

CENTER FOR COGNITIVE SCIENCE

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Wednesday, April 18, 2001

280 Park Hall
North Campus
2:00 pm –3:30 pm

“On Identifying the Topic and Why We Might Want To Do So”

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'Topics' are usually defined in structural terms, typically the leftmost NP in a clause (Halliday 1967; Gundel 1974, 1885; Reinhart 1981; Foley and Van Valin 1984...). However, topics so defined are clearly of no use in research attempting to correlate linguistic form and cognitive function, given that the cognitive notion 'topic' is in fact defined by linguistic form. In contrast, Centering Theory, a computationally tractable means of modeling local attention in discourse provides us with an algorithm for identifying what I believe we intuitively think of as 'topic', without defining it on the basis of its form. In this presentation, I shall show how this works and shall cite some (perhaps surprising) research findings on the relationship between topic thus defined and the syntactic forms known as Subject-Prodrop, 'Topicalization', and Left-Dislocation.

**Refreshments will be available
Everyone is welcome to attend!**

For information please call the Cognitive Science Office at (716) 645-3794 or check
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/cogsci>