Flouting Grice’s Maxims

Here are a couple of examples (from lecture) of implicatures that arise through a speaker’s deliberate and obvious violation of some conversational maxim. (In Grice’s terms, the speaker has “flouted” the maxim.) You may like to refer to these examples when formulating your responses in Assignment 3, Part I.

(1) (Spoken while Nicholas and Anna’s dog is standing nearby)
Nicholas: What are your plans for this afternoon?
Anna: I was going to take the D-O-G for a W-A-L-K.

Implicature of Anna’s response: Don’t utter the words *dog* and *walk* around the dog, because the dog will get too excited if it hears them.

Deriving the implicature in (1):

(i) Despite appearances, Nicholas still believes that Anna is obeying the Cooperative Principle.
(ii) For (i) to be so, there must be some reason why Anna has violated the maxim of Manner by choosing to spell the words *dog* and *walk*, instead of simply uttering these words. (The latter option is less obscure and also more brief.) Presumably, Anna knows that the dog can’t spell, and so will not recognize the spellings of the words *dog* and *walk*. So Anna must not want the dog to hear actual utterances of the word *dog* and *walk*. Most likely, the dog would recognize these words if they were actually uttered, and would then get too excited.
(iii) Anna knows that Nicholas will assume her cooperation, and that Nicholas is competent enough to engage in the reasoning in (ii).
(iv) Anna has done nothing to prevent Nicholas from arriving at the conclusion in (ii).
(v) Therefore, Anna has implicated that she doesn’t want the dog to hear the words *dog* and *walk*, presumably because they will excite him.
(2) Joan: I’ve been dating this new guy for a while now, but I think I need to break up with him. He’s always late, he never has any money, and I think he was hitting on my roommate last night.

Ivan: (Uttered in a sarcastic tone) He’s a real keeper.

Implicature of Ivan’s response: He’s not a real keeper.
(i.e., You should get rid of him.)

Deriving the implicature in (2):

(i) Despite appearances, Joan still believes that Ivan is obeying the Cooperative Principle.

(ii) For (i) to be so, there must be some reason why Ivan has violated the maxim of Quality by saying something that he clearly believes to be false (as indicated by his tone of voice). So he must be trying to convey some other claim, one which he does believe to be true. This other claim must also be obviously related to the claim that he did in fact make—otherwise, how could Joan ever figure out what Ivan intended to convey? The most obvious related, true claim is in fact the opposite one, namely, that Joan’s new boyfriend is not a real keeper.

(iii) Ivan knows that Joan will assume his cooperation, and that Joan is competent enough to engage in the reasoning in (ii).

(iv) Ivan has done nothing to prevent Joan from arriving at the conclusion in (ii). (For instance, he could have made his utterance in a perfectly sincere tone of voice.)

(v) Therefore, Ivan has implicated that Joan’s new boyfriend is not a real keeper.