REFERENCE, ANAPHORA, AND DEIXIS: AN OVERVIEW

Setiono Sugiharto

English Department Faculty of Education Atma Jaya Catholic University

ABSTRACT

An adequate understanding of semantic terminologies is essential as it can have a direct effect on the implications of language teaching. A lack of accurate understanding of the terminologies can cause terminological confusion among language teachers. In order to avoid the confusion, this article presents and comprehensively discusses some central semantic notions such as reference, referent, referring expression, anaphora, and deixis. An accurate understanding of these notions can help language teachers, particularly semantics teachers, to enrich their insights into semantic terminologies.

Keywords: reference, anaphora, deixis

ABSTRAK

Pemahaman tentang makna istilah semantik (semantic terminologies) sangat penting karena dapat memberikan dampak langsung pada implikasi pengajaran bahasa. Kurangnya pemahaman terminologi secara akurat dapat mengakibatkan kebingungan terminologi (terminological confusion) diantara para guru bahasa. Untuk menghindari kebingungan terminologi tersebut, artikel memaparkan dan membahas secara komprehensif istilah penting yang sering ditemukan dalam ilmu semantik, seperti reference, referent, referring expression, anaphora, and deixis. Pemahaman yang akurat akan istilah itu dapat membantu guru bahasa, terutama guru semantik memperkaya pengetahuannya akan terminologi semantik.

Kata kunci: reference, anaphora, deixis

INTRODUCTION

A lack of an adequate understanding of the semantic terminologies often contributes to a terminological confusion among language teachers in general and semantics teachers in particular. This in turn has a negative consequence in the implications for language teaching. The purpose of this article is to discuss the notions *reference, referring expression, referent*, and their types. Furthermore, it also attempts to elaborate the central semantics notions *anaphora* and *deixis*. A thorough understanding of these notions can help language teachers, especially semantics teachers, enrich their knowledge of semantic terminology.

Reference, Referring Expression, And Referent

Reference is commonly construed as an act in which a speaker, or writer, uses linguistic forms to enable a listener, or reader, to identify something. In other words, reference is concerned with designating entities in the world by linguistic means. Matthews (1997:312) states that "reference is the relation between a part of an utterance and an individual or set of individuals that it identified."

It is important to note that reference is often contrasted with the notion *sense*. While reference deals with the relationship between the linguistic elements (language) and the non-linguistics elements (the world), sense is exclusively concerned with the intra linguistic relations, particularly words (Palmer, 1981). Thus, the sense of *tulip*, for instance, relates to sense of other words such *flower* (known as hyponym), and the sense of *profound* relates to the sense of *deep* (known as synonym). The relation among words is also known as *sense relation*.

The linguistic forms or the linguistic means used to identify or designate entities are called *referring expressions,* which can be proper nouns (*Edison, Bandung*), noun phrases that are definite (*the woman*, *the singer)*, or indefinite (*a man, an island*), and pronouns (*he, her, it, them*). Noun phrases, proper nouns are called primary referring expressions, while pronouns are termed secondary referring expressions (Kreidle,1998). In addition, Kreidler (1998:130) states that referring expression is "a piece of language that is used in an utterance and is linked to something outside language, some living or dead or imaginary entity or concept or group of entities or concepts."

When the sentence *Einstein is a famous scientist* is uttered to make a statement, we will say that the speaker refers to a certain individual (*Einstein*) by means of a referring expression. The thing or things (or the individual named Einstein in this case) in the world referred to by a particular expression is called its *referent(s).* Thus the notion *referent* is an expression for the thing picked out by uttering the expression in a particular context (Saeed, 1997:27). Sentences may also contain two or more referring expressions. For example, if the sentence *Bill kissed Mary* is uttered, with its characteristic force of

making a statement, both *Bill* and *Mary* would be referring expressions, their referents being the individuals identifiable by names as *Bill* and *Mary*.

Kreidler (1998) further argues that the difference between referent and referring expression lies in the fact that there is no natural connection between referring expression and referent. There is no privileged one-to-one relationship between the expression *Bill Clinton* and the Bill Clinton, who was the president of the USA. Furthermore, the existence of a referring expression does not guarantee the existence of a referent in the physical-social world that we inhabit. We can create expressions with referents such as *the dragon in my house*, *the emperor of Indonesia* without necessarily proving the existence of their physical referent.

Types of Referents

Kreidler (1998) provides a comprehensive account of different types of referents used by a language to identify entities in the world. According to him, there are essentially three kinds of differences in referents. Each of these will be discussed below.

Unique and Non-Unique Referents

A referent has a unique entity or unique sets of entities if its referring expression has fixed reference. Thus entities like *the Rocky Mountains, the Louvre, the Pacific Ocean, Germany* designate unique entities that can be found only in certain places, and knowledge of it is part of one's general knowledge. On the other hand, a referent may have a non-unique entity if its referring expression has variable reference. Entities such as *that woman, my brother, a mountain,* are not unique since they are different every time they are used, and knowledge of it is a matter of specific knowledge. It is the physical and linguistic contexts that help the speakers to identify those entities.

Concrete and Abstract Referents

Concrete referents are denoted by concrete or tangible objects such as *book, lamp, tree, brick,* whereas the abstract ones are designated by abstract or intangible entities such as *beauty, democracy, knowledge, philosophy*. It is interesting to note that lexemes with different kinds of denotation generally occur in different kinds of utterances and may have different effects on other lexemes. Thus the lexeme *key* has a concrete referent in the phrase *the key to the front door*, bearing literal meaning, and an abstract one in *the key to success*, bearing figurative meaning.

Countable and Non-Countable Referents

It is the property of noun phrase that merits the notion countable and non-countable, both of which can be concrete and abstract. Concrete countable expressions are those that are separate from one another, and those that can ordinarily be counted one

by one. This includes such entities as *pencil, bags, chairs, and watches*. Abstract countable nouns include such entities as *problem, experience, and suggestion*. Concrete non-countable phrases have three kinds of reference: those that refer to continuous substances (*ketchup, sauce, milk, ink*), those that name substances consisting particles not worth counting (*rice, sand*, *sugar*), and those that refer to collections (*furniture, jewelry, luggage*).

The feature that distinguishes countable noun phrases from non-countable ones is that the former recognize the division between singular and plural forms while the latter do not. Thus we can say *an apple, a hat, an umbrella*, the overt specifier being present preceding the singular nouns, and *some apples, some hats*, *some umbrella, some apple sauce, some mud, some ink*, with a zero specifier preceding both plural countable and non-countable.

In a language such as English the names of the animals that are countable by nature become uncountable when referring to food. An instance of this is the lexemes *(a) lamb, (a) chicken, and (a) turkey*. Finally, some nouns phrases may have dual class membership in that it can be countable and noun-countable, depending upon the items it designates. Such entities as *(a) paper, (a) iron, (a) glass, (a) coffee*, etc. can be countable and non-countable.

Types of Reference

The discussion of reference has become a central concern in semantics, and the classification of different types of the ways of referring is relatively uncontroversial and remains undisputed among semanticists. Lyons (1977), Hofmann (1993), Kreidler (1998), and Cruse (2000) agree on the following classification of reference types:

Generic and Non-Generic Reference

The meaning of the notion *generic* (not really synonymous with general) can be understood by observing the following
(1)   The cat is a nice pet.
(2)   A cat is a nice pet.
(3)   Cats are nice pets.

Each of these sentences may be used to assert a generic proposition, that is a proposition which says something, not about this or that group of cat or about any particular individual cat, but about the class of cats as such. In other words, the entity *cat* in the above sentence is reference to a class of referents (Cruse, 2000:311). The fact that the *cat* in the sentences above has generic meaning can be demonstrated by proposing the question "which cat (s)?". Obviously none of the above sentences are the answer of such as question because the question is not germane . Sentence (1), (2), (3) are in contrast with sentences (4) and (5) below.

(4)   A cat is lying on the mattress
(5)   Cats are lying on the mattress

In that the latter do not have generic reference. They do not necessarily refer to the whole class of cats. Although they are not the answers of the question "which cat (s)?" either, such a question is germane in this context. Lyons (1977) and Cruse (2000) identify two sorts of proposition involving generic reference as argument: either something is predicated of the whole class referred to, or something is predicated of each member of the class. The former has collective reference and the latter distributive reference. Sentence (1) has collective reference, and sentence (2) exemplifies distributive reference.

Definite and Indefinite reference

Kreidler (1998:143) argues that referring expression is definite if the referent from the physical-social context is identifiable for both speaker and hearer. The directive *put the book on the table* contains definite referring expression *the book* and *the table*. Moreover, if the speaker assumes that the addressee can make the necessary implicature to relate a new reference to a previous one, this is also the case of referring expression. The utterance *I bought a new house in a quite neighborhood. The kitchen is very big* has a definite expression *the kitchen*. We can also say that a referent is definite is the referring expression is fixed and therefore presumably part of the addressee's general knowledge, like Mount Everest. Finally, referring expression is definite if the referent has a unique or nearly unique position in the more limited world of the speaker and addressee. For example, the definite referring expression of this type can be seen in the interrogative *have you received the reports from the doctor?*.

The central idea of the indefinite referring expression is that the identity of referent is not germane to the message, and that the hearer has to make a choice from the extension of the noun (Krediler, 1998; Cruse, 2000). It must be emphasized here that indefiniteness is not restricted to the indefinite article only. The following sentences also contain indefinite expressions (Cruse, 2000:308):
(6)   Come up and see me sometime.
(7)   I expect he's hiding somewhere.
(8)   You'll manage somehow.
(9)   Are you looking for something?

Specific and Non-Specific Reference

In order to identify whether a referent has a specific or non specific reference, it is of importance to understand the discourse rather than the expression of the referent *per sei*. It is the discourse that determines the specificity or non- specificity of a reference. Consider now the following sentence:

(10)   Every evening at six o'clock a heron flies over the chalet.

The indefinite noun phrase *a heron* in this sentence can, under one interpretation, be understood to refer to a specific referent. It refers to a particular heron that the speaker has in mind. We can further support the specificity of the reference by providing the same context as follow:

(11)   It nests in the ground of the chateau.

The pronoun *It* in (11) is co-referential with *a heron* in (10). Again let us observe the sentence below:

(12) I trust we can find answers to all your questions.

The referent *answer* in (12) can be understood to refer to a non-specific reference since both speaker and hearer are not really sure about the referent being spoken. It should be admitted, however, that very often we cannot exactly tell whether an indefinite noun phrase is being used with specific reference or not as it is dependent very much upon how the speaker/hearer interprets it. Hence, due to the alleged ambiguity of the indefinite noun phrase in the sentence below, it can be construed as being used specifically or non-specifically:

(13) I want to marry a girl with blue eyes.

Under one interpretation, the indefinite noun phrase is used specifically if it implies the existence of some individual who satisfies the description of having blue eyes, and thus can be equated to having the same sense as the definite noun phrase *the girl with the blue eyes* in the same context. On the other hand, it is used non-specifically provided that no presupposition or implication exists.

Anaphora

Halliday and Hassan (1976), in a lengthy discussion of textual cohesion in English, classify reference into two types: exophora and endophora. When we utter *his shirt* or *your uncle*, we refer to some entity in the real world: real world reference is called *exophoric reference*. But we can also refer to the referents in the text items using linguistic means: reference in text is called *endophoric reference*. Consider the following sentence:

(14) *Danny* doesn't like *hamburger*. *He* avoids eating *it* whenever possible

Danny and *hamburger* are two nouns with exophoric reference, while *he* and *it* have endophoric reference: they refer to *Danny* and *hamburger* in the context, and not directly to real-world entity. Traditionally they are called *pronouns*. Endophoric reference can be classified into anaphora and cataphora depending on the position of the antecedent.

Anaphora

Observe the short passage below:

(15) 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, he, her*, and *they*) in the passage are subsequent reference to already mentioned referents, which are known as anaphoric reference or anaphora. Technically speaking, the subsequent reference is called *anaphor* and the initial or already introduced reference is known as *antecedents*. Quirk et. al. (1985) states that anaphoric reference is used where the uniqueness of reference of some phrase *the X* is supplied by information given earlier in the discourse. They further distinguish two kinds of anaphora: direct and indirect. In direct anaphora, the referents have already occurred in the text, and thus can be identified directly, whereas in indirect anaphora the hearer identifies the referents indirectly from his knowledge by inferring what has been mentioned. Consider the following sentences:

(16) John bought a TV and tape recorder, but he returned the *tape recorder.*
(17) John bought a car, but when he drove *it* one of the wheels came off.

Sentence (16) exemplifies the use of direct anaphora where the referent the *tape recorder* can be identified directly, while sentence (17) contains the indirect anaphora where the noun *car* has been substituted by anaphor *it.* Similarly, Matthews (1997:18) defines anaphora as "the relation between a pronoun and another element, in the same or in an earlier sentence, that supplies its referents". Finally, Kreidler (1998) adds another type of anaphora, which he calls *lexical anaphora.* This anaphora is the restatement of a certain referring expression by means of repetition, synonym and superordinate as in (19):

(18) There was a strange painting on the wall.

	the painting	
(19) I wondered where	the picture	had come from
	this work of art	

Cataphora

The notion *cataphora* is less common in use than that of anaphora. Cataphora is the relation between an anaphoric expression and an antecedent that comes later (Matthews 1997:48). Thus cataphora refers to entity that is mentioned latter in the discourse. Consider this sentence:

(20) I turned to the corner and almost stepped on *it.* There was *a large snake* in the middle of the path.

The pronoun *it* (the cataphor) in the sentence can be interpreted as referring forward to a noun phrase *a large snake*, (the antecedent) and is said to have cataphoric reference. Cataphora is also known as *anticipatory anaphora* or *backward anaphora*.

Deixis and Its Types

The notion *deixis* has become one of the important topics that merits our attention. Deixis is a semantics notion, which is originally derived from a Greek word meaning *pointing* or *indicating* via language. Any linguistic form used to accomplish this *pointing* is called a **deictic expression**. The adjective deictic (*deikticos*) has the sense of *demonstrative*. When we notice a strange object and ask, "What's that?" we are using a deictic expression (*that*) to indicate something in the immediate context. Deictic expressions are also sometimes called **indexical**.

The notion of what deixis is relatively uncontroversial among the linguists. Lyons (1977:637) offers the following definition of deixis: "the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically of a single speaker and at least one addressee."

Similarly, Yule (1996:9) argues that deixis is a form of referring that is tied to the speaker's context, with the most basic distinction between deictic expressions being "near speaker" versus "away from the speaker." If the referents being referred to are near the speaker, the **proximal terms** such as *this*, *here*, *now* are used. By contrast, the **distal terms** such as *that*, *there, then* are employed provided that the referents are away from the speaker.

Matthews (1997:89) states that deixis is "they way in which the reference of certain elements in a sentence is determined in relation to a specific speaker and addressee and a specific time and place of utterance." From the three definitions given above, it can be inferred that the notion deixis involves the pointing of certain referents that belong primarily to the category of persons (objects), speaker-addressee relationship, space, and time, context of utterance. Respectively, this category is termed **person deixis, social deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis,** and **discourse deixis.** We shall examine each of these in detail.

Person Deixis

Person deixis basically operates on a three-part division, exemplified by the pronouns for first person or the speaker (*I*), second person or the addressee (*you*) and third persons or other participants (*he, she, it*). What is important to note here is that the third person singular forms encode gender, which is not deictic by nature because it is not sensitive to aspects of the speech situation (Cruse, 2000). Another point worth making with regard to the person deixis is the use of plural pronouns, which can be in the

representative or **true** use (Cruse, 2000:320). If the pronoun *we* is spoken or written by a single speaker or writer to represent the group he or she refers to, it is the case of representative use. On the other, if it used to refer to the speaker and the group, the pronoun *we* is employed in its true sense. The representative and true use of pronoun *we* are also called **inclusive** and **exclusive** *we*, respectively. The inclusive-exclusive distinction is explicable in the utterance *Let's go* (to some friends) and *Let us go* (to someone who has captured the speaker and friends). The action of going is inclusive in the first, but exclusive in the second.

The pronoun systems in English can be seen in the following:

	Singular	**Plural**
1st person	I/me	we/us
2nd person	you	you
3rd person	he/him, she/her, it	they/them

Social Deixis

In many languages the deictic categories of speaker, addressee, and other(s) are elaborated with markers or relative social status (addressee with higher status versus addressee with lower status). Expressions that indicate higher status are described as **honorifics**.

A widely quoted example to describe the social deixis is the so-called TV distinction, from the French *tu* (referring to familiar addressee), and *vous* (referring to non-familiar addressee). Other languages that make a distinction between the social status are German with the distinguishing pronoun *du* and *Sie*, and Spanish with *tu* and *Usted*. In the social context the higher, older, and more powerful speaker will tend to use the *tu* version to a lower, younger, and less powerful addressee, and be addressed by the *vous* form in return.

Spatial Deixis

The concept of distance is relevant to spatial deixis, where the relative location of people and things is being indicated. As Cruse (2000:320) puts it "spatial deixis manifests itself principally in the form of locative adverbs (*here* and *there*) and demonstratives or determiners (*this* and *that*)." In English the spatial deictic system is indicated by two terms labeled **proximal** and **distal.** Such terms as *here* and *this* indicate that the location is relatively close to the speaker, and hence proximal. Conversely, the terms *there* and *that* indicate the relative distant of the location from the speaker, and hence distal.

In considering spatial deixis, Yule (1996) warns that the location from the speaker's perspective can be fixed mentally and physically. Speakers temporarily away from their home location will often continue to use *here* to mean the (physically distant) home location, as if they were still in that location. Speakers also seem to be able to project themselves into other locations prior to being in those locations, as when they say "I'll come later" (movement to addressee's location). This is sometimes described as **deictic projection**.

Temporal Deixis

Cruse (2000) asserts that temporal deictics function to locate points or intervals on the time axis, using the moment of utterance as a reference point. The time axis can be divided into three major divisions: before the moment of utterance, at the time of utterance, and after the time of utterance. The time adverbial that forms a basic concept in temporal deixis in English includes *now* and *then*.

Now displays the same capacity for indefinite extension, which can refer to a precise instant, such as *Press the button-now*!; or it can accommodate a wide swathe of time like *The solar system is now in a relatively stable phase* (Cruse, 2000:320). However, very often *now* indicates the time coinciding with the speaker's utterance; for example, *I am reading a novel now* (the action done at the moment of the speaker's utterance). *Then*, on the other hand, designate the time period which is distal from the speaker's utterance. *Then* is normally interpreted from the context, as the following sentences indicate:
(1) Watching movies at 8.30 tonight? Okay, I'll see you then.
(2) December 23 rd , 2002? I was in Solo then.

Apart from the time adverbial, there are essentially other types of temporal deixis worth mentioning here. One type is related to calendric notions that include both clock time as in [1] and calendar time as in [2]. Other temporal deictic related to calendric system includes such expressions as *today, yesterday, tomorrow, this week, last week, next* week, *this month, last moth, next month, this year, last year, and next year*. The last type of temporal deixis in English is related to the verb tense, as illustrated in the following sentences.
(3) We live here now.
(4) We lived there then.

The verb tense in (3) is in simple present and is normally treated as close to (proximal) the speaker's current situation, whereas in (4) the verb tense is simple past, and is thought as distant (distal) by the speaker.

Discourse Deixis

Discourse deixis is actually a linguistic device used to designate an entity in the discourse. The linguistic devices can be the deictic expressions *this* and *that,* the expression *hereby* in the explicit performative sentence, and sentence adverbs such as *therefore* and *furthermore*. The following sentences exemplify each of these devices.

(5) Listen to this, it will kill you!
(6) That has at least two implications.
(7) Notice is hereby served that if payment is further delayed, appropriate legal action will be taken.
(8) That rationale is controversial; furthermore…………

The deictic expression *this* in (5) and *that* in (6) respectively refer to future discourse element and past discourse element. Similarly, the *hereby* in (7) points to current discourse. Finally, the sentence adverb marker in (8) refers to what follows in the future discourse. Discourse deixis is not, however, to be confused with anaphora, the difference being that the latter might extract a referent from an extralinguistic entity. Thus the anphor *she* in sentence (9) below does not strictly refer to the word *Susan* itself.

(9) Susan is indeed sexually attractive. She has been admired by many men.

CONCLUSION

In the realm of language pedagogy, where teachers play a central role as knowledge transmitter, terminological confusion abounds. The confusion may be due to a lack of adequate understanding of the specific terms of the subject they teach. This article has presented and comprehensively discussed some important semantics notions such as reference, referent, anaphora, and deixis. A through understanding of these notions can help teachers enrich their insights into semantics.

REFERENCES

Cruse, D.A. 2000. *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K and Ruqaiya Hasan. 1976. *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.

Hofmann, Th.R. 1993. *Realms of Meaning*. London:Longman.

Kreidler, C.W. 1998. *Introducing English Semantics*. London: Routledge.

Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics. Vol. 1 & 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Matthews, P.H. 1997. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Palmer, F.R. 1981. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saeed, J.I. 1997. *Semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Quirk, R, Sydney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvick. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.

Yule, G. 1996. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.