

## NOTES ON

# HEARER PRESUPPOSITIONS AND THE ART OF LANGUAGE BASED PROFILING

## Section 11

### Reasoning UFs in Brokaw Anthrax Letter And Their Associated Hearer Presuppositions And Implications

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

**1.1. In this Section, we illustrate the proposed approach as it relates to *Reasoning UFs*, noting HPs associated with selected Reasoning UFs in the Brokaw Anthrax letter. In the following Section 12, we describe this writer's profile.**

**1.2. We repeat: HPs are associated with selected Reasoning UFs of the utterance U (the Brokaw Anthrax letter) relative to the hearer's understanding  $U^*$  of U and understanding  $C^*$  of the context C in which U occurs which includes the understanding of C as a letter.**

**1.3. Recall (from Section 2) that Reasoning UFs concern the structure of the writer's reasoning as it is reflected in implied and explicit arguments expressed in an utterance, where an argument is a relationship between parts of an utterance which the writer appears to intend to be accepted by the hearer (referred to here as the writer's intended "conclusions") and**

other parts of the utterance apparently forwarded as justifications (referred to here as the writer's intended "premises") for them. These appraisals, as others made in this paper, are relative to the hearer's understanding of the utterance in question and his understanding of the context in which that utterance occurs, and includes considerations pertaining to the connections holding among expressions occurring in them as premises and conclusions, the degree to which they are explicit or implied, plausible, relevant, or ambiguous, etc. Examples of Reasoning UFs are given in Appendix A, where they are listed as R1 through R 20.

## **2. HPS ASSOCIATED WITH REASONING UFS IN THE BROKAW ANTHRAX LETTER AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS (IMPS)**

**(The designations of the various UFs referenced below, while familiar to most readers, are indicated parenthetically.)**

**(a) UF: "Appeal to Force." (A Coercive UF which has the general purpose of intimidating the hearer to accept the conclusions of arguments by threatening the application of some sort of "force".)**

*Level 1HP: S intends to induce concern in the hearer that he (the hearer) will be subjected to a force related to and comparable with that which destroyed the WTC on 9-11-01, which might well result in the death of the hearer.*

*IMP: S believes that without the reference to the WTC incident, the wider implications of his threat - namely, that there is an ongoing and continuing attack on American institutions - will not be believed.*

*IMP: S expects that his reference to the WTC incident would be more likely to intimidate the hearer than to induce the hearer actually believe that there is some sort of connection between S and the perpetrators of the WTC incident.*

*Level 1 HP: S intends that the hearer, upon opening the envelope, should take penicillin for protection.*

*IMP: S intends that the hearer believe himself to be personally under great jeopardy and that he has been placed in such a position by the same interests and for the same purposes as those which motivated the destruction of the WTC towers.*

*IMP: S intends also to indicate to the hearer that S does not intend the hearer to become his "next" victim, and that he (S) has an agenda that goes beyond the (temporary) risk to which he subjects the hearer, but which he does not intend to specify at this time.*

*Level 2 HP: S intends to convey that he could have chosen to do otherwise, that is, to have allowed the hearer to die by being contaminated with Anthrax, had he so chosen.*

*Level 3 HP: S intends to give the appearance of being able to do much more than he has actually done and so the restraint he has shown thus far cannot be counted on in the future.*

*Level 4 HP: S intends that the letter itself serve as a warning about what S could do if he so chose, not only to this particular recipient victim, but to any individual or assemblage of persons that he chose to put at risk. (Indeed, S's use of a less lethal type of Anthrax spore in this letter as compared to the more lethal type of spore used in later letters attests to the restraint apparently exercised here)*

**(b) UF: "Appeal to Popular Beliefs". (A Coercive UF which has the general purpose of appealing to popular beliefs in order to establish the conclusion of an argument which the hearer otherwise unlikely to accept.)**

*Level 1HP: S believes that reference to beliefs which are popular among a certain group of Islamic extremists (e.g., that the greatness of "Allah" mandates "Death to America and Death to Israel.") are sufficient to explain why the WTC was destroyed on 9-11-01 and why "this" has been selected to be "next."*

*IMP: It appears unlikely that S himself holds such beliefs.*

*IMP: It appears more likely that S references such beliefs to make it appear that he himself is an Islamic extremist in order to cause authorities concern about the letter.*

**(c) UF: "Appeal to Authority." (A Coercive UF which ascribes beliefs to such authorities as S believes would reinforce the intended conclusion of an argument, without documenting the relevant qualifications of those authorities.)**

*Level 1HP: S believes that citing "Allah" would reinforce the acceptability of his intended conclusion that "death" will be brought unto America and Israel.*

*IMP: S is more likely to believe that the hearer would not be inclined to accept "Allah" as an authority, so that S must be regarded to be citing "Allah" in this manner for other reasons.*

*IMP: Such other reasons appear here to include the rhetorical value of such a citation; in other words, we can presume that S is interested in referring to "Allah" for purely rhetorical reasons.*

*IMP: It is unlikely that S is actually a follower of Islam but is only dissembling so.*

**(d) UF: "Contestable Suppressed Premise." (An Omission UF) which has the general purpose of implying unstated premises in arguments required to establish their conclusions which the hearer is unlikely to otherwise accept.) First instance of a contestable suppressed premise is: "There is a connection between the hearer's receipt of the letter and the WTC incident," which is not stated, but is implicit<sup>1</sup> in the first and second lines of the letter: "9-11-01" and "This is next."**

*Level 1 HP: S intends that the hearer accept the implied unstated (and potentially contestable) premise that there is a connection between his receipt of the letter and the WTC incident.*

*Level 2 HP: S intends to indicate that he has an agenda that goes beyond both the letter and the WTC incident.*

**(e) UF: “Contestable Suppressed Premise.” Second instance of a contestable suppressed premise is: “The hearer is personally and immediately at risk,” which is not stated but is implicit<sup>1</sup> in the third line of the letter, “Take penacilin now.”**

*Level 1 HP: S intends that the hearer accept the implied unstated (and potentially contestable) premise that the hearer is in some kind of (as yet unknown) jeopardy for which he/she should take penicillin for protection.*

*IMP: S implies that he does not intend to cause injury to the letter recipient.*

*IMP: S implies that he could have chosen to do otherwise, that is, to allow the letter recipient to die, had he so chosen.*

*IMP: S implies that he has an agenda that goes beyond the (temporary) risk to which he subjects the hearer which he does not intend to specify at this time.*

*IMP: S implies that he is capable of doing much more than he has actually done and so the restraint shown here cannot be counted on in the future. (Indeed, S's use of a less lethal type of Anthrax spore in this letter as compared to the more lethal type of spore used in later letters attests to the restraint implied here).*

**(f) UF: “Contestable Suppressed Premise.” Third instance of a contestable suppressed premise is: “It is the ‘greatness’ of Allah that mandates “death” be brought unto America and Israel,” and is not stated but is implicit<sup>1</sup> in the last three lines of the letter, “Death to America,” “Death to Israel,” and “Allah is great.”**

*Level 1 HP: S intends that the hearer believe that S holds radical Islamic beliefs.*

*Level 2 HP: S intends that the hearer believe that the threatened targeting of America and Israel has a base in radical Islamic beliefs.*

*Level 3 HP: S intends that the hearer believe that S is of middle eastern origin and of a group that holds radical Islamic beliefs.*

*IMP: The connection which S attempts to make between himself and Islam is so weakly implied as to suggest that the writer is a home-grown "American dissembling more exotic origins.*

***UF: "Syntactic Ambiguity."*** (An Obscurity UF which uses an expression which purports to have a single meaning in a given context but which can be read in more than one way under an alternative context). Instances of this Obscurity UF are seen in the expressions, "9-11-01," "Allah is great," and "Death to." With respect to the expression, "Death to...", it can have the meaning, "We can or will bring Death to..." But there are other possible meanings which can be assigned to the expression, "Allah is Great," such as affirming S's preference for this particular deity, or it can be an expression uttered in the spirit of a battle cry in the context of a religious war which S is part of. There are also other possible meanings to the date "9-11-01," which can be read as the date on which the letter was written or as a reference to the WTC incident of that date, and so to comprise a substantive line in the letter with a special content and implication of its own.

*Level 1 HP: S intends each of these potentially ambiguous expressions to be accepted as having a clear intended meaning.*

*IMP: S is unaware the syntactic ambiguities (noted above) and employs them habitually.*

*IMP: While S appears intelligent, his professional activities do not require a sophisticated language capability.*

*IMP: If S is professionally situated in a work environment in which he has access to Anthrax spores, we would not expect him to be working at an administrative or managerial level, but more in a "hands-on" capacity.*

***UF: "Semantic Ambiguity."*** (An Obscurity UF in which an expression is used as if its meaning was clear or known when, in fact, it is neither.) Instances of this Obscurity UF are seen in the

*expression, “This is next,” and primarily on the word "This," which can have any of several meanings: one is as a reference to refer to the powdery material in the envelope; another is as a reference to – and a prognostication of - a general assault on more victims; another is in the broad sense of "this kind of thing," that is, as a sample of the general kinds of assaults of which S and those he is associated with are planning.*

*Level 1 HP: The intended meaning (i.e., in this context, the intended reference) of the word "This" is clear.*

*IMP: S sees no difficulty in leaving the referent of the word "This" open to interpretation.*

*Level 2 HP: S intends to induce the hearer to be sufficiently curious about this letter to reach the point of determining that nature of the powdery substance in the envelope, namely that it is Anthrax, hence the intended meaning for “This.”*

*UF: Pragmatic Inconsistency,” an Obscurity UF which is defined in this paper as follows: “S makes an assertion whose meaning is understood by the hearer as incompatible with some aspect of the context in which it is made, in the sense of violating the hearer’s understanding that assertion and of that context. Resolving the incompatibility leads the hearer to "update" his understanding of the assertion and/or of that context so that the apparent "violation" is thereby resolved in terms of some new hypothesis regarding the hearer’s understanding of that assertion or of the context. This new hypothesis is one which renders the hearer’s understanding of the assertion and/or of the context appropriate. An instance of this UF can be seen in S’s apparently egregious misspelling of “penicillin” as “penacilin,” which has the following HPs and IMPs:*

*Level 1 HP: S believes that “penacillin” is the correct spelling of penicillin, which is incompatible with the hearer’s understanding of the context as one within which this writer appeared to be an individual who was intelligent and knowledgeable. This suggests the following implication as an update of that understanding of the context.:*

*IMP: While S had sufficient understanding of Anthrax to be aware of its toxic nature and sufficient understanding of Anthrax to avoid self-contamination in handling it, his professional involvement with Anthrax appears not to be at the level where he would be reading about the use of penicillin in counteracting its toxicity.*

*IMP: S appears to be a lower level worker in a facility where he has access to Anthrax is stored but who does not have knowledge about how to avoid contamination, which is incompatible with our understanding of the context as one within which this writer has sufficient knowledge about Anthrax and penicillin to have avoided self-contamination - at least to the extent of retaining the physical ability to write and mail this letter. This suggests the following implication as an update of that understanding of the context:*

*(Alternative 1) Level 1 HP: S knows the correct spelling of penicillin but had simply made an error in writing it, which is incompatible with our understanding of the context in which it was written as one within which this writer exercised painstaking care in writing the letter. This suggests the following implication as an update of that understanding:*

*(Alternative 2) Level 1 HP: S made no error but had purposely misspelled the word “penicillin” as “penacilin” for some other purpose, such as to mask his identity as a professional Anthrax scientist or lab technician, or to mask his identity as an American scientist.*

*(Alternative 3) HP: S knows the correct spelling of penicillin but has elected to misspell it as “penacilin,” to introduce an element of puzzlement for the hearer, since misspelling this key word would be incompatible with other HPs (above) which suggest that S has taken great care to represent himself as knowledgeable about various claims made in the letter.*

*IMP: S’s own purpose in sending this letter is confused.*

*(Alternative 4) HP: S did not know the correct spelling of “Penicillin” even though he was familiar with its potential use in Anthrax contamination.*

*IMP: S was a foreign national who did not know the English spelling of “penicillin.”*