

COURSE: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

LECTURE 10: REFERENCE AND INFERENCE

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Reference and inference

- ▶ Lesson expected learning outcomes:
- ▶ By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:
 - ▶ A. Describe the terms reference and inference.
 - ▶ B. Examine types of reference
 - ▶ C. Discuss how reference is achieved.

Reference and inference: An introduction

- ▶ We talked about deictic expressions:
- ▶ Do you remember them?
- ▶ We mentioned that we use words to refer to people and things
- ▶ They are person, spatial and temporal references and we found that pronouns and adverbs are used in this way.
- ▶ So what is reference?
- ▶ And what is inference?

Meaning of reference

- ▶ **Reference** is an act in which a speaker, or writer, uses linguistic forms to enable a listener or reader, to identify something.
- ▶ Referring expressions can be:
- ▶ proper nouns,
- ▶ definite and indefinite nouns,
- ▶ pronouns.
- ▶ Among other expressions.

Meaning of reference

- ▶ The choice of one type of referring expression rather than the other seems to be based on what the speaker assumes the listener already knows (Yule, 1996).
- ▶ In a shared physical context, expressions such as ‘[She is here.](#)’ may be sufficient for successful reference.
- ▶ If identification seems difficult, more elaborate noun phrases may be used ‘[The teacher is in the office](#)’.

Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. NY: Oxford University Press. (pg. 17)

Meaning of reference

- ▶ It is then tied to the speaker's goals (i.e to identify something) and,
- ▶ the listener's beliefs (i.e, does the listener know what is being identified?)
- ▶ **Referent**=what a word or symbol stands for.
- ▶ **Referring expressions**=linguistic forms such as words and phrases.

Meaning of inference

- ▶ For successful reference, we must recognize the role of inference.
- ▶ Inferring is connecting prior knowledge to text based information to create meaning beyond what is directly stated.
- ▶ An inference, therefore, is any additional information used by the listener to connect what is said to what is meant.

Role of inference

- ▶ The role of inference in communication is to allow the listener to correctly identify which particular entity is being referred to.
- ▶ Therefore, inference and reference have a close connection.
- ▶ Inference makes reference successful.
- ▶ The pigs arrived for the meeting.
- ▶ Who are 'pigs' in this case?
- ▶ Inference is important.

Referential vs attributive use

- ▶ Referential use- where the referent is known
- ▶ Attributive use- where entities are assumed to exist but are not known.
- ▶ Consider this sentence:
- ▶ He wants to build a house within a beautiful scenery.
- ▶ Look at the expression ‘ beautiful scenery’. What does it mean to you?

Referential vs attributive use

- ▶ **Within a beautiful scenery** may mean
- ▶ that the place is known by the speaker and the listener (**This is the attributive use**)
- ▶ It may also mean that such a place is not known and any place can fit that description (**This is the referential use**)

Referential vs attributive use

- ▶ There was no sign of the killer.
- ▶ ‘The killer’ may be known or unknown.
- ▶ This shows that speakers often invite us to assume, via attributive uses, that we can identify what they’re talking about, even when the entity or individual described does not exist.
- ▶ In other times, the reference is known in because of a shared context.

Names and referents

- ▶ In this type of reference, there is a basic intention to identify and a recognition of intention working together.
- ▶ This process works between all members of a community who share a common language and culture.
- ▶ Here, there's a convention that certain referring expressions will be used to identify certain entities on a regular basis.

Names and reference

- ▶ A truly pragmatic view of reference allows us to see how a person can be identified via particular expression:
- ▶ Can I lend you my *Weep not child*?
- ▶ Yes, I would love to have it.
- ▶ Given the context created, the intended referent and the inferred referent would not be a person, but a book

Names and reference

- ▶ There appears to be a pragmatic connection between proper names and objects that will be conventionally associated, within a socio-culturally defined community, with those names.
- ▶ Using a proper name referentially to identify any such objects invites the listener to make the expected reference;

Names and reference

- ▶ Hence show himself/herself as a member of the same community as the speaker.
- ▶ In such cases, it is means that more is being communicated than is said.

The role of co-text

- ▶ Co-text is the linguistic material accompanying the referring expression.
- ▶ France won the cup.
- ▶ If this appears as a headline of a newspaper, we can say that 'France' is a referring expression and 'won the cup' is a co-text.
- ▶ The rest of the newspaper is more co-text.

The role of co-text

- ▶ The co-text helps to limit the range of possible interpretations we might have for a word like 'France'.
- ▶ Hence, the referring expressions actually provides a range of reference or a number of possible referents.
- ▶ We can therefore say that a co-text is the linguistic environment in which is referring expression is used (Yule, 1996).

The role of context

- ▶ While **co-text** is the linguistic environment, **context** is the physical environment.
- ▶ It has a powerful impact on how referring expressions are interpreted.
- ▶ Such contexts can be:
 - ▶ Classroom
 - ▶ Restaurant
 - ▶ Dispensary
 - ▶ Courtroom

The role of context

- ▶ Consider these sentences drawn from Yule (1996)
 - ▶ The heart attack mustn't be moved.
 - ▶ Your ten-thirty just cancelled.
 - ▶ A couple of rooms have complained about the heat.

What do they mean in these contexts?
- ▶ These examples provide some support for an analysis of reference that depends on local context and the local knowledge of the participants.

The role of context

- ▶ The interpretation will depend on familiarity with the local socio-cultural conventions.
- ▶ Hence inference will be based on this familiarity.
- ▶ Note:
- ▶ Reference is not just a relationship between the meaning of a word or phrase and an object or person in the world.
- ▶ It is **a social act**, in which the speaker assumes that the word or phrase chosen to identify an object or person will be interpreted as the speaker intended.

TYPES OF REFERENCE

- ▶ ANAPHORIC REFERENCE-
- ▶ CATAPHORIC REFERENCE

ANAPHORIC REFERENCE

► CONSIDER:

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.

The pronouns ‘it’, ‘her’, ‘he’, ‘they’ are examples of subsequent reference to already introduced referents.

This is anaphoric reference.

After the initial introduction of some entity, speakers will use various expressions to maintain reference.

Anaphoric reference

- ▶ This subsequent reference is called anaphoric reference or anaphora.
- ▶ The second or subsequent expression is the **anaphor**.
- ▶ The initial expression is the **antecedent**.

Can you identify the antecedents and anaphors in the above extract?

Anaphoric reference

- ▶ There is a range of expressions which are used for anaphoric reference in English.
- ▶ The most common are pronouns but definite noun phrases can also be used:
 - ▶ Peel an onion and slice it.
 - ▶ Drop the slices into hot oil.
 - ▶ Cook for three minutes.

CATAPHORIC REFERENCE

- ▶ In some cases, the referring item comes before the referent.
- ▶ This is called cataphoric reference.
- ▶ I drove miles away to meet him. Myles had visited the country after 15 years.
- ▶ Him is used first and may be difficult to interpret unless the full noun phrase is presented.
- ▶ ‘the slices’.

Zero anaphora

- ▶ When the interpretation requires us to identify an entity (i.e. cook (?))... , and has no linguistic expression, it is called:
- ▶ **Zero anaphora or ellipsis.**
- ▶ The use of zero anaphora as a means of maintaining reference clearly creates an expectation that the listener will be able to infer who or what the speaker intends to identify.

Zero anaphora

- ▶ See more examples:
- ▶ If I don't cook for them, who will?
- ▶ I can play the piano, and my sister the flute.
- ▶ She has won the game before, so she will again.
- ▶ He has three vehicles while his wife has five.

Zero anaphora

- ▶ The use of zero anaphora as a means of maintaining reference clearly creates an expectation that the listener will be able to infer who or what the speaker intends to identify.
- ▶ It is also another obvious case of more being communicated than is said.
- ▶ The listener is also expected to make more specific types of inference when the anaphoric expressions don't seem to be linguistically connected to their antecedent.

Conclusion on Reference and inference

- ▶ The social dimension of reference may also be tied to the effect of collaboration.
- ▶ The immediate recognition of an intended referent, even when a minimal referring expression is used, represents something shared, hence something common.
- ▶ This implies social closeness.

Conclusion on reference and inference

- ▶ Successful reference means that an intention was recognized, via inference, indicating a kind of shared knowledge and hence social connection.

Summary

- ▶ We have seen that reference works successfully when there is proper inference
- ▶ We have come across key terms:
- ▶ Co-text
- ▶ Context
- ▶ Anaphora
- ▶ Cataphora
- ▶ Anaphor
- ▶ Referent
- ▶ Zero anaphora or ellipsis.

Reference

- ▶ Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Next lesson

- ▶ In our next lesson, we shall learn about:
- ▶ **SPEECH ACT THEORY AND SPEECH ACTS.**