莫爱屏◎著

Mo Aiping

RIDGING REFERENCE IN CHINESE
DISCOURSE—A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

汉语话语中推理照应的
语用研究

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PREFACE

As early as 1977, Professor Herbert H. Clark's paper "Bridging" appeared in *Thinking-Readings in Cognitive Science*, edited by P. N. Johnson-Laird and P. C. Wason. Since then, "bridging reference", which refers to the relationship between a bridging expression and its intended referent not explicitly expressed in context, but can be inferred via the addition of contextual assumptions, has been broadly studied as assumptions in verbal communication. Pragmatically, such linguistic assumptions have been dealt with in various ways, based on notions of truth, coherence and relevance. Gricean framework of Cooperative Principle with maxims observation and violation (Grice, 1989), Sanford and Garrod's scenario account of comprehension (1981), Grosz and Sidner's computational account of reference resolution (1986), Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (1995), etc. are different means to handle the cases of bridging interpretation. As Matsui (1998) puts it, the relevance-based approach to bridging is preferable on both descriptive and explanatory grounds. Following what Matsui held, Dr. Mo Aiping has studied bridging reference in the Chinese context, making analysis from the viewpoint of relevance theory. And his doctoral dissertation is just about what he has gained in his studies of Chinese discourse.

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Dr. Mo's main arguments in this dissertation were presented as three hypotheses related to bridging reference: the validity at the syntactic level, the acceptability at the semantic level, and the appropriateness at the pragmatic level. He tested these three hypotheses in two questionnaire studies, and the results showed that the data tested could well be explained by relevance theory, and the three levels are interrelated and complementary—no single level or hypothesis can stand alone for the appropriate interpretation of bridging in communication. Dr. Mo's findings are of significance in utterance understanding, and have practical implications in discourse studies.

Mr. Mo came to do his Ph.D. in Guangdong Foreign Studies University (GDUFS) in 2000. He was interested in linguistics, especially in pragmatics. He worked hard, having published quite a few papers on pragmatics during his studies. He also teamed up with me for a national research project on cognitive pragmatics granted by the State Education Ministry. Mr. Mo finally got his Degree in 2003 and has since been working as a faculty member in GDUFS. Recently, Dr. Mo has been promoted as Professor in linguistics, engaged in supervising graduate students who major in pragmatics. He also gives lectures and courses on various subjects of linguistics. Dr. Mo was one of my best students in the past, and he, I believe, will be one of the best academics among the university faculty.

He   Ziran
Professor of Linguistics
Guangdong Foreign Studies University
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The completion of such a research project (on bridging reference in discourse in general and in Chinese discourse in particular) of some duration and magnitude could not have been possible without the assistance of many others.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Mo Aiping, born in Hengyang, Hunan province in January 1963, received his college education during 1978 – 1981 in the Foreign Language Department in Hengyang Normal University (HYNU). Upon graduation, he was assigned to teach in Hunan Forestry College where he worked for about 10 years. Then he was transferred to teach in HYNU. Two years later, he pursued for an MA degree in College of Foreign Languages in Changsha Railway University (now called Central South University), majoring in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in the span of 1993 to 1996. Then from 1997 to 1998, he went to study for a postgraduate diploma in English language teaching at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore. After that he went back to teach in the Foreign Language Department in HYNU again till 2000 when he was admitted to the Ph.D. Program in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS), specializing in pragmatics under the supervision of Prof. He Ziran. He got his Ph.D. degree in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in 2003. Presently he is Professor of English in School of English for Business, and Vice-dean and Professor of English in School of Interpreting and Translation Studies while co-supervising Ph.D. candidates with prof. He ziran in the Ph.D. program in Center for Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in GDUFS. His major research interests in-

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clude Pragmatics, Translation studies, Discourse analysis, Business English and Foreign language teaching.

ABSTRACT

Bridging reference (henceforth BR), which permeates verbal communication, refers to the relationship between a bridging expression and its intended referent not explicitly expressed in context (including preceding and subsequent discourse), but can be inferred via the addition of contextual assumptions. As a semantic concept, BR has been extensively researched in the literature and significant insights have been gained through various approaches. However, no single model is capable of handling all the cases of BR interpretation due to the fact that each model approaches the problem either from a different perspective or with a different goal.

This research, drawing on current insights and empirical data from various resources (e.g. academic journals, newspapers, novels, daily conversation, etc.) in the Chinese language, proposes a practical model that incorporates the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels in the interpretation of BR. It points out, from a pragmatic point of view, that past studies do not do justice to the way different knowledge resources interact, arguing that the recognition and interpretation of BR is a necessary but not sufficient communicative process in our daily communication. It claims that the rhetorical connections between the propositions introduced in the discourse are crucial in interpreting BR, but the work concerned in this research is different from previous studies in that the author demonstrates how

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this source of information interacts with the usual syntactic and semantic analysis in a pragmatic context. Hence such a language phenomenon is approached from three different levels: the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels. Focusing on internal preferences to these levels, the interpretation of BR is subject to different mechanisms. The observed focusing preferences at each of these levels are modeled syntactically, semantically and pragmatically, along the lines suggested in relevance theory (henceforth RT). Thus it provides a new perspective for research in verbal communication.

These are some of the basic propositions of the present research:

1) BR refers to the relationship between a bridging expression and its intended referent in discourse or context. It is used in actual discourse to represent what is implicitly expressed, functioning as an explanation or supplement to what is not explicitly expressed. Thus it enriches the dynamic study of discourse and serves as an aid to the success of human communication.

2) BR is a form of existence that enables people to handle properly different relationships such as the one between bridging expressions and referents in verbal communication. It is also a medium of transmission.

3) BR can be considered as a way of getting to know the world (both physical and mental), or a paradigm derived from reflections upon a concrete method of approaching discourse. Hence it becomes consciously or unconsciously a tool for forming a world view.

The theoretical framework of the book consists of various fac-

tors (e.g. communication needs, interaction between the propositions introduced in discourse, context, etc.) that influence the establishment and interpretation of BR. As a point of departure, the study distinguishes BR from other types of reference. Then it discusses such a relationship from three different levels, focusing on issues such as the linguistic components of a discourse, information distribution, syntactic structure, meaning relations and truth conditions, context and relevance, etc. It tries to demonstrate how the interpretation of sentence meaning, bridging inference (BI) of contextual assumptions and encyclopedic knowledge, constrains the interpretation of BR. These and some other arguments, together with the research findings and their contribution to other branches of sciences, will be briefly discussed below:

The syntactic level: Issues such as linguistic elements and their functions in discourse, logical operators, information structure of discourse (including the given-new contract by Clark), and the syntactic structure of the Chinese language are examined in an attempt to present a clearer picture of BR at the syntactic level. At the same time, syntactic constraints such as word order, constituent order, etc. are also discussed. The description and interpretation of these preferences help to bring out the first hypothesis—**the validity hypotheses.** .

The semantic level: Theories relating to BR, the distinction between two major types of BR (situational and discourse bridging reference), meaning relations (entailment and semantic presupposition), truth-conditions, the semantic constraints (such as propositions expressed in discourse, the interaction between propositions, animate and inanimate entities, etc.) are discussed so as to deter-

mine the acceptability of such a relationship in discourse. Based on these observations and the influence of rhetorical relations between propositions on BR, the second hypothesis—**the acceptability hypothesis**—is proposed.

The pragmatic level: Recent approaches to BR, the distinction between BR and BI, contextual assumption, implicature, the dynamics of context, relevance, the pragmatic constraints on the interpretation of BR, etc. are discussed. Within the relevance-theoretic framework, a unified account is offered, taking into account different extant theories such as Sanford and Garrod's "scenario-based association", Sidner's "the expected focus algorithm", topic/focus account, etc. It is found that these theories are inadequate in one way or another when used to interpret BR. Only RT has been shown to be very persuasive in explaining BR. These observations, together with the hypotheses being made at the previous two levels, suggest that the third hypothesis—*the appropriateness hypothesis*—can be made.

The three hypotheses are further tested in two questionnaire studies related to this research. The results (see Chapter Seven) show that the data tested can all be explained in terms of RT. It has been found that the three levels (as well as the three hypotheses made in the process of interpreting BR) are complementary, i. e. no single level or hypothesis can stand alone; and that in daily communication, an appropriate interpretation of BR plays a decisive role in the success or failure of an interactive activity. At the same time, the research findings can provide clues and directions for further research not only within this immediate discipline concerned but also for language research in general. Moreover, they have practical im-

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plications relating to various fields, ranging from the teaching of Chinese to non-native speakers, discourse analysis to artificial intelligence.

中文摘要

　　语言推理的照应（bridging reference）（简称推理照应），是言语交际中普遍存在的一种现象，意指话语中的待释表达法（bridging expression）与语境（包括前、后述话语等）中没有明确表述出的指称对象（referent）之间的照应关系。作为一种隐含的意义关系，推理照应是话语研究中的一个核心概念。不少学者已就该问题做过研究，并取得了一定的成绩。但是，由于其出发点和侧重点各不相同，他们的研究均出现不同程度的局限性。

　　本研究在借鉴和发展前人研究成果的基础上，从语用的角度，结合语言的三个层面（即句法、语义和语用）来考察汉语话语中的推理照应现象，其基本观点是：

　　（i）推理照应作为语言表达的一种手段，在话语的实际运作中，是对话语含意或隐性表述（implicit expression）的具体内容做出阐释或补足，它使语言变得相对完善，有利于人们进行成功的交际。

　　（ii）推理照应是人们在言语交际中，以人与人之间、人与事物之间以及事物与事物之间的相互关系来把握世界的一种认知方式和传播媒介。

　　（iii）推理照应关系可以被认为是人们认知世界的一种方式；可以是人们反思认识事物的具体方法后形成的一种思维方法；还可以是人们自觉或不自觉地用来认识事物的一种视角。

　　本研究的理论框架由人们的交际需求、话语的交互性和语境等要素构成，因为推理照应现象的产生就是基于这些要素。本研

究的研究步骤是：1）对推理照应与其他类型的照应进行了界定；2）通过从句法、语义和语用三个层面对推理照应进行描写和分析，来探讨汉语话语中话语的各组成成份、信息分布、句法结构、意义关系及其切分、真值条件、"语境"与"关联"的常项、变项等问题；3）讨论了汉语话语中的词序、语序、逻辑连接词、话语的命题、有生命性与无生命性（animateness and inanimateness）、常规关系（stereotypicality）等等因素对推理照应理解的制约功能，同时也指出了人们对句子意义的理解、对语境假设的推理以及人们对百科知识的掌握程度是理解推理照应关系的关键；4）推理照应关系的辨认与理解是人们在社会语境中进行言语交际的一个必需的、但非充分的过程（a necessary but not sufficient communicative process）。

本研究对推理照应在句法、语义、语用三个层面所做的研究具体表现为：

（一）句法层面

通过考察话语各组成成份如逻辑连接词、信息结构和句法形式 [包括 Clark（1977）的"新/旧信息契约"] 等以及他们在话语中所起的作用，弄清话语的信息分布以及影响汉语话语中推理照应关系在句法层的制约因素（如词序、语序问题等），以确定影响汉语话语中推理照应关系形成的有效性，提出推理照应的第一假设：有效性假设（**the validity hypothesis**）。

（二）语义层面

通过考察描写和解释话语中推理照应关系的理论、区分两种主要的推理照应形式、话语中的意义关系与真值条件以及制约推理照应关系的语义因素（如：语句命题以及语句命题间的交互作用、有生命性与无生命性及其特征等），以确定影响推理照应的可接受性。基于对上述理论的讨论以及语句命题之间的各种修辞关系对推理照应关系的影响，提出推理照应的第二假设：可接受

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