ (stories & correct responses were mismatched)

SET 3.2

41a
42a
43a
44a
45a
46a
47a
48a
33b
34b
35b
36b
37b
38b
39b
40b

VERSION 2

‘YES’ SARC/IRONY

SET 2.1

17a
18a
19a
20a
21a
22a
23a
24a
25b
26b
27b
28b
29b
30b
31b
32b

‘YES’ METAPHOR

SET 3.1

33a
34a
35a
36a
37a
38a
39a
40a
41b
42b
43b
44b
45b
46b
47b
48b

‘YES’ LITERAL

SET 1.1

1a
2a
3a
4a
5a
6a
7a
8a
9b
10b
11b
12b
13b
14b
15b
16b

‘NO’ SARC/IRONY

SET 2.2

25a
26a
27a
28a
29a
30a
31a
32a
17b
18b
19b
20b
21b
22b
23b
24b

‘NO’ METAPHOR

SET 3.2

41a
42a
43a
44a
45a
46a
47a
48a
33b
34b
35b
36b
37b
38b
39b
40b

‘NO’ LITERAL

SET 1.2

9a
10a
11a
12a
13a
14a
15a
16a
1b
2b
3b
4b
5b
6b
7b
8b

VERSION 3

‘YES’ SARC/IRONY

SET 3.1

33a
34a
35a
36a
37a
38a
39a
40a
41b
42b
43b
44b
45b
46b
47b
48b

‘NO’ SARC/IRONY

SET 3.2

41a
42a
43a
44a
45a
46a
47a
48a
33b
34b
35b
36b
37b
38b
39b
40b

‘YES’ METAPHOR

SET 1.1

1a
2a
3a
4a
5a
6a
7a
8a
9b
10b
11b
12b
13b
14b
15b
16b

‘NO’ METAPHOR

SET 1.2

9a
10a
11a
12a
13a
14a
15a
16a
1b
2b
3b
4b
5b
6b
7b
8b

‘YES’ LITERAL

SET 2.1

17a
18a
19a
20a
21a
22a
23a
24a
25b
26b
27b
28b
29b
30b
31b
32b

‘NO’ LITERAL

SET 2.2

25a
26a
27a
28a
29a
30a
31a
32a
17b
18b
19b
20b
21b
22b
23b
24b

Versions 4, 5 & 6 were created by swapping the YES & NO allocations

VERSION 4

'YES' SARC/IRONY
SET 1.2

'NO' SARC/IRONY
SET 1.1

'YES' METAPHOR
SET 2.2

'NO' METAPHOR
SET 2.1

'YES' LITERAL
SET 3.2

'NO' LITERAL
SET 3.1

VERSION 5

'YES' SARC/IRONY
SET 2.2

'NO' SARC/IRONY
SET 2.1

'YES' METAPHOR
SET 3.2

'NO' METAPHOR
SET 3.1

'YES' LITERAL
SET 1.2

'NO' LITERAL
SET 1.1

VERSION 6

'YES' SARC/IRONY
SET 3.2

'NO' SARC/IRONY
SET 3.1

'YES' METAPHOR
SET 1.2

'NO' METAPHOR
SET 1.1

'YES' LITERAL
SET 2.2

'NO' LITERAL
SET 2.1

SHORTER VERSION USED FOR CLINICAL STUDY (reported in Langdon et al., 2002)

Based on the error rates for Uni. students, the original 48 pairs of scenarios were culled to 36 pairs. Each participant saw 72 stories with 36 stories requiring a 'yes' response (12 irony, 12 metaphor and 12 literal) and 36 requiring a 'no' response. 6 different versions of this task were used, and the items included in each version are outlined below. These were further culled to 60 stories for the 2002 clinical study reported in *Psychological Medicine*. The 72 story version is provided below. The final 60 stories are not included as this information is not readily accessible. If you use this task in your research, we ask that you reference the task appropriately in any publications.

Reference:

Langdon, R., Coltheart, M., Ward, P., & Catts, S. (2002). Disturbed communication in schizophrenia: The role of poor pragmatics and poor theory-of-mind. *Psychological Medicine*, 32, 1273-1284.

The original version of this task was computerised to record reaction times, although hit rates proved to be more important than RTs. If you are not interested in recording RTs for individual trials you could put together balanced subsets of stories into different booklets (for each version) which participants would work through at their own pace. As well as the participant's responses, you could then also record the total time taken for a participant to complete the task.

Practice Trials

Participants practiced with the stories listed below and were provided with feedback after each incorrect response. Participants were explicitly told about the inclusion of indirect speech.

Instructions:

In this section you will be reading short stories and deciding whether what a story character says is something that a person might say in that situation. Here are some examples of the sorts of stories that you will see. Read each story at your own pace and then press NEXT when ready to read what the story character said.

Press NEXT when ready to begin.

First story: Michael is very disappointed. His girlfriend has just broken off their engagement. He tells his friend Jim what has happened. Jim sympathizes with poor Michael and says: (Participants press NEXT and then the following statement appears under the story)
"I'm sorry to hear that."

(Participants then use the keypad to indicate whether the statement was appropriate or inappropriate. All participants respond appropriately and I simply check that participants generally understand how the task will run. They then press NEXT to move on and see the following text.)

Sometimes the correct answer is YES because the story character is using a figure of speech. Press NEXT for an example of this sort of story:

Second story: Angela needs to ask her University lecturer some questions. She is nervous because he has a bad reputation for being rude. When she finally gets up the courage to speak to him, she speaks so quietly that he can hardly hear her. The lecturer gets irritated with her and says:

"Stop being a mouse."

(Participants again use the keypad to indicate whether the statement was appropriate or inappropriate. If a participant's response is incorrect, I explicitly explain why this is an appropriate thing for someone to say if interpreted as a figure of speech. They then move on to the next screen.)

Sometimes the correct answer is YES because the story character doesn't really mean what is said. Press NEXT for an example of this sort of story.:";

Third story: Helen has gone to watch a football game with her boyfriend Jim. Helen does not like football very much. The crowd behind them are noisy and someone spills a drink all over Helen. Jim has not seen what has happened. He asks Helen if she is having a good time.

Helen replies:

"Can't you see I'm having a great time."

(Participants then use the keypad to indicate whether the statement was appropriate or inappropriate. If a participant's response was correct I then ask why they answered in the way that they did to check that they understood the irony. If the answer was incorrect I explain that this statement was appropriate if one interpreted the speaker as being ironical. Then we move on.)

Sometimes the correct answer is NO because no one would say what the story character says. Press NEXT for an example of this sort of story:

Fourth story: During a fierce army battle, a group of soldiers have become trapped. Luckily, their sergeant has thought of a plan of escape. After explaining his plan to his men, one of the soldiers replies:

"What bad manners!"

(Participants typically answer correctly. I then check whether they have any questions before they move on to practice with 8 stories where correct/incorrect feedback is given after each response. Then they are presented with the 60 experimental stories with no feedback.)

For the 72 story version, the allocation of sets to conditions was as follows:-

VERSION 1

'YES' SARC/IRONY

SET 1.1

1a
2a
5a
12a
25a
30a
8b
3b
10b
18b
29b
39b

'NO' SARC/IRONY

SET 1.2

8a
3a
10a
18a
29a
39a
1b
2b
5b
12b
25b
30b

'YES' METAPHOR

SET 2.1

19a
16a
13a
33a
34a
40a
20b
46b
22b
17b
37b
42b

'NO' METAPHOR

SET 2.2

20a
46a
22a
17a
37a
42a
19b
16b
13b
33b
34b
40b

'YES' LITERAL

SET 3.1

6a
45a
26a
14a
48a
43a
7b
21b
27b
38b
35b
44b

'NO' LITERAL

SET 3.2

7a
21a
27a
38a
35a
44a
6b
45b
26b
14b
48b
43b

VERSION 2

‘YES’ SARC/IRONY

SET 2.1

19a

16a

13a

33a

34a

40a

20b

46b

22b

17b

37b

42b

‘NO’ SACR/IRONY

SET 2.2

20a

46a

22a

17a

37a

42a

19b

16b

13b

33b

34b

40b

‘YES’ METAPHOR

SET 3.1

6a

45a

26a

14a

48a

43a

7b

21b

27b

38b

35b

44b

‘NO’ METAPHOR

SET 3.2

7a

21a

27a

38a

35a

44a

6b

45b

26b

14b

48b

43b

‘YES’ LITERAL

SET 1.1

1a

2a

5a

12a

25a

30a

8b

3b

10b

18b

29b

39b

‘NO’ LITERAL

SET 1.2

8a

3a

10a

18a

29a

39a

1b

2b

5b

12b

25b

30b

VERSION 3

'YES' SARC/IRONY

SET 3.1

6a
45a
26a
14a
48a
43a
7b
21b
27b
38b
35b
44b

'YES' METAPHOR

SET 1.1

1a
2a
5a
12a
25a
30a
8b
3b
10b
18b
29b
39b

'YES' LITERAL

SET 2.1

19a
16a
13a
33a
34a
40a
20b
46b
22b
17b
37b
42b

'NO' SARC/IRONY

SET 3.2

7a
21a
27a
38a
35a
44a
6b
45b
26b
14b
48b
43b

'NO' METAPHOR

SET 1.2

8a
3a
10a
18a
29a
39a
1b
2b
5b
12b
25b
30b

'NO' LITERAL

SET 2.2

20a
46a
22a
17a
37a
42a
19b
16b
13b
33b
34b
40b

Versions 4, 5 & 6 swapped the 'YES' & 'NO' allocations

VERSION 4

YES SARC/IRONY
SET 1.2

NO SARC/IRONY
SET 1.1

YES METAPHOR
SET 2.2

NO METAPHOR
SET 2.1

YES LITERAL
SET 3.2

NO LITERAL
SET 3.1

VERSION 5

YES SARC/IRONY
SET 2.2

NO SARC/IRONY
SET 2.1

YES METAPHOR
SET 3.2

NO METAPHOR
SET 3.1

YES LITERAL
SET 1.2

NO LITERAL
SET 1.1

VERSION 6

YES SARC/IRONY
SET 3.2

NO SARC/IRONY
SET 3.1

YES METAPHOR
SET 1.2

NO METAPHOR
SET 1.1

YES LITERAL
SET 2.2

NO LITERAL
SET 2.1