

# REFERENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

## APRAGMATIC STUDY

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### Abstract

This paper aims at presenting *a pragmatic study of reference*. Reference is a kind of relation that holds between linguistic forms and what they stand for in the universe of discourse. Two types of reference are distinguished: *exophoric* and *endophoric reference*. The linguistic forms, which are used in the process of exophoric or endophoric reference, are called *referring expressions*. These referring expressions take various forms. They can be proper nouns, noun phrases that are either definite or indefinite, and pronouns. They have different identities. The identity of a referring expression is determined on the basis of the co-text in which they occur. Finally, successful reference can occur only in case we pay a special attention to the role of inference on the part of the listener.

### 1-Reference: An Introduction:

Reference is an act in which a speaker, or writer, uses linguistic forms to enable a hearer, or reader, to identify something. These linguistic forms are interpreted differently. When the interpretation of these linguistic forms lies outside the text, in the context of situation, this type of reference is called an *exophoric reference*. Where their interpretation lies inside the text, it is called an *endophoric reference*.

Crystal (2003:170) defines *exophora* as "A term used by some linguists to refer to the process or result of a linguistic unit referring directly to the extralinguistic situation accompanying an utterance". For example, the pronouns I and you in the utterance (I like you) are exophoric for they refer outward to participants in the discourse (Finch, 2000:223)

*Endophora* is defined as "the coreference of an expression with another expression either before it or after it. One expression provides the information necessary to interpret the other" (Internet source,2003:1) Endophoric reference has two main forms: *anaphoric* and *cataphoric reference*. For example:

1. A well-dressed man was speaking; he had a foreign language
2. If you need one, there 's a towel in the top drawer

Crystal (2003:161) defines *endophoric reference* in comparison with *exophoric reference* as "A term used by some linguists to refer to the relationships of cohesion which help to define the structure of a text; it is contrasted with exophoric relationships which do not play a part in cohesion". Thus, according to this definition, *endophoric reference* contributes to the cohesion of a text whereas *exophoric* does not. For example, the third person pronouns he/him, she/her are endophoric and require textual antecedents in order to make complete sense. So the utterance (He likes her) requires us to indicate who is being referred to, as in:

3. John phoned Jane. He likes her.

What is important is that the linguistic forms, which are used in the process of reference, whether it is exophoric or endophoric reference, are called *referring expressions*. Different types of referring expressions are distinguished as proper nouns, noun phrases that are either definite or indefinite, and pronouns. These referring expressions have different identities. The identity of a proper noun like Shakespeare, for example, is not only a person but also a thing. Thus, proper nouns can be used to identify persons as well as things. This is determined on the basis of the co-text in which they occur.

Pronouns are different from other referring expressions in that they lack of content. For example, what does the pronoun it refer to? Since there is no reasonable answer to such a question, this will lead us to suggest that a pronoun such as it is not actually a referring expression, but it can be used co-referentially within a text which includes a full nominal expression. The relationship between the full nominal expression and the pronoun is described as an antecedent-anaphora relation. Not in all cases the anaphoric pronoun has the same identity as the antecedent .In many cases the anaphoric pronoun identifies something different from the antecedent. However, the choice of one referring expression or another depends on what the speaker assumes the listener already knows.

Reference is connected with the speaker's goals (for example, to identify something) and the speaker's beliefs (Is the listener expected to know that particular something?). Successful reference can occur only in case we pay attention to the role of inference(1). Because there is no direct relationship between entities and words, the listener's task is to infer correctly which entity the speaker intends to identify by using a particular referring expression(Yule,1996:17)

## 2-Referring Expressions

2-1 Indefinite Noun phrases: Indefinite reference is used to introduce entities that are new to the hearer into the discourse. For example, a man, a rainbow, an Acura Integra, a beautiful girl, etc. In each of these examples, the speaker intends the hearer to recognize that there is an individual entity referred to by the expression used. It is not important for this type of reference that the hearer should be able to identify the individual referred to (Brown and Yule, 1983:208).

4. I saw an Acura Integra today.

The indefinite noun phrase an Acura Integra denotes a specific entity in the universe of discourse, particularly the one the speaker saw.

Another example:

5.a. John is looking for a horse; it escaped last Friday.

b. John is looking for a horse; it better be white

Similarly, the horse in (5.a) denotes a specific individual entity whereas the one in (5.b) does not. The anaphoric pronoun it is used for

both the real horse that escaped in (5.a) and the hypothetical that is yet to be found in (5.b).

Reference in a universe of discourse is, as Wright and Givon (1987:2) say, a crypto – pragmatic affair. This is so because every universe of discourse is opened or established, for whatever purpose, by a speaker. And that speaker either intends entities in that universe to refer, or not to refer. And it seems in human language it is that referential intent of the speaker that controls the grammatical coding of reference. Thus, a horse in (5.b) is *referentially opaque*. It may either refer to a specific horse of the type mentioned or it may have no reference.

Referential opacity also occurs in the following example:

6. I am going to the dealership to buy an Acura Integra today.

The indefinite noun phrase an Acura Integra may denote a specific Integra in a speaker's mind or it may not. The speaker is just planning to buy one.

(Jurafsky and Martin, 2000:674)

The term *Referential opacity* is extended to the environments where one can obtain an ambiguity between a referential and non-referential or attributive(2) use of a nominal expression. To illustrate this ambiguity, consider the following examples:

7.a. John married a rich woman

b. John wanted to marry a rich woman

The rich woman that John married in (7.a) is referentially existent in the universe of discourse. That is to say, if John married one that one must have existed. On the other hand, the rich woman in (7.b) may or may not have such reference. Thus, either a referential or non – referential interpretation of a rich woman in (7.b) is possible as in the following:

a. John - and thus the speaker – has a particular woman in mind; he wishes to marry her.

b. John - and thus implicitly the speaker – has no particular woman in mind; he wishes to marry someone of that type.

Interpretation (a) is compatible with (8.a) as continuation of (7.b)  
whereas interpretation (b) is compatible with (8.b)

8.a. but she refused him.

b. but he couldn't find any

(Wright and Givon, 1987:3-4)

2-2 Proper Nouns: Another means of referring expressions is that of *proper nouns*. It is suggested that proper nouns are used to identify persons uniquely and that they are used in specific contexts. For example, a proper noun, like Shakespeare, is used to identify one specific person or a name like Plato is taken to have a unique referent regardless of context. This belief is mistaken. A pragmatic view of reference allows us to see how a thing can be identified via the name Shakespeare. For example, if one student asks another the question in (9-a), he will receive the reply in (9-b)

9. a. Can I borrow your Shakespeare?

b. Yeah, it's over there on the table.

In this example, Shakespeare is not used to refer to a person, but a book which is related to that person and for this reason we use it in the reply.

(Yule, 1996: 20)

Another example is the use of the name Plato to refer to an entity other than the Greek philosopher, as in:

10-Plato is on the bottom shelf of the bookcase.

The intended referent, in this example, is not the individual, but rather some publication of his writings. (Brown and Yule, 1983:110) . These examples suggest that there is a set of entities that can be identified by the use of a writer's name. By the use of such suggestion, we can make sense of such sentences

(11-a-b-c)

11. a. Shakespeare takes up the whole bottom shelf.

b. We're going to see Shakespeare in London.

c. I hated Shakespeare at school

(Yule,  
1996:20)

There is, as Yule (Ibid.) says, a pragmatic connection between proper names and objects that will be associated with those names. Using a proper name referentially to identify any object invites the listener to make the expected inference (for example, from name of writer to book by writer) and show himself or herself to be a member of the same community as the speaker. In such cases, it is obvious that more is being communicated than is said.

Proper nouns can also be used non-referentially. Such uses are signalled by the presence of either the definite or indefinite article as in:

12 –Young Smith is the Plato of the fourth form.

(Brown and Yule, 1983:210)

2-3 Definite Noun phrases: Jurafsky and Martin (2000:674) say “Definite reference is used to refer to an entity that is identifiable to the hearer, either because it has already been mentioned in the discourse context, it is contained in the hearer's set of beliefs about the world, or the uniqueness of the object is implied by the description itself”.

For example:

13. I saw an Acura Integra today .The Integra was white and needed to be washed.

In this example, the referent is identifiable from the discourse context

14 .The Indianapolis 500 is the most popular car race in the US.

The referent, in this example, is identifiable from the hearer's set of beliefs.

An interesting feature of definite noun phrases is that they can also be used referentially and non-referentially. For example:

15. There was no sign of the killer  
The killer is either interpreted with a referential function when it refers to a specific individual or it is interpreted non-referentially when it does not refer to a particular individual but it means 'whoever did the killing'.

Nunberg (in Brown and Yule, 1983:213) claims that successful reference is provided by using a definite noun phrase which contains a description that has a specific relation to the intended individual referent. The hearer's knowledge of this specific relation is assumed. For example, a restaurant waiter going off duty might say (16) to his replacement.

16. The ham sandwich is sitting at table 20

The referent being identified via the expression the ham sandwich is not a thing but a person. To identify intended referents, we depend not only on our understanding of the referring expression, but also on the linguistic material, or co-text, accompanying the referring expression. This point is illustrated by Yule (1996:21)

The co-text clearly limits the range of possible interpretations we might have for a word. It is consequently misleading to think of reference being understood solely in terms of our ability to identify reference via the referring expression. The referring expression actually provides a range of reference, that is, a number of possible referents. For example:

17. a. The cheese sandwich is made with white bread.

b. The cheese sandwich left without paying .

Since we have different co-texts, this will lead us to different interpretations. That is, the cheese sandwich in (17.a) refers to a type of food and in (17.b) it refers to the person.

Other examples are the following:

18.a. The chicken pecked the ground.

b. The chicken with bean sauce was delicious.

19. a. The newspaper weighs five pounds.

b. The newspaper fired John.

The chicken in (18.a) is understood to be a reference to a type of a bird and in (18.b) to the type of meat. In (19.a) the newspaper refers to an edition or copy of the publication and (19.b) it is the company or even the publisher. As it is said before, these expressions are interpreted on the basis of our pragmatic knowledge of the range of reference of such

expressions, which is determined by the nature of the predication and by the conversational context. These factors influence the hearer's (or reader's) representation of entities, not only for definite noun phrases and proper nouns, but also for pronominals when they are used in discourse

(Brown and Yule, 1983:214)

### 3. Endophoric Reference

As it is said before, *endophoric reference* involves the coreference of one expression with another either before it or after it. This means that *Endophora* instructs the hearer/ reader to look inside the text to see what is being referred to. It is different from *exophora* in that the latter instructs the hearer/ reader to look outside the text to see what is being referred to. *Endophoric reference* has two forms: *anaphoric* and *cataphoric reference*.

#### 3-1 Anaphoric Reference

The term *anaphora* comes from a Greek word *anapherein* meaning to 'carry back'. It is used in connected speech and writing to describe the cohesive ties which link sentences to those which precede them. *Anaphoric reference* is, as Finch (2000:203) points out, a form of discourse connection which enables the reader to see the sentences s/he is reading as constituting a text.

For example:

20. John came in and he lit a fire.

In this example, the pronoun he is interpreted as referring backward to whoever it is that John referred to. (Levinson, 1983:67)

Another example:

21. In the film, a man and a woman were trying to wash a cat. The man was holding the cat while the woman poured water on it. He said something to her and they started laughing.

In English, introductory reference is often indefinite a man, a woman, a cat. The pronouns (it-he-her-they) refer anaphorically to the definite noun phrases (the cat -the man-the woman) and both of them refer to already introduced referents. In technical

terms, the second or subsequent expression is *the anaphor* and the initial expression is *the antecedent*.

(Yule, 1996:22)

Finch (2000:203) says that *anaphoric reference* is achieved in three ways. Firstly by *co-reference* in which pronouns refer to items previously mentioned in the text as in (Finish your homework. It will save time) where it refers back to (Finish your homework). Secondly, by *substitution* in which we use do and one in order to avoid repetition, as in (I like his car. It's a new one). The referential use of one in this example should be distinguished from the non-referential one in (22) and another use when it gives us a meaning as the number one in (23)  
22. One shouldn't pay more than twenty thousand dollars for an Acura  
23. John has two Acuras. But I only have one

(Jurafsky and Martin, 2000:676)

The third way by which we achieve anaphoric reference is by *ellipsis* as in where are you going?  
(I am going) to the pictures.  
where we ellide (I am going) and we immediately answer (to the pictures)

Anaphoric reference is, as Yule (1996:23) says, suggested to be a process of continuing to identify exactly the same entity as denoted by the antecedent. Sometimes, we may have a difference in the interpretation. Thus, in those cases where some change is described the anaphoric reference must be interpreted differently. For example:  
24. Peel and slice six potatoes. Put them in cold salted water. The referring expression six potatoes identifies something different from the anaphoric pronoun them, which must be interpreted as 'the six peeled and sliced potatoes'

(Ibid.)

Consider the following examples:

25. Wash and core six cooking apples. Put them into a fireproof dish.

In this example, them refers back to six cooking apples.

Similarly the anaphoric pronoun them identifies something different from six cooking apples. In the first sentence they were pristine apples, straight from the supermarket whereas in the second they are washed and cored; that is, they have undergone a change of state. Their description has changed. Such a change is important in a text because as Kallgren (in Brown and Yule, 1983:201) remarks "The content of a text is not merely an enumeration of referents; an important part of the content is the relations that the text establishes between the referents".

26. Kill an active, plump chicken. Prepare it for the oven, cut it into four pieces and roast it with thyme for one hour.

The identity of the chicken, in this example, is preserved until it is dismembered. Thus, we cannot substitute it with an active plump chicken in the last clause because it has a different identity.

Endophoric reference is not only backward. In the following introductory sentence from a magazine story:

27. He was tall, dark, handsome and at twenty-eight. John Smith was already a power in the city.

The pronoun he is understood only by referring forward to John Smith. This type of reference is called *cataphora*. The word *cataphora* comes from a Greek term meaning 'forward looking' (Todd and Hancock, 1986:43). It is defined as "A term used by some grammarians for the process or result of a linguistic unit referring forward to another unit" (Crystal, 2003:65). It is also used in stylistics to describe the cohesive ties between items and those which come after them, typically between a pronoun and a following noun phrase.

For example:

28. It's going down, the sun.

In this example, it refers forward to the sun

Cataphora is much less common than anaphora. It is a device favoured by people who wish to create a sense of mystery or expectancy.

There is a range of expressions which are used for anaphoric reference in English. The most typical forms are pronouns. But we can also use definite and indefinite noun phrases. For example:

29. I've just had my hair curled and it looks windblown all the time. In this example, the pronoun it refers back to my hair but it identifies something different from the antecedent. Thus, the pronoun it cannot be substituted with my hair because it also undergoes a change of state. Mckay and Fulkerson (in Brown and Yule, 1983: 216) demonstrate that the nature of the antecedent may not completely determine the interpretation of the pronoun. They suggest that if a change of state predicate is attached to a nominal expression, then subsequent pronominals must be interpreted in terms of that predicate. Thus, the pronoun it in the above example is interpreted not only in terms of the antecedent nominal expression, but also the accompanying predicate, as in :

29.b My hair which I've just had curled looks windblown all the time  
(Ibid)

Sometimes we use a gap, in a phrase or clause, that has an anaphoric function to the antecedent. The antecedent supplies the information necessary for interpreting the gap. Such use is called *zero anaphora*. For example:

30. There are two roads to eternity, a straight and narrow and abroad and crooked

In this example, the gaps in a straight and narrow [gap] and a broad and crooked [gap] have a zero anaphoric relationship to two roads to eternity. Using a specific type of inference the hearer/or listener is expected to interpret what is being referred to by the use of zero anaphora

(Internet Source, 2003:1)

The hearer is also expected to make more types of inference when there are no connections between the anaphoric expressions and their antecedents. For example:

31. I almost bought an Acura Integra today, but a door had a dent and the engine seemed noisy.

The indefinite noun phrase a door, in this example, introduces a new door into the context. The hearer has to infer that it is not just any door but one of the doors of the Integra. Similarly, the context does not

mention any engine but the hearer has to infer that the referent is the engine of the previously mentioned Integra (Jurafsky and Martin, 2000:677)

Consider the following examples:

32. There are two different ladies go up to the whist and both have a wig and they are most natural.

The pronoun they is interpreted on the basis of the hearer's understanding that there are two wigs and not one as the antecedent a wig states. Thus, we use the pronoun they as referring to these two wigs. In this example, there is no agreement in terms of number between the antecedent and the anaphoric pronoun (Brown and Yule, 1983: 217)

33. The bus came on time, but he didn't stop

The hearer is required to infer that a bus has a driver, thus, the pronoun he is used to refer to the driver of this bus. This example also presents a grammatical mismatch in terms of gender between the antecedent and the anaphoric pronoun (Yule, 1996:24)

4-Conclusions:

The main conclusion of this paper is that *reference* can be either *exophoric* or *endophoric*. Using a referring expression, *exophoric reference* identifies something outside the text. These referring expressions take various form. They can be proper nouns, indefinite and definite noun phrases. They have different identities. The identity of a proper noun, like Plato is not only a person but also a thing the person produced whereas the identity of a definite noun phrase, like the sandwich is not only a thing but also a person. Such identity is allowed through a pragmatic study of reference.

*Endophoric reference* identifies something inside the text. It has two main forms: *anaphoric* and *cataphoric reference*. The most prominent anaphoric expressions are pronouns but definite and indefinite noun phrases are also used. The identity of the anaphoric pronoun, in many cases, is different from the antecedent Thus, if a

charge of state predicate is attached to the antecedent, the anaphoric pronoun is interpreted in terms of that predicate

Successful reference can occur only in case we pay attention to the role of inference on the part of the hearer especially when we do not have a kind of agreement whether in number or in gender between the antecedent and the anaphoric expression.

#### Notes

(1) Inference means “The listener's use of additional knowledge to make sense of what is not explicit in an utterance”. (Yule, 1996:131)  
Inference is crucial to interpretation because a good deal of meaning is implied rather than being explicitly stated. The amount of inferring which listeners make depends on the degree of shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer. For example:

34. I cleaned the house. My mother-in-law is coming.

In this example, the listener infers that the speaker cleaned the house because his/her mother-in-law was coming.

Most inferences are derived automatically from utterances. For example:

35. I dropped the vase. It broke

The listener, in this example, infers that the pronoun it refers back to an antecedent noun phrase.

(2) The use of an expression to identify someone or something without being committed to the existence of an actual person or thing is called an attributive use. For example, The first person to walk on Mars (Ibid:127)

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