

# THIRD-PERSON ANAPHORA RESOLUTION IN ENGLISH NARRATIVE TEXTS

## 英语叙事语篇中 第三人称前指的阐释

Zhou Ping 周平

中国科学技术大学出版社

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## 序

本书是由我的博士论文修改而成的,也是对我在上海外国语大学三年学习时光的一个交代。我是1999年9月从厦门大学考入上海外国语大学的。在厦门大学攻读硕士学位时,我师从傅思逸教授,专业方向是应用语言学,主要研究特殊用途英语(English for Special Purposes);到了上海外国语大学之后,我有幸投在著名学者许余龙教授的门下,专业方向也改成了对比语言学。幸则幸矣,但难度可想而知;加上本人天资愚钝,生性懒惰,难度于无形之中更是增加了许多。

这里我要特别感谢我尊敬的导师许余龙教授。许先生知识渊博,为人谦和。实际上,在与许老师接触的时间里,上海外国语大学所有的研究生甚至本科生们无时无刻不能感受到他谦虚、亲切的为人处事方式。尽管他做出了许多有重要学术价值意义的科研成果,他从不曾在学生面前夸耀自己。他常常把自己的著作和文章给同学们阅读,针对某些问题提出自己的思路和解决方法,并虚心地听取同学们的不同见解和看法。对于同学们提出的问题,他总是耐心地解答。也许正是由于许老师的和蔼可亲,加上他是研究生中公认的知识渊博的教授,每次下课后总有许多同学围着许老师问问题,有些同学甚至拿其他学科的问题向许老师请教。在听了许老师的课,读了他所写的文章和著作之后,学生对他的专业基础之扎实、所涉学科范围之广泛不禁惊叹万分。语言学的各个分支学科他都不仅仅是知道一点,而是都有相当深入地研究。对国内外语言研究的最新发展动向他都了如指掌。这与他持之以恒的努力是分不开的;即使在放假期间,学生们也经常会在图书馆里遇见他。许先生的所有弟子为能成为许老师的弟子既感到幸运和骄傲,又感到惶恐。幸运和骄傲的是,我们能成为许老师这样的治学态度严谨、对我们这样的学术后辈循循

善诱的大学者的弟子；惶恐的是，在学术上我们不知到能否赶上甚至超越他的成就。我们惟有尽自己最大的努力、才能不辜负许老师对我们的期望。

我还要感谢上海外国语大学的其他一些学者，尤其是王德春教授、何兆雄教授、冯庆华教授、梅德明教授、束定芳教授、李基安教授、史志康教授等。他们一丝不苟的科研态度、勤勤恳恳的工作作风、严于律己的处世哲学都给我做出了榜样。我将永远为曾经是他们的学生而感到自豪。

我还要感谢我的同学，尤其是朱亚军、贾中恒、张辉、李志岭、范祥涛、谢建文、陈兵、熊友奇、杨玲、王敏琴等。与他们的相识与相知是我在外求学这六年中最宝贵的人生财富之一；他们在学术上的见解常常使我受益匪浅。当然，他们在学术上的成就也是我追赶的目标和动力。

借此机会，我还要表达我对其他一些在我的成长之路上对我有过重要影响的学者的感谢，尤其是傅思逸教授、杨信彰教授和黄国文教授。他们高尚的人格魅力和严谨的学术风范一直在影响着我。

最后，我要感谢我的父母。在我求学的过程中，他们一直默默地支持我，使我在远离故乡的六年中一直能够体会到幸福和安慰。

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周 平

2005 年 7 月

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The notion of anaphora

Discourse can be interpreted from different linguistic levels and angles, one of which is the interpretation of anaphora. The interpretation of anaphora is of great significance to the understanding of natural English discourse on account of the fact that, in natural discourse, the establishment, maintenance and the shift of topic(s) are mainly realized through anaphoric relations. Judging by the linguistic embodiment of anaphora, it is composed of two components: the anaphor and its antecedent. However, the use of it involves various syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, psychological, cognitive and other constraints. Therefore, the interpretation of anaphora has always been the focus of study among linguists, discourse analysts, text linguists, pragmatologists, psycho-linguists, functionalists, artificial intelligence experts, and experts specializing in language universals, language acquisition, language typology, and language learning and teaching.

The notion of anaphora can be understood both broadly and narrowly. As Xu (1995:1) points out that

“In its broadest sense, anaphora may be defined as a linguistic phenomenon in which an (often attenuated) expression is used to refer (back) to an entity or sense denoted by another expression in the same text or discourse. Perceived from this perspective, the



notion of anaphora actually embraces almost all the cohesive relations of reference, substitution<sup>①</sup>, ellipsis and lexical cohesion in discourse as discussed in Halliday and Hasan (1976)"

According to this interpretation and by the standard of the differences in the types of their antecedents and their morpho-syntactic features, he classifies anaphora as shown in Figure 1.

The notion of anaphora in its narrow sense can be interpreted as a linguistic phenomenon in which a nominal expression (often attenuated) is used to refer (back) to an entity and / or sense which is embodied by another nominal expression in the same text or discourse. The definition provided by the MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences (2000:20) represents the notion of anaphora in the narrow sense:

"The term anaphora is used most commonly in theoretical linguists to denote any case where two nominal expressions are assigned the same referential value or range."

---

① Substitution is different from coreference. According to the discussion in this chapter, coreference is an anaphoric relation in which coreferential relation holds between anaphor and its antecedent. However, this is not the case for substitution. Let's consider the following examples: (1) Hill did not go home after work last night. He went to a bar with a friend. (2) I bought a book yesterday, and he also bought one. In (1), "he" corefers with "Hill", while in (2), "one" is used to substitute "a book". What is significant is that, the referents of "one" and "a book" are not the same. Xiong (1999:8) correctly points out that both coreference and substitution are devices to maintain cohesion in discourse. However, the antecedent in the coreferent relation is usually realized with a specific pronoun or an adverb with the feature of a pronoun. Its referent can be pinned down basically within the (linguistic) context in which it occurs. On the other hand, the word used to substitute another in discourse is usually not a pronoun. The word it substitutes is usually not so definite, and the interpretation of it depends more on the context in which it is in.

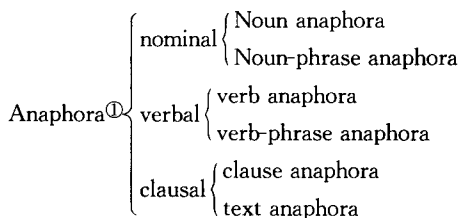


Figure 1.1 Xu's classification of different types of anaphora

Therefore, judging by the key word “nominal”, we have nominal anaphora in which the anaphors are linguistically realized by nouns and noun phrases, pronouns, and zeros<sup>②</sup> as the underlined parts illustrate in the following examples:

- (1)a. There was once a poor man and a poor woman  
       b. who had nothing but a little cottage,  
       c. and who earned their bread by fishing,  
       d. and Ø always lived from hand to mouth.  
       e. But it came to pass one day,  
       f. when the man was sitting by the waterside, and casting  
       his net,  
       g. that he drew out a fish entirely of gold.

---

① The examples provided to illustrate each type of anaphora by Xu are as follows, with anaphor and its antecedent in each sentence underlined:

- (1)a. John bought a blue jacket and Paul bought a black one.  
       b. John's jacket is blue and Paul's Ø is black.  
       (2)a. The man told John that he bought a blue jacket.  
           b. The man persuaded John Ø to buy a blue jacket.  
       (3) John bought a blue jacket and Paul ? a black one.  
       (4) John bought a blue jacket a Paul ? too.  
       (5) Someone told me that John can speak ten different languages, but I won't believe it.  
       (6) This is what has happened; (followed by the description)

② Zero anaphors are indicated by the symbol ? throughout this thesis, as is the common practice in related linguistic works.

(“The Fisherman and His Wife”)

- (2)a. A farmer once had a faithful dog called Sultan,  
b. who had grown old,  
c. and Ø lost all his teeth,  
d. so that he could no longer hold on to anything.  
e. One day the farmer was standing with his wife before  
the house-door,  
f. and Ø said  
g. tomorrow I intend to shoot old Sultan,  
h. he is no longer of any use.

(“The Farmer and His Dog”)

In this study, anaphora in the narrow sense in natural<sup>①</sup> English texts will be our focus of interest (henceforth it will be referred to simply as anaphora).

## 1.2 A brief survey of literature

As is stated in the previous section, anaphora has been the focus of interest in the past thirty years shared by experts working in so many different lines within or concerning the field of linguistics because of its importance in understanding the nature of discourse and “in formulating and testing a theory of grammar” (Xu, 1995). It is needless to say that there has been quite an extensive literature developed in the field of anaphora study. The major approaches that are adopted in these studies can be broadly classified into three types, namely, the formal syntactic approach,

---

① “Natural” is a relative term, because when any story or tale is put down in black and white, it will inevitably carry the marks left by the compiler’s or the story-teller’s personal style and wording.

the discourse functional approach, and the pure cognitive approach.

### 1. 2. 1 The formal syntactic approach

As Xu (1995:3) points out, the formal syntactic approach to the study of anaphora is mainly done within the overall theoretical framework of generative grammar. The research done within this framework is mainly concerned with the various syntactic constraints governing the distribution and semantic interpretation of different types of nominal expressions in a most elaborate manner (see e. g. Reinhart 1976, 1981, 1983; Wasow 1979; Aoun 1985; Huang 1992, to mention just a few among others). The core of research of this kind largely rests in the analysis of c(constituent)-command relations suggested by Reinhart (1976, 1981, 1983). According to Chomsky (1981), for an NP to be bound by its antecedent, the latter should be able to c-command the former. Such a relation can be represented schematically as follows.

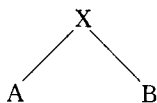


Figure 1. 2

Or in Chomsky's words:

A node A c-commands a node B iff (if and only if)

(1) A does not dominate B;

(2) B does not dominate A;

(3) The first branching node (X) dominating A also dominates B.

Reinhart (1976, 1981, 1983) provides the similar definition.

As she puts it, Node A c-commands node B if and only if the first branching node  $\alpha_1$  dominating A

(1) either dominates B, or

(2) is immediately dominated by a node  $\alpha_2$  which dominates B, and  $\alpha_2$  is of the same category type as  $\alpha_1$ .

For example, observe the following structures.

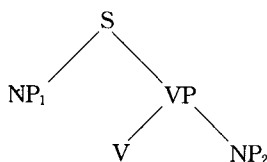


Figure 1. 3

In (b),  $NP_1$  c-commands  $NP_2$  because S, which is the first branching node that dominates  $NP_1$ , dominates  $NP_2$ . On the other hand,  $NP_2$  does not c-command  $NP_1$  because the VP node, which is the first branching node that dominates  $NP_2$ , does not dominate  $NP_1$ .

However, for an exhaustive study of anaphora, there are in general two obvious limitations with the formal approach. "First, it is largely limited to the formal aspects of anaphora. And second, it is largely limited to the exploration of such formal properties of noun phrases within a sentence." (Xu, 1995: 4) It is rather apparent for the first one, since it has long been established as a common sense that the use of anaphora is not only concerned with the syntactic aspects but also with semantic, pragmatic, cognitive, and a number of other constraints. With the second one, we would like to argue that, anaphora is a discourse unit rather than a syntactic one, though it has been studied on the syntactic level by so many linguists, especially in the GB tradition. As we point out in Zhou (2001a), anaphoric relation mainly occurs in discourse. A proper piece of evidence in point are the statistics of the distribution of referring expressions in English discourse provided by Ariel (1990: 18) and the statistics of the distribution of referring

expressions in Chinese given by Xu (1995: 81), which are reproduced respectively in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 as follows (we have made one minor adjustment to Ariel's table, that is, the addition of the "Total" column at the bottom. In the tables, S = sentence, and P = paragraph).

**Table 1.1 Ariel's statistics of referring expressions in English discourse (1990:18)**

Referring expressions	Text position				Total
	Same S	Previous S	Same P	Across P	
Pronoun	110 (20.8%)	320 (60.5%)	75 (14.2%)	24 (4.5%)	529 (100%)
Demonstrative	4 (4.8%)	50 (59.5%)	17 (20.2%)	13 (15.5%)	84 (100%)
Definite description	4 (2.8%)	20 (14.1%)	65 (45.8%)	53 (37.3%)	142 (100%)
Total	118	390	157	90	755

**Table 1.2 Xu's statistics of the distribution of referring expressions in Chinese discourse (1995: 81)**

Referring expressions	Text position				Total
	Same S	Previous S	Same P	Across P	
Zero	630 (91.3%)	53 (7.7%)	4 (0.6%)	3 (0.4%)	690 (100%)
Reflexive	16 (94.1%)	1 (5.9%)			17 (100%)
Pronoun	90 (55.2%)	69 (42.3%)	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.8%)	163 (99.9%)
Demonstrative	6 (35.3%)	6 (35.3%)	4 (23.5%)	1 (5.9%)	17 (100%)
Definite description	45 (12.9%)	118 (33.9%)	38 (10.9%)	147 (42.2%)	348 (99.9%)
Total	787	247	47	154	1,235

The statistics in the above two tables clearly show that in both English and Chinese, demonstratives and definite descriptions, and even zeros and pronouns, are discourse cohesive devices. Although zeros and pronouns are mainly employed as inter- or intra-sentence cohesive devices, we may still safely say that they are discourse cohesive devices, because no matter how near they are to their antecedents, the purpose of their employment is to contribute to the cohesion of the whole discourse. The reason for the fact that the distance between them and their antecedents is relatively closer than demonstratives and definite descriptions is because of the constraints of syntactic principles (Chu, 1998) and the constraint of the general principles of language use, such as “economy” and “clarity” (Xiong, 1999).

### **1. 2. 2 Discourse functional approach**

Therefore, because of the limitations of the formal approach, discourse functional approach has been adopted by some researchers to explore the textual and pragmatic properties of anaphora. The focus of research within this framework is the function of anaphora in discourse in making the discourse coherent and their textual constraints (see e. g. Kuno, 1987; Xu, 1995, among others). Tai (1994, ed. Preface, VII) maintains that there are three levels within functionalism, namely structural functionalism, pragmatic functionalism, and cognitive functionalism. Structural functionalism aims at exploring the role(s) of a certain grammatical unit within the whole or partial grammatical system to which it belongs. The purpose of pragmatic functionalism is to demonstrate the multi-functions of a syntactic unit in order to interpret its different meanings and constraints. Cognitive functionalism tries to explore the semantic structure of a specific language, which is

supposed to be the cognitive domain of the basis on its syntactic structure. However, in practical research, it is often the case that a research is done on more than one level. A good case in point is Xu's Functional-Pragmatic Model (Xu, 1995), which is also the model employed in this study and which is going to be introduced in Chapter II because of its unique importance in this thesis.

### **1. 2. 3 “Pure” cognitive approach**

By the term “pure cognitive approach”, we mean the approach that focuses on the subtle semantic relationships between anaphor and its antecedent in the mental model that a speaker constructs, instead of starting from their syntactic, pragmatic, or discourse role. For example, Von Hoek (1997) thinks that the study of anaphora constraints is the study of conceptual structure because “the constraints on anaphoric coreference rest on the relative prominence of the conceptual constructs which collectively make up the context for a nominal”(Hoek, 1997:xii). Therefore, according to the “Content Requirement” in cognitive grammar, the semantically based constraints on anaphora are determined by the natural features of the semantic organization in a language, especially the semantic features of nominals. What is most significant is that, in this approach, researchers do not draw a distinction between sentence-internal and sentence-external anaphora. The distinction between them is only a “disparity in the sharpness and reliability of judgments at the intrasentential and intersentential levels” ( Hoek, 1997:218). Therefore, a set of semantically based conceptions is adopted in this approach, among which the most important ones are “conceptual reference point” and “dominion”. Conceptual reference point refers to the first entity that is accessed among a group of entities in a conceptual structure,



which is termed as the dominion of the conceptual reference point. Other entities in the dominion depend on the conceptual reference point for their interpretation. Thus efforts conducted in this approach mainly go to the factors that influence an interpreter to choose a certain entity as the reference point and the establishment of some concrete conceptual reference points and dominion configurations in the conventional schemas.

## **1. 2. 4 Basic assumptions and methodology**

### **1.2.4.1 Basic assumptions**

The most important reason why we employ the Functional-Pragmatic model (hereinafter it will be referred to as the FP model in the rest part of the thesis) is because of the fact that this model is one that “focuses on the discourse function various linguistic cues sensitive to anaphora interpretation in a text may play in the process of anaphora resolution” (Xu, 1995:6), rather than only the mental process or the syntactic features of anaphora resolution itself. One of the outstanding advantages of the model is that it spans three levels of anaphora research, namely, structural functionalism, pragmatic functionalism, and cognitive functionalism. It is functionally structural because it takes into account the function of surface linguistic cues; it is functionally pragmatic because it holds that “the choice of referring expressions by the text producer at a particular point of text production is pragmatic” (Xu, 1995:31), since the writer wishes to produce the desired effect by his choice of a certain referring expression; and it is cognitive because it makes use of such cognitive notion as “accessibility”. As we point out in Zhou (2001a), an ideal model for anaphora resolution would be “an integrated one”, that is, one that takes into account of most, if not all, the possible factors that