Pragmatics Homework

A. In *Writing: A College Handbook*, the authors offer examples of what they call “unclear reference.” One example is as follows:

(1). A recent editorial contained an attack on the medical profession. The writer accused them of charging excessively high fees.

The authors provide the following discussion:

Who is meant by the pronouns *them*? From the phrase *medical profession* you may guess that the writer is referring to doctors. But *profession* cannot be the antecedent of *them*, for *them* is plural and *profession* is singular. (Heffernan and Lincoln 1982, 209)

Now Consider examples 2 and 3 and answer questions A-1 through A-5:

(2) Yesterday, the President announced the decision to send aid to numerous countries in Central America. He went on to say that it was time to help our neighbors in this hemisphere.

(3) Yesterday, the White House announced the decision to lift all sanctions. He went to say that this gesture would set the one for further negotiations.

1. Who is *he* in example 2? (5%)

2. Assume that the noun phrase “antecedent” for *he* is the *White house* in example 3. Who would you guess *he* is? (You may think of several possibilities.) (5%)

3. In order to answer question A-2, what kinds of issues must you consider? (5%)

4. Example 2 and 3 are similar in that in each example both the noun phrase “antecedent” (the *President* and the *White House* respectively) and the pronoun *he* are singular. How are these examples dissimilar with respect to determining the reference of *he*? (5%)

5. In example 3, *the White House* and the pronoun *he* are both singular, whereas the college handbook describe the problem of determining the reference of *them* in example 1 as a problem of number incompatibility (*profession* is singular, whereas *them* is plural; therefore, *profession* cannot be the antecedent for *them*). Is number compatibility between the noun phrase antecedent and the pronoun sufficient for determining the reference of the pronouns? Explain, using examples 1 and 3 to back up your arguments. (5%)
B. Now consider the following example and answer the following questions.
The office threw a surprise birthday party for the boss. They even gave her a beautiful gift.

1. Who are *they* and how do you know? (5%)
2. Is the noun phrase “antecedent” of *they* singular or plural? (5%)
3. How does this bear on your discussion in Question 2-e? (5%)
4. Who is *her* being used to refer to? How do you know? (5%)

C In the following scenarios consider:

1. Which of the lines is considered to have an implicature (there may be more than one) (5%)
2. What maxim is being flouted in each implicature (5%)
3. What meaning is possibly implied. (5%)

Karen goes to a birthday party on Saturday night with some of her classmates. Their class had a party on Friday night, but Karen chose not to go because it was too expensive. What happened?

Linda: Did you go to the party last night?
Karen: No, have you talked to anybody who went?
Linda (kind of confused): Yes.
Karen: I was wondering if many people went?
Linda: Oh! Most of the class was there. It was really fun.
Karen: You were at the party?
Linda: Yes!
Karen: Well then why did you ask me if I was there?

Exercises in the textbook

19. p. 217 ------ 20%
20. p. 217 ------ 20%