ACCESSING NOUN-PHRASE ANTECEDENTS. M. Ariel.

Anaphora, like other language phenomena, can be and has been approached from various starting points and tackled in the framework of different linguistic theories. Described at sentence and discourse levels, analyzed in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, anaphoric relations have been gradually formalized and accounted for in ever broader context. Once the speaker and addressee had been brought into consideration, the conventions governing their interaction and the processes underlying it attracted the linguists' interest. Mire Ariel's efforts in this respect have contributed to bringing about a major shift in the treatment of referring expressions, by applying a cognitive approach to anaphoric items, their antecedents and the relation between them. Her study is based on the assumption that context retrievals are governed by a system of markers which ensure access to mental entities. Accordingly, "not all retrievals are left to the addressee's discretion" but the speaker "has specific means...to guide her addressee as to the retrieval process". In other words, the accessibility markers /AMs/ employed by a speaker help the addressee make certain predictions.

While introducing the Accessibility theory, the author reviews the so called "Geographic" view of context and reveals its restricted validity. She shows convincingly that the same AMs can refer to mental entities derived from different contexts. Definite descriptions, proper names, demonstrative expressions and pronouns are found to occur relative to the three types of context: a. Encyclopaedic knowledge; b. Physical context; c. Linguistic context. Hence, no one-to-one correspondence can be established between their form and function. To overcome this
problem Ariel proposes that AMs be analyzed in terms of accessibility degree rather than context type. The shift is indicated by a change in terminology - Givenness, which is associated with "geographic" context, is replaced by Accessibility, which is related to memory structure. Thus, the choice of referring expressions is determined by the connection between accessibility marking and memory. A speaker signals how automatic or not the retrieval is by using various AMs as a set of instructions for the addressee's search process. Ariel's view is that the procedure of context search is conducted simultaneously with the comprehension process.

As an advocate of the Accessibility Theory, Ariel adduces supportive evidence from a vast corpus of authentic texts and a number of linguistic and psycholinguistic studies. Relative to the degree of activation of the mental entities which are subject to retrieval, she identifies three major classes of AMs: a. Low AMs - definite descriptions and proper names; b. Intermediate AMs - personal and demonstrative pronouns; 3. High AMs - "deep anaphora" and 3rd p. pronouns. Applying the Accessibility Theory at discourse level first, Ariel submits the AMs to a unified treatment and succeeds in revealing their joint functioning as members of a hyperarchical set. Four are the factors contributing to the assumed and signalled accessibility status of the antecedents: a. distance; b. competition; c. saliency, and d. unity /cohesion/. By studying the sensitivity of each marker to these factors, the author proves that the form of the markers depends crucially on the degree of accessibility. The wordier, less ambiguous and less attenuated the marker, the lower the accessibility presumed by the speaker. Thus, for instance, a full proper name
plus a modifier will signal the lowest accessibility degree in comparison to a gap, which will obviously be at the other extreme. The next stage of the investigation is indicative of the fact that the sub-types of the three major types are not completely homogeneous themselves. According to the amount of lexical information they contain they can further vary in degree. A full name, for instance, will retrieve less accessible antecedents than a single last or first name. Similarly, an expanded NP will signal lower accessibility than a single N. Thus, after a thorough investigation of the data Ariel establishes a network of inter- and intra-class relationships, which makes each marker identifiable according to its status within the system. For instance, as members of the Intermediate AM-class, distal demonstratives are more powerful than definite AMs /Low AM-class/ and less powerful than 3rd n. pronouns /High AM-class/. They are, furthermore, more efficient markers than the other members of the Intermediate AM-class, i.e. the proximal pronouns. What is attractive about this analysis is that it opens up prospects for further research, which may uncover the contribution of each AM and even each component to the process of retrieval /see e.g. Vendler's recognition procedures for definite NPs, which distinguish between exhaustive, generic and singular interpretations of the definite article the/.

The set of AMs, graded on the basis of parallel counts, logically evolves into an overall hierarchical arrangement - Accessibility Marking Scale. As a major theoretical achievement /with obvious practical implications/, this part of Ariel's work deserves a special mention.

ACCESSIBILITY MARKING SCALE:

Low Accessibility

a. Full name + modifier
b. Full "name"/ name
c. Long definite description
d. Short definite description
e. Last name
f. First name
g. Distal demonstrative + modifier
h. Proximal demonstrative + modifier
i. Distal demonstrative /+NP/
j. Proximal demonstrative /+NP/
k. Stressed pronoun + gesture
l. Stressed pronoun
m. Unstressed pronoun
n. Clicicized pronoun
o. Extremely High Accessibility Markers /gaps, including pro, PRO and wh traces, reflexives, and Agreement/

High Accessibility

The Accessibility marking Scale is not just a challenge to the purely pragmatic approaches to referring expressions. The underlying claim is that the choice of AMs depends crucially on the relative status of each marker on the scale. Should this straightforward prediction, proposed for both marked and unmarked context, find general support, linguists will be able to account for language-specific phenomena against the background of universal principles. Different languages may have different number of markers and the latter may be spaced unevenly along the Scale, but they will all have their choice
and distribution defined on a cognitive base. So, if a one-to-one translation is impossible, the fact that discourse in all languages is governed by the same accessibility principles will predict the scale arrangement universally. What makes The Accessibility Scale a potential universal is the dependence of any AM-form on three criteria: a. informativity; b. rigidity/unambiguosity/, and c. attenuation. Proceeding from the general rule that an effective marker Ariel shows how is a good search-guide, the linguistic marking system is sensitive to non-informational features, which motivates the distributional differences. The lower the accessibility assumed, the more informative, unambiguous and unattenuated the marker, and vice versa. Due to the interdependence between the lexical information in AM and the degree of accessibility of its antecedent, no language-specific rule can be expected to violate the formal choices dictated by the Scale. Therefore, the arrangement of the expressions listed by Ariel is a strong candidate for universal validity. In addition to universality, the Accessibility Marking Scale claims also flexibility and productivity. By employing the principles underlying the Scale a speaker can generate more and more distinctions. Which identifies the Scale as a synchronically productive mechanism for codification of accessibility.

The application of the Accessibility Theory at sentence level reveals that sentence anaphora is similar to discourse anaphora, as the same mechanisms are operative in both cases. Differences turn out to be quantitative rather than qualitative. The more salient the antecedent and tighter the cohesion, the more accessible the antecedents across clause boundary. Ariel further shows that the linguistic aspect of accessibility, i.e. the fact that accessibility conventions are
formulated over specific linguistic expressions, places it within the
domain of grammar and incorporates it into linguistic pragmatics.

As a procedure for context search, conducted simultaneously with
the comprehension process, AMs depend crucially on context environment.
As manifested by Ariel's findings, initial references are obligatorily
directed towards maximizing context implications, the speaker's goal
being to aid the addressee's processing for Relevance. The marking sys-
tem conveys instructions as to "where" to retrieve the background in-
formation required, how to disambiguate and to eliminate the wrong al-
ternatives. The speaker has to decide how explicit he should be and
resort to the amount of wording commensurate with the assumed degree
of accessibility on the part of the addressee.

Finally, the author discusses a number of special cases which ap-
pearance to ignore the accessibility principles formulated by her and
shows that the seeming divergences are not accidental. By "breaking"
the rules these "counterexamples" convey some additional meanings such
as vividness, empathy or negative evaluation. Thus, they tend to support
the general hypothesis rather than challenge its validity.

ACCESSING NOUN-PHRASE ANTECEDENTS by M.Ariel is an important con-
tribution to the study of language semantics and pragmatics. By defining
the notion of accessibility and predicting in a straightforward way the
use of referring expressions, the author presents a formalized hierarchy
/ The Accessibility Marking Scale/ to serve as a universal framework in
further language-specific analyses. The thoroughness and logical consis-
tency of her analysis, the well-structured presentation and clear style
make this book a highly recommendable reading for linguists, psycholin-
guists and all those interested in the theoretical and specific problems
addressed in it.

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