

Group work on focus

Chris Potts, Ling 390a: Controlling the Discourse, Fall 2007

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Note Words printed in all capital letters have *focal stress*.

1 Q and A

Match the question with its (potentially) felicitous answer.

- (1) Which movie did Joan watch?
- a. JOAN watched *Jaws*.
- (2) Who watched *Jaws*?
- b. Joan WATCHED *Jaws*.
- c. Joan watched JAWS.
- (3) What did Joan do to the movie *Jaws*?

Follow up A phrase is *discourse-old* just in case it has already appeared in the discourse. What do the above examples tell us about the relationship between *discourse-old* and *focus*?

2 Introductions

Describe the meaning difference between example (4) and example (5).

- (4) Sue only introduced **BILL** to Ted.
- (5) Sue only introduced Bill to **TED**.

3 *The Conversation*

In Francis Ford Coppola's classic 1974 film *The Conversation*, a surveillance expert (Gene Hackman) is hired to record a conversation between a man and a woman as they walk in the park. His recording is rough, the voices difficult to hear. The movie's central question is whether the woman says (6) or (7).

- (6) He'd **KILL** us if he found out. (focus on *kill* if anywhere — fairly neutral for English)
- (7) **HE**'d kill **US** if he found out. (focus on both *he* and *us*)

Try to articulate the subtle meaning difference between these two examples.