

## Chris's Assignment 2

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

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### 1

From the television show *The Office* (U.S. version), episode 3.12: 'Traveling salesmen'. Dwight has a pathological love for the company. He openly scorns some of his colleagues. But he gets along with a few, and he has a secret romance with one of them. In this episode, he was forced to resign (only to return shortly after). The following is his resignation letter, which he abruptly read aloud to the entire office:

Although I love this company more than almost anything in the world, I have decided to step down from my post and spend more time with my family. I do not fear the unknown. I will meet my new challenges head on, and I will succeed. And I will laugh in the faces of those who doubt me. It's been a pleasure working with some of you, and I will not forget those of you soon. But remember, while today it is me, we all shall fall. In other words, I'm quitting.

There's a lot happening in this passage. The part that is of most interest to me is the phrase "It's been a pleasure working with some of you, and I will not forget those of you soon". Why doesn't he say the more obvious alternative, "It's been a pleasure working with you — and I will not forget you soon"? Why doesn't he say, "It's been a pleasure working with all of you — I won't forget any of you soon"?

### 2

President George W. Bush, quoted in *Time Magazine*, Aug 30, 1999, p. 34:

As I understand it, the current FBI form asks the question, 'Did somebody use drugs within the last 7 years?' and I will be glad to answer that question, and the answer is no.

The example is complicated. It sounds oddly like an admission of drug use prior to 1992. Why? And, then again, if the subject is a question on a form, then the limitation to *within the last seven years* shouldn't suggest wrong-doing. And yet, it seems to do just that. Since we don't have more context, it is hard to say for sure.

### 3

The question "Did you have any hearts?", when asked about a poker hand that has just finished, can be answered with "No", and no one will complain, even if the addressee has a few hearts — they just can't be of the sort that would have mattered to the outcome. This is probably due to relevance, balanced by manner (submaxim be brief).

## 4

From a May 2004 Senate hearing:

**Senator Jack Reed (D-RI)** General Sanchez, today's USA Today, sir, reported that you ordered or approved the use of sleep deprivation, intimidation by guard dogs, excessive noise and inducing fear as an interrogation method for a prisoner in Abu Ghraib prison. Is that correct?

**General Sanchez** Sir, that may be correct that it's in a news article, but I never approved any of those measures to be used within CJTF-7 at any time in the last year.

(Transcript from <http://atrios.blogspot.com/>, March 27, 2005.)

The final *within* clause of Sanchez's reply is the interesting part. It has a similar effect to Bush's *within* clause above. Including these restrictions *lowers* the overall informativity. We are likely to conclude that the pressure of quality (be truthful!) blocks the more informative statements.