Lign 169: Assignment One

Distributed: April 16, 2003
Due: April 25, 2003 (in class)

The fragment of text attached to this assignment was excerpted from a dialogue that occurred during an episode of CNN's Crossfire, a political debate show. The episode occurred approximately ten years ago; the topic of the day was whether the U.S. should lift an existing ban on immigrants into the country who carry the AIDS virus. This topic was set up by a short monologue in the beginning of the program. "P" stands for Pat Buchanan, who was a regular host, and "M" is an invited debater (I don't remember who that was).

In this assignment, we'll do an analysis of some of the referring expressions in the passage and the cognitive status of their referents. The paper entitled "Cognitive Status and the Form of Referring Expressions in Discourse" (Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski, 1993) should be consulted for this assignment.

Part 1

Highlight all of the noun phrases (NPs) in the passage that refer to (i) a person or a group of people, or (ii) a disease/virus or group of diseases/viruses. You can ignore references to people with indexicals like *I*, *we*, and *you*, as well as cases in which the *entire NP* is either "people" or "AIDS". (Include NPs like "six people" or "the AIDS virus", however.) If a complex NP that falls into category (i) or (ii) includes a smaller NP so categorized, list both (i.e., "a person with the AIDS virus" yields two NPs: "a person with the AIDS virus" and "the AIDS virus"). Draw a table with the following information for each NP:

1. The noun phrase

2. The number of the line of the passage in which it appears

3. An informal description of the referent, if the referring expression is reduced (i.e., if the text says "the virus", say what virus)

4. Whether it is an indefinite, definite (lexical), definite (demonstrative), definite (pronoun), or something else (e.g., a proper name)

5. The cognitive status of the <u>referent</u> according to Gundel et al.'s *Givenness Hierarchy*: *Type Identfiable, Referential, Uniquely Identifiable, Familiar, Activated, In Focus*.

Do not include the following NPs: "American citizens" (line 13), "most people...States" (lines 23-24), "300 people" (line 28), "people who get AIDS and...spread them" (lines 34-36). You <u>do</u> have to include any relevant NPs contained within these phrases, however.

Important: Discuss (briefly) any cases that you had trouble classifying and why, and what alternatives you considered. I'm more interested in you recognizing which cases are the tough ones than whether you picked the right answer for those.

Also, if you notice anything interesting, problematic, puzzling, etc., make a note to yourself to include a discussion in Part 3.

Part 2

Draw a second table of the sort found in the Gundel et al. (1993) that relates referential form to cognitive status to see if there are any identifiable tendencies. The table should have 6 rows and 6 columns: one side will list the six different cognitive statuses, and the other will list the six classes of referring expressions that Gundel et al. use.

Discuss anything especially worthy of note in these statistics. What cases are the outliers with respect to Gundel et al.'s analysis?

Part 3

This last part of the assignment is meant to be more open-ended. Provide a brief discussion of anything pertaining to reference that you found interesting, noteworthy, problematic, puzzling, etc., in the passage. You don't need to write more than a paragraph or two, or it can be formatted as a list. You can include NPs other than those analyzed above if you like. Some example questions you could address include the following. This list is far from exhaustive, however, and is included only as a general guide.

1. Which definites, if any, seemed to have referents that in some way weren't clearly identifiable, or required a non-trivial inference to identify?

2. Which noun phrases contained descriptive information other than what was necessary for the hearer to identify the referent, such as is the case with *conversationally relevant descriptions* as discussed in class? Why do you think the speaker included that information?

3. Were you ever surprised that a certain form of reference was used instead of a different one? Can you think of why the different one wasn't used?

4. Some definites that are common in English seem to violate Gundel et al. outright. These include "the store" or "the hospital": I can say "My brother is in the hospital" even if you have no idea which hospital it is. Can you find any NPs like that in the example passage?

5. Can you find any examples of cataphora in the passage?

Tips for Determining Cognitive Status

- In Focus: Has the referent been mentioned very recently (e.g., in the current or previous sentence)? Is the referent central to what the discourse is about?

- Activated: Has the referent been mentioned recently (e.g., within the last few sentences)? Is the referent part of the global focus of the discourse (e.g., AIDS and people with AIDS are presumably always at least activated in this discourse, even at the point of initial mention).

- Familiar: Does the speaker expect that the hearer can identify exactly what is being referred to?

- Uniquely Identifiable: Does the speaker expect that the hearer can construct a representation for the referent from the information provided by the noun phrase itself, and then assume (relative) uniqueness of that referent per that description?

- Referential: Does it appear that the speaker can identify the exact referent, but believes that this referent is unidentifiable by the hearer?

- Type Identifiable: Does it appear that the speaker, like the hearer, does not know of the exact referent?

Format for Tables

NP	Line(s)	Referent	Form	Cognitive Status
the donut	5	the donut Andy had for breakfast	definite (lexical)	uniquely ID
...	...	...	...	...

Table 1: Table for Part 1

	In Focus	Activated	Familiar	Uniquely ID	Referential	Type ID
it, etc.						
this N *this* *that*						
that N						
the N						
this N (indef)						
a N *num* N						

Table 2: Table for Part 2