NOTES ON

HEARER PRESUPPOSITIONS AND
THE ART OF LANGUAGE BASED PROFILING

Section 3

Role of Hearer Presuppositions in Understanding Others' Speech

1. INTRODUCTORY CONCEPTS

1.1. Hearer Presuppositions. Recall that a *hearer presupposition (HP) of an utterance U made in a context C relative to the hearer's understanding U* of U and C* of C, is an hypothesis made by the hearer regarding those of the speaker's beliefs and/or intentions which may have inclined the speaker's production of U in the context C, as the hearer understands that utterance and that context.*

1.2. Consistency of Understandings. Recall also that a hearer's understanding U* of a speaker's utterance U is *consistent (inconsistent) with*[1] that hearer's understanding C* of the context C in which the utterance U was made if that utterance would generally be regarded by language users who understood the utterance U and the context C as the hearer does would be inclined to regard that utterance as an *appropriate (inappropriate)* one to make in that context.

1.3. Role of HPs in Consistency of Understandings. A hearer will generally be disposed to adopt HPs which would render the hearer's understanding U* of the speaker's utterance U *consistent with* the hearer's understanding C* of the context C in which the utterance U was made.

1.4. Altering Understandings of Utterances and Contexts. If a hearer's understanding of an utterance is inconsistent with his understanding of the context in which that utterance is made, he will generally tend either to: (i) retain his original understanding of the utterance but alter his understanding of that context in such a way that his original understanding of that utterance becomes consistent with the altered context, or (ii) retain his original understanding of the context but alter his understanding of the utterance in such a way that his altered understanding of that utterance becomes consistent with his original understanding of that context, or (iii), alter *both* his understanding of that context and of that utterance in such a way that his altered understanding of that utterance becomes consistent with his altered understanding of that context.

1.5. HPs as Mechanisms for Altering Understandings. We defer a discussion of this mechanism till Section 6, where we give examples of how it operates to induce an experience of humor in a hearer.

1.4. Inconsistent Understandings and Humor. People generally tend to be intuitively aware of when ways of understanding given utterances are inconsistent with their understanding of the contexts in which those utterances are made, and may tend to regard a situation as humorous as they *undergo the experience of resolving those inconsistencies by adopting HPs which render those altered understandings consistent.*

1.5. Hearer Presuppositions in a Structured Approach. Individuals differ in their capacity to identify hearer presuppositions in others' speech. One of the advantages of the proposed structured approach to profiling is that it affords a reasonably systematic way to identify and use hearer presupposition effectively.

1.6. UFs as Speech Signals. Linguistic properties of utterances such as the class of properties we note here as utterance features (UFs) are typically used by speakers to indicate how they intend to have their utterances understood, and they enter integrally in the hearer's understanding of those utterances. Thus UFs can be regarded as speech signals by which a speaker

consciously or unconsciously uses to guide the hearer's understanding of his utterances. Such speech signals can be of diverse sorts. They can be implicit in the conventional semantic meanings of certain utterances, such as factives like "regret" whose conventional meaning implies that what is regretted has actually occurred. Or they can be implicit in the conventional semantic or pragmatic meanings of utterances which are perceived to hold of those utterances. In oral utterances, they are implicit in the conventional pragmatic meanings of special intonation, pausing, pitch, volume, etc.. In written speech, they are implicit in the conventional pragmatic meanings of punctuation, character spacing, line spacing, font selection, exclamation marks, etc. In both oral or written utterances they are implicit in many properties of utterances beyond their physical properties such as the foregoing, including those conveyed by word choices, phrasing style, juxtapositions, pattern of inclusion or omission of key contents, patterns of argumentation, etc. Generally, any UF of the Formatting, Stylistic, Thematic, or Reasoning types can be viewed as potentially functioning as a speech signal entering into the hearer's understanding of any utterance relative to and conditioned by his understanding of the context in which that utterance occurs.

2. HEARER PRESUPPOSITIONS AND PROFILING

2.1. Profiler as Hearer. As remarked earlier, our primary interest in this paper is profiling authors of documents (oral or written) and, in particular, documents which are intended as communications. The profiling analyst takes the role of hearer and regards the speaker' utterances as the subject of his analysis.

2.2. Role of HPs in Profiling. Once the profiler identifies those UFs which, in context, appear to have associated HPs and infers implications from HPs which appear to be relevant to profiling the speaker, the profiler must then identify and organize those associated HPs and their implications (i.e., IMPs – see Sections 4 and 7) into a coherent profile of the speaker.

2.3. Organizing Associated HPs. A given UF in a given utterance produced in a given context could well have more that one HP associated with it in the hearer's understanding of that utterance, each such HP expressing an hypothesis (drawn by the hearer) underlying why the speaker elected to

make that utterance. Multiple such hypotheses – i.e., HPs – and their implications (IMPs) - could thus be associated with a given UF instance in a given utterance, and the profiler needs to organize and inter-relate them to help form the speaker's profile. In Section 4, following, we discuss a particular way of organizing and inter-relating HPs associated with a given instance of a given UF in a given utterance.