

NOTES ON

HEARER PRESUPPOSITIONS AND THE ART OF LANGUAGE BASED PROFILING

Section 12

Profile Summary of Writer of the Brokaw Anthrax Letter

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Profiling. In this paper we use the term “profiling” in the sense of “psychological profiling,” by which I mean developing hypotheses regarding a speaker’s beliefs and intentions which may have inclined the speaker to make particular utterances in particular contexts, solely on the basis of examining those utterances and contexts. *The problem to which this paper is addressed is that of structuring the inference from a given utterance made by a speaker in a given context to a hypothesis of the likely beliefs and intentions of the speaker which inclined him to make that utterance in that context.*

2. PROFILE SUMMARY

2.1. Psychological Profile

2.1.1. Passivity. We would presume S to be a passive individual in his professional functioning and in his personal life, and with few friends or other like-minded individuals, suffering from a sense of chronic disempowerment and resentment against established authority. He tends not to commit energy to his enterprises. In particular, he does not appear disposed to do more “acting-out” than to write letters with enclosed Anthrax spores such as this one. S appears to avoid direct confrontation and to be disposed to take great pains to avoid being discovered. He will probably be heard from again, however, but will remain anonymous and take no risks in being apprehended.

2.1.2. Abiding Sense of Impotence. In his sense of personal impotence, he apparently seeks to aggrandize himself by implying a connection with the intentions and motivations of the perpetrators of the very recent WTC attack. However, he provides no comment whatever to support this implication, other than making indirect intimations of connections with Islamic radicals by using hackneyed middle-eastern Islamic rhetoric, apparently hoping to make authorities believe that his Anthrax mailings are the second assault on American interests, among many which he and/or others been planned. By this means S appears to intend to induce the hearer/authorities to believe that S is far more formidable than he in fact is.

2.1.3. A Loner. S appears to be an individual who has drifted into a lab technician's job which puts him in potential contact with sources of Anthrax spores manufactured by other labs. This writer appears to be a "loner," unmarried, and living marginally. He may have resentment against individuals who have become rich and powerful in U.S. financial life and politics, whom he views as being unjustly in a higher and more esteemed position than his own. He probably suffers from a chronic sense of disempowerment, and may be an avid hearer of newspaper accounts of the lives and accomplishments of powerful men. He regards himself as in possession of the power to end their lives and, generally, the power to terrify a nation. He savors being able to inflict fear and harm on anyone he chooses, and to do so with impunity. He thereby achieves the desired result of prevailing mightily over his symbolic enemies. We do not regard this writer to have any interest in the extremist Islamic movement or in its goals. His

choice to "swim in the wake" of the WTC incident and insinuate (as we have pointed out in our analysis) some sort of connection with its perpetrators, appears to have been done for purely pragmatic reasons - i.e., to heighten the likelihood of a strong reaction to his letter.

2.1.4. A Criminal Amateur. S appears to be an amateur in criminal or terrorist activity. Were it not for the Anthrax spores in the letter, authorities would have no interest in the letter, inasmuch as it would be undistinguished from crank letters of this kind. Thus S's credibility hinges solely on the presence of the Anthrax spores. As an isolated bona-fides, it is underutilized: a more sophisticated adversary would have leveraged the presence of the spores to mount a much more serious threat. All indications are that that is all that S has – just the spores – and the only threat he poses is that he would use them again (which he ultimately does). But the threat goes nowhere. Clearly the radical Islamic rhetoric is an unimaginative gesture at a more general threat. Yet that is all that this writer can do. The spores themselves, while deadly and likely to create concern among authorities, are so circumscribed in their impact as to suggest a writer who has only that single string in his fiddle. Moreover, S also appears naïve in communication dynamics, writing, as it were, an unaccustomed threat letter perpetrating a threat with a familiar substance (Anthrax). S thus appears to be an amateur in terrorism, attempting to leverage the notoriety accruing to an Anthrax threat on the basis of an implied and less-than-believable connection with the preceding TWC incident. S appears unaccustomed to making written communications and displays a certain naiveté suggestive of someone who is also an amateur in criminal activities, perhaps working as a lab technician with access to Anthrax.

2.1.5. Motivation. It would appear that S's access to Anthrax spores had emboldened him to send such a letter. We would suppose further that that access was a relatively simple one for him to exploit, rather than requiring a special strategy of some kind to obtaining them. Overall, this suggests S may be working as a lab technician in a facility where Anthrax spores are available. The very recent WTC and Pentagon assaults have given him an opportunity to express some long-standing hostility toward the U.S. government. We would presume that his motivation is not to further the goals of radical Islamic terrorists, but the more limited one of discomfiting and/or discrediting authorities charged with the monitoring of Anthrax related threats he generates. His apparent goal of discomfiting authorities in this regard may be due to possible resentment arising from his perception of having been

underestimated or otherwise mistreated in his professional activities, which probably involve access to Anthrax.

2.2. Professional Profile

2.2.1. Professional Situation. S appears to have technical knowledge relating to the properties and handling of Anthrax spores of the type used in the Brokaw Anthrax Letter. The level at which the letter was written suggests either an individual working as a lower level technician in a facility that handles Anthrax or an individual working at a higher level in such a facility who is dissembling a professional level consistent with that of a lower level or foreign born technician. We would presume that S is a “home grown” American working in a technical capacity in an Anthrax facility dissembling both his technical level and national origin.

2.2.2. Level of Expertise. We do not believe that this writer actually developed the spores he included in the letter but that he had access to them and had sufficient knowledge about them so as not to contaminate himself while preparing the letter. In this regard, S does not appear to have taken adequate precautions to avoid allowing the spores to filter out of the closed envelope and thereby to contaminate other presumably non-targeted individuals.

2.2.3. Technical Competency. On the whole, S appears to be an intelligent individual whose professional activities place him in contact with Anthrax spores of the kind found in this letter but who is otherwise naïve about how to leverage his access to them to cause greater consternation among authorities. We note in this regard that S did not properly secure the envelope containing the letter in such a way that Anthrax spores would not be inadvertently released and contaminate non-targeted individuals. He may have done this for any of several possible reasons: (1) Either S was not aware that spores could be released from the envelope, or else S actually intended the incidental contamination of others beyond the intended target. (2) We are inclined to believe that the first possibility is the more likely, inasmuch as if S wanted to contaminate persons who came into contact with the letter he could have done this more effectively by using envelopes with tiny perforations invisible to the naked eye, and in quantity, so as to significantly broaden the range and number of victims. (3) The fact that S

did not do this suggests that he intended only to contaminate Brokaw Anthrax Letter and/or inner circle Brokaw Anthrax Letter staff (and then "save" them all via his penicillin warning). (4) Thus we regard the first possibility as the more likely, and from this infer further, that S may not have been sufficiently aware of how easily Anthrax spores could be released outside an envelope and, more generally, unaware about how to design a more effective delivery system for this contaminating agent. (5) This may suggest, in turn, that S is not technically astute, at least about the properties of Anthrax when inserted in an envelope. (6) S's misspelling of penicillin as "penacilin" is somewhat an anomaly, inasmuch as, while not an uncommon misspelling of this word, it would seem to imply that S had not seen it in print often enough to remember its correct - and more common - spelling, hence that he may not be very familiar with medical or toxicological literature on penicillin as a treatment for Anthrax exposure. (7) We can infer from this one of two possibilities, both of which appear plausible: one possibility is that S may not have had the expected exposure to the kind of literature that someone knowledgeable about Anthrax beyond a technician's level would have had, and so had misspelled the word out of ignorance; the other possibility is that, since this was the only word that was misspelled in the letter, and since there were a number of other indicators of the writer's focus and control, *it would appear that this single misspelling was purposeful, and done in order to mask his true (and higher) professional level.* In other words, the letter appears sufficiently "quintessentially crude" to suggest that it was contrived precisely to give that appearance.

2.3. Cognitive Profile

2.3.1. Inclination toward Ambiguity. S allows a high level of ambiguity in his letter, centering primarily about the word "this," whose referent is wholly ambiguous as to whether it refers: (a) to the letter itself, (b) to S's disposition to mail such letters, (c) to the Anthrax which the recipient will eventually determine to have contaminated the letter and himself, (d) to general assaults to be made on targeted recipients, (e) or to some combination of these possible referents. S maintains this semantic ambiguity in the word "this" throughout the Brokaw Anthrax Letter, seemingly to reinforce a sense of tension deriving from uncertainty as to just what this sentence means. He uses ambiguity as a way of implying that he and the danger he poses is more than appears to be. In this Brokaw Anthrax Letter, he allows this ambiguity

to remain in force through the six enigmatic lines of the message and to communicate to the hearer that he or she will not know what "this" refers to until such time as the enclosed powder is analyzed, at which time it may be "too late." S thus builds-in a deferred understanding on the part of the hearer and authorities as to what "this" refers to and for a proper evaluation of the potential lethality of the message.

2.3.2. Dissembled Country of Origin. S attempts to obscure his educational and professional level by dissembling a persona of a middle eastern terrorist with limited knowledge of English, who is awkward in writing of a letter such as this, and who appears crude in the manner of an unskilled and unschooled terrorist who has deadly Anthrax spores at his disposal and the inclination to contaminate others.

2.3.3. Dissembled Level of Expertise. We are inclined to believe otherwise, that is, we are inclined to believe that this writer is schooled at a fairly high level and who has employment at an Anthrax facility consistent with his education.

2.4. Motivation and Intention

2.4.1. Motivation. S's motivation appears unclear from the Brokaw Anthrax Letter. It may be that S has had a chronic sense of disempowerment and a feeling that, as someone with technical knowledge regarding Anthrax, that he has the potential to exercise power over potential victims. S's actions in writing and sending the letter to Tom Brokaw Anthrax Letter were probably stimulated by the WTC incident, in the sense that he would not have done it had the WTC incident not occurred as a proper preface for it. The WTC incident and its aftermath in inducing widespread fear and social disruption probably offered an "attractive" opportunity for this disempowered writer to mount an Anthrax threat against an already beleaguered victim population. Everyone was "talking terrorism" and so the time was ripe for this individual to do what he did. This writer probably also had a "hankering" for publicity, albeit anonymous publicity, which could be fairly easily attained in the terrorism-conscious climate following the WTC incident. And he selected a high profile media symbol, Tom Brokaw as his first recipient, to take advantage of it.

2.4.2. Intention. S has probably been familiar with the destructive capacity of Anthrax since well before 9/11/01. The WTC and the Pentagon incidents of 9/11/01 had given him the opportunity to “throw his hat in” during the few days following and to express his long-standing hostility toward financial and governmental authority, symbolized by the WTC and the Pentagon, respectively. S's apparent intention in writing and mailing the Anthrax letter to Tom Brokaw was to use it as a conduit into and through the media to get maximum publicity for his letter.