
There is a multitude of different ways of making a reference in text. The same individual can be indentified with a bare *her*, a more explicit *that/ the woman* or even more rigidly by a *Susan Jones*. This book offers a rich analysis of the factors underlying the choice of different forms and a theory to explain it.

As a starting point, Ariel considers the well-worked notion of 'givenness' as a key factor in explaining choice of referential form but quickly rejects what she calls the geographic account. According to this account, different forms of reference reflect the source of 'given' information from which an antecedent can be recovered. While proper names and definite descriptions are claimed to recover antecedents through the listener's general knowledge, demonstratives are said to work on the immediate physical context and pronouns or gaps on the immediate linguistic context. As Ariel quite correctly points out, it is easy to find counterexamples to this simple mapping between referential form and recovery function. Even gaps do not always need linguistic antecedents; witness the sauce bottle with the inscription 'shake ø well', where the ø recovers its antecedent from the physical context. In its place, Ariel builds on Sperber and Wilson's notion of contextual accessibility to account for the distribution of different referential forms.

The basic idea behind the accessibility theory is simple. On the one hand, antecedent information is graded according to how accessible it is to the listener at any point in comprehension, and on the other, noun phrases are marked according to the presumed accessibility of their intended antecedents. So an NP marked for high accessibility, such as a gap or an unstressed pronoun, will only recover a readily accessible antecedent; one marked for intermediate accessibility, such as a demonstrative...
or stressed pronoun, will only recover an intermediately accessible antecedent; and so on.

The correlation between degree of accessibility marking of a noun phrase and the type of context that it usually depends on is explained according to general principles of accessibility for the different types of context. Thus, in general, encyclopedic knowledge is less accessible than knowledge of the immediate physical context and that less accessible than knowledge of the immediate linguistic context. Apart from this rather coarse grading, there are many text-internal factors which contribute to the accessibility of antecedents: recency of mention is one, but the topicality or salience of the antecedent, as identified in various psycholinguistic studies, also plays a role. Perhaps the most interesting suggestion concerns what Ariel describes as the unity of the antecedent context with the current expression. In certain cases the context may be more strongly linked to the current expression, as with a subordinate and a main clause versus two clauses simply conjoined. In these cases an antecedent in the relevant clause is going to be slightly more accessible since the context is more firmly united with the material under interpretation and so likely to still be under consideration when the noun phrase is encountered.

Turning to the other side of the argument, Ariel’s accessibility-marking scale for noun phrases is very much in line with other proposals in the literature (see Givon 1983). At the top, low-accessibility markers are ‘full name + modifier’, going down through definite descriptions, demonstratives, stressed pronouns, and cliticized pronouns to gaps of various sorts, with 15 or so items identified. Underlying this scale, Ariel proposes three universal factors, informativity, rigidity of reference, and degree of attenuation. Thus at the bottom, expressions marked for high accessibility are those which are low in semantic information, flexible designators, and highly attenuated in form (for example, gaps or unstressed pronouns); up the scale they become increasingly informative and rigid in their designation, with associated increase in phonological richness (for example, definite descriptions and proper names).

Many of the basic ideas proposed here can be found in various forms distributed across the linguistic and psycholinguistic literature, but the great strength of this book is in pulling together the threads to mount a convincing argument for the importance of accessibility across a wide range of languages. Although items with a certain accessibility marking in one language will not always translate directly into an item with the same accessibility marking in another, the scale does seem to be ordinal within any language. Thus you never find a case where, say, a full name is accorded a higher accessibility rank than a demonstrative, or that higher than an unstressed pronoun. Ariel is also to be commended for her
attempt to bridge the gap between the literature on intrasentential anaphora and that which takes a wider text-based view of reference. The book contains a fascinating discussion of how the so-called avoid-pronoun constraint is probably more generally a case of matching accessibility marking with accessibility, even though this may on occasion be encoded within the grammar of a particular language.

However, the theory does have its weaknesses. The greatest problem with accounts of this kind is in setting up clear principles for defining the accessibility of an antecedent independently of the preferred form of reference. As in the case of focus theories, it is difficult to go beyond rules of thumb, like the amount of intervening text, topicality of the antecedent, and so on. What is obviously needed is a clearer psychological-processing account which incorporates accessibility. Ariel puts her faith in the inchoate theory of PDP representation, which may well turn out to be well justified. However, it is by no means certain that accessibility represented in these systems would be unidimensional; that is, it may well be true that the listener's ability to recover antecedent information could involve a complex interaction between the form of reference and the form of representation of the antecedent. To take a simple example, the anaphoric interpretation of demonstratives versus definite descriptions can be different in the same context. Thus in the following example (Webber 1988) Those files receives a more restricted anaphoric interpretation than The files.

(1) Some files are superfiles
(2) To screw up someone's directory, look at the files.
(3) If one of them is a superfile, delete it.

versus

(1') Some files are superfiles
(2') To screw up someone's directory, look at those files.
(3') They will tell you which of his files is absolutely vital to him.

Thus the definite description seems to have access to different antecedent information associated with the currently relevant situation (that is, in relation to directories having files) than the demonstrative, which can only operate on a more distant linguistic antecedent (that is, some files). Even though it may be argued that a linguistic antecedent is somehow always more accessible than the knowledge-related one, this claim has yet to be convincingly demonstrated. For instance if (2) had contained the superfiles (a more informative description) it would then recover the same antecedent as those files.

However, overall this book must be heralded as an exciting contribu-
tion to the pragmatics literature and is witness to the great potential offered by taking an interdisciplinary approach to language and language use.

University of Glasgow

SIMON GARROD

References


In 1972 Bertil Malmberg stated that 'at the outbreak of the First World War ... purely descriptive linguistics ... (was) generally looked upon as nonscientific. The leading authorities did not realize its necessity' (Malmberg 1972: 223). A descriptive linguist these days may sometimes have the impression — not in her/his best of moods, of course — that things have not changed very much. This is not the case, of course, as we all (?) know. The publication of an introduction to descriptive linguistics should help to overcome thoughts of this kind, especially if our somewhat depressive descriptive linguist is a German realizing with some astonishment that it is a German introduction to the discipline (written by Germans in German). Alas, as to its topic it is not a germane book, which is something that (not only) a (German) linguist reading it must soon come to realize.

After an adequately modest introduction, some practical hints for using the book, and some maps that attempt to give a rather rough impression of where the languages mentioned are spoken, the book starts with an introductory chapter that abounds in the authors' immunizing strategies against criticism (for example pp. 26, 28; see also pp. 8, 9, 11). Moreover, although this introduction starts with some polemics against Chomskyan linguistics, it ends with more kowtowing to the master — an inconsistency that alarms the attentive reader, who fears that she might be confronted with more inconsistencies of this kind in the pages to come.

Chapters 2–6 attempt to give a survey of the linguistic subdisciplines 'phonetics/phonology', 'morphology', 'syntax', 'semantics', and 'pragmat-