

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSION AND SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SENTENCES IN ENGLISH ^(*)

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One of the most noticeable developments in the linguistic sciences in the past few decades or so is the study of discourse and text.⁽¹⁾ The keen interest of linguists for various observable facts of language use, conversational interaction or communicative events became more integrated under the label of discourse analysis.⁽²⁾ The term 'discourse' is used in this paper to refer to a continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence; several different applications may be found within this broad notion. At its most general, a discourse is behavioral unit which has a pre-theoretical status in linguistics: it is a set of utterances which constitutes any recognizable speech event. Classification of discourse function and the behavior of speakers is often carried out in socio-linguistic studies. In recent years, many linguists have attempted to discover linguistic regularities in discourses.

There may be important linguistic dependencies among sentences but it is less clear how far these are sufficiently systematic to enable linguistic units higher than the sentence to be established. To write all that is encompassed under the title of this paper within these limited pages would be impossible. Consequently, the content or scope of this essay is quite conservative in methodology and approach, and it considers the main topics in a particular tradition of work. In a broad sense, this paper is about the nature of colloquial English. In a narrower sense, it is about specific aspects of English which are very important for all Japanese English learners to understand.

In Japan, almost all English teachers and learners consider English carefully and in detail by dividing each sentence into its separate parts (words or morphemes) in order to understand its meaning. So they also study English grammar by analyzing the parts of each sentence. However, the real meaning of English has much to do with many other factors such as deixis, illocutionary acts and so on. Besides this imperfection in teaching and learning English, the Japanese people as a whole seem to have less communicative ability.

Thus, many Japanese seem to be frustrated because of their inability to communicate orally with others and to establish satisfying human relationships. Such isolation sometimes leads to mental disturbance. Failure to make clear meaning in speech, or failure to understand spoken words, may lead to a breakdown in relationships. These are natural consequences, for the spoken language has been neglected in Japanese society for a long time at all levels.

For example, in Japan schools have been concerned only with literacy, with reading and writing, and all education has been built upon them. Almost all schools forbid pupils to talk to each other during school hours. So all elementary and high schools have become silent places with "Shut up!" or "Be quiet!" as the key words in the maintenance of educational discipline.

Nowadays, things are changing very slowly. The Japanese are gradually realizing the importance of the spoken language in the development of their daily lives. Through research in psycholinguistics, we now understand that in our early years, we acquire our words, and thus our ideas through speech and learn to organize them into sense through speech. It is needless to say that even adult communication by speech is extremely important in the development of their minds and personalities and human relationships.

PRESUPPOSITION⁽³⁾

The simplest cases of meaning of discourse in some situation are those in which a speaker says something and means exactly and literally what the person utters. In such cases, the speaker intends to evoke an illocutionary effect in the hearers, the person intends to bring about this effect by getting the hearers to recognize the person's intention, and s/he intends to get the hearers to recognize this intention by virtue of the hearers' knowledge of the rules that govern the utterance of discourse.

We usually find it quite easy to converse at home or among close friends. This is of course partly because we are not under stress. In close groups such as families, friends and colleagues, there may be so many assumptions held in common that there is almost no need to put them into words since they are taken for granted among them. We call these PRESUPPOSITIONS. Some of the examples of restricted uses of words and phrases occur in families, which may have their own words and common stock of knowledge which a stranger does not possess. The following example is a conversation between a husband and his wife:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| WIFE: Saw Mrs. Lewit in MEIRIN. | [1] |
| HUSBAND: Buying another laptop? | [2] |
| WIFE: They didn't have any rice cake. | [3] |
| HUSBAND: Where's the HANGOROSHI then? | [4] |
| WIFE: I think George is all right really. | [5] |
| HUSBAND: House far too big for one thing. ⁽⁴⁾ | [6] |

When we listen to or read this conversation, we first think that there are two monologues: there is no connection between each utterance such that any listener or reader cannot make coherent sense of

what is going on. In other words, their talk has none of the reciprocity which we usually expect in conversation.

To understand the discourse above it is necessary for us strangers to have the following information in advance.

- (1) Mr. and Mrs. Lewit have come to live in the neighborhood and have bought a house which the husband in the conversation thinks is extremely grand for them.
- (2) MEIRIN is the grocer's name where the wife was buying some rice cake, despite the husband's remark about the laptop (computer).
- (3) Mr. Lewit has spent several years in dealing with personal computers and he thinks himself an expert on them and can talk of nothing else.
- (4) As a result, the husband in the conversation finds Mr. Lewit very pompous and thinks it a pity that he himself cannot handle any computer — hence his remark about buying another laptop computer.
- (5) The wife, however, is quite impressed with Mr. Lewit's talking about computers, 'George' as she calls him.
- (6) The family's name for a kind of rice cake is HANGOROSHI — what other people usually call OHAGI in Japan.

If we have these pieces of information and if we know what meaning attaches to particular words or phrases in this family, then we have no difficulty in following the conversation. The husband and his wife do not use a large number of words and phrases as they would have had to if they were explaining the conversation to strangers. Their sentences are very economical, but the words that they use are full of meaning.

More difficulty arises when we come to speak outside such restricted situation. There may be several reasons for this. One is that we may need to use other words to explain our meaning and we often fail to explain because we do not realize how restricted is the meaning of some of the words that we use to other people. When we as strangers hear the presupposition, we think that it is new information that is given or old information for the family.

Another reason for the difficulty of understanding conversation that we sometimes feel in some situations is that we have misconceptions about the nature of conversation. We imagine it will be pitched at some high level which will be beyond us. Conversation may be like that, but it is much more likely to be commonplace, occupied with matters of everyday concern. And people talk about such things without diffidence or embarrassment. Some conversation is not really concerned with

communicating information or ideas, but with establishing goodwill and maintaining friendly relationships.

In most conversational situations the speaker ought to be very thoughtful of the hearer's knowledge about the theme (ideas) of new information that the speaker wants to convey. Otherwise the hearer cannot understand the speaker. The speaker also must be considerate to construct his discourse with adequate ordering of the sequence of elements in the clause and that of the clauses in the discourse so that the hearer understand the new information easily.

REDUNDANCY

Let us examine the transcription of a recording of a speaker on an informal occasion. Suppose the speaker concerned was relaxing over a cup of coffee with colleagues.

"He was as it were, you know him do you? how shall I say, er withdrawn, er, shut-in, as though as though he had a kind of mm goldfish bowl round his head. Not very easy."⁽⁵⁾

The words in italics form the sentence as it would probably be if we were writing, that is: "He was withdrawn as though he had a goldfish bowl round his head." All the other words are in some sense characteristic of spoken rather than written English.

There is a freer form of sentences in the colloquial expression. This group of words has two other sentences stuck in the middle of it. 'you know him do you,' and 'how shall I say.' Despite what school grammar books tell us about a sentence having a subject and a verb, many sentences in spoken English have no subject or verb at all. The examples are such as with the finishing expression 'Not very easy.' in the above transcription and the former examples of [1] 'Saw Mrs. Lewit at MEIRIN.', of [2] 'Buying another laptop?' and of [6] 'House far too big for one thing.' These cases will be discussed later as ELLIPSIS.

Repetition or redundancy is not usually made completely consciously. In the transcription above, the speaker is telling his listeners, no less than three times, of the difficulty his acquaintance has in making contact with people. He tells that he is 'withdrawn', 'shut-in' and it is 'as though he had a goldfish bowl round his head'. He does not say to himself 'I'll put it in three different ways', but it seems that his concern with effectively making his point leads him to do so.

In general, the spoken language contains a lot of redundancy. When more words than necessary are used to do the job of communication, it is regarded as a fault in discussing the written language. However, in the spoken language, it need not be a fault at all but a positive virtue. If we are reading and we do not wholly grasp the meaning, we can read the troublesome sentences again and again.

But we cannot look over speech in this way. It has gone and gone swiftly. The speaker needs to make sure his important points are grasped the first time.

ELLIPSIS

When we examine how a sequence of sentences in English can be combined to form a spoken discourse, the two devices which most pervasively mark the connections between one idea and another are, on the one hand, the overt linkage of conjunctions and conjuncts, and, on the other hand, covert linkage of coreference and substitution which exist by virtue of pro-forms and ellipsis.

Ellipsis occurs when the structure of one sentence is incomplete and the missing element(s) can be recovered from a previous sentence unambiguously. It is more common in speech than in writing. We can classify some examples as follows: ⁽⁶⁾

I Ellipsis in declarative sentences

(a) Ellipsis of subject

The element ellipted can be:

(1) the 1st person pronoun:

(I) Saw Mrs. Lewit in MEIRIN. [1]

(I) Beg your pardon. [7]

(I) Told you so. [8]

(I) Don't know what to say. [9]

(2) the 2nd person pronoun:

(You) Want a drink? [10]

The 2nd person pronoun is ellipted, as the examples above show, in declarative questions. It is ellipted in statements only if a tag question is added.

(You) Want a drink, do you? [11]

(You) Had a good time, did you? [12]

[10] can be also interpreted as an ordinary yes-no question with *Do you* ellipted:

(Do you) Want a drink? [10]

(b) Ellipsis of subject plus BE:

(1) the 3rd person pronoun plus BE:

(Their) House (is) too big for one thing. [6]

(2) the 1st person pronoun plus BE:

(I am) Sorry to be late. [13]

(3) *it* plus *is*:

(It is) Good to see you. [14]

(4) the 1st person pronoun followed by other than BE:

(I'll) See you later. [15]

II Ellipsis in interrogative sentences

(a) Ellipsis of subject plus operator

(Was he) Buying another laptop? [2]

If the subject and a main verb BE are omitted in a yes-no question, the resulting elliptical sentence begins with a subject complement or an adjunct.

(Are you) Happy? [16]

(Is there) Anyone in? [17]

(b) Ellipsis of operator alone

(Are) You hungry? [18]

(Does) Anybody need a lift? [19]

III Other cases of situational ellipsis

Ellipsis of an article:

(The) Trouble is there is nothing we can do about it. [20]

(The) Fact is I don't know what to do. [21]

REFERENCE

Reference back to previous statements made by a speaker is an essential ingredient in the continuity and cohesiveness of any discourse. It can be most easily illustrated by considering the use of pronouns.

A man approached a policeman in the street. He was visiting the town and he asked for directions. [1]

The three elements, *man*, *he* and *he*, all have the same referent. The assignment of the two pronouns to this particular referent is attributable to their anaphoric⁽⁷⁾ status. In themselves, pronouns have a very large number of potential referents: *he* can denote any 'masculine' object.

Through anaphora their referent is specified: in this case *to a man who approached a policeman in the street*. An alternative way of putting [1] is to use *the man* instead of *he*:

A man approached a policeman in the street. The man was visiting the town. [2]

If the speaker had said *a man* the listener is likely to assume that another referent was intended. The use of anaphoric *the* ensures that 'he knows that the speaker is continuing to talk about the *man* mentioned in the previous sentence.' If however, the sentence in which *man* had been mentioned had occurred some time much earlier, it may be necessary for the speaker to specify the referent more closely, for example:

A man approached a policeman in the street ... The man who approached a policeman was visiting ... [3]

In this case we have an anaphoric *the* and a following relative clause which restricts the range of referents to this particular 'man'—another 'man' may have been talked about in the sentences between the two above.

In order to become familiar with the notion of entities naturally evoked by a discourse, let us consider the following sentence.

[1] Each coed of Tottori University brought a brick to Mr. Cates' house.

Now consider the continuation of this event in sentences [2]a-e. In each case, we have labeled the referent of the definite pronoun (namely 'he', 'it', or 'they') and the entity naturally evoked by sentence [1].

[2]a. He certainly was surprised.

he = Cates

b. They know he would be surprised.

they = the set of coeds of the University. he = Cates

c. He piled them on the front lawn.

he = Cates them = the set of bricks, each of which some coeds brought to Cates' house

d. He was surprised that they knew where it was.

he = Cates they = the set of coeds it = Cates' house

e. Needless to say, it surprised him.

it = the brick-presenting event him = Cates

From these examples we may make the assumption that one objective of discourse is to communicate a model: the speaker has a model of some situation which, for one reason or another, s/he wishes to communicate to a listener. Thus, the ensuing discourse is an attempt by the speaker to direct the listener in synthesizing a similar mode.

ANAPHOR

An element of discourse is termed anaphoric if we must refer to another element of the same discourse in order to interpret it. The element to which the anaphoric term refers is called the antecedent. The anaphor and its antecedent may belong either to the same sentence or to successive sentences. It is this latter possibility that allows us to consider the anaphor as a potentially transphrasing relation. In the following examples, the anaphor is in italics and its antecedent is in capitals:

- Saw Mrs. Lewit at MEIRIN. { 1 } *They* didn't have any rice cake. { 3 }
- If *he* comes, KIP will be happy. (Cataphoric)⁽⁸⁾ [22]
- I ran into SOME FRIENDS. *These friends/They* spoke to me about you. [23]
- Kip TOLD ME THAT THE WEATHER COULD BE NICE. *Bob too.* [24]
- Kip knows my HOUSE, but not *yours.* [25]
- BOB DETESTS JACK, and *the reverse is also true.* [26]
- KIP, BOB AND JACK came. *They were all happy.* [27]

It seems clear from these examples that the antecedent may have widely varying dimensions and, furthermore, that anaphors may be found in very different parts of speech. The difficulty with anaphor stems not only from its situation on the borderline between syntax and semantics but at least as much from the fact that its semantic nature is far from clear. A widespread approach consists in representing anaphor as substitution: the anaphoric expression 'stands for' its antecedent, or which repetition avoids (a particular application of this approach is found in the traditional definition of the pronoun as a replacement for a noun). According to the stylistic point of view, a desire for elegance might be at the origin of anaphor (repetition is tedious). Modern grammarians consider themselves more scientific because they speak of a desire for economy.

This view of anaphor as substitution gives rise to serious difficulties, the least of which is the following: we would often obtain an ungrammatical sentence if we were to replace the anaphoric expression purely and simply by its antecedent (consider sentences [25] and [26] above). The basic problem is that substitution, even when it is possible without grammatical alterations, may

involve serious modifications in meaning. This is the case when the antecedent is an indefinite expression: the example [23] 'I ran into some friends. They spoke to me about you.' does not have the same meaning at all as 'I ran into some friends. Some friends spoke to me about you.'

Comprehension of English implies that we can establish a correspondence between each sentence and other sentences of English that are considered synonymous, or semantically equivalent; that is, it implies that each sentence is capable of paraphrase.

NOTES

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(1) In recent discussions of language structure beyond the level of the sentence, the term 'discourse' and 'text' have tended to be used without sharp distinction. On the whole, discussions with a more sociological basis or aim tend to use the term 'discourse', while those with a more linguistic basis or aim tend to use the term 'text'. Where the materiality, form and structure of language are at issue, the emphasis tends to be textual; where the content, function, and social significance of language are at issue, the study tends to be of discourse. Discourse is a category that belongs to and derives from the linguistic domain. The relation between the two is one of realization: discourse finds its expression in text. However, this is never a straightforward relation; any one text may be the expression or realization of a number of sometimes competing and contradictory discourses. To sum up, both 'discourse' and 'text' can be used in a much broader sense to include all language units with a definable communicative function, whether spoken or written.

(2) 'Discourse analysis' employs both the methodology and the kinds of theoretical principles and primitive concepts typical of linguistics. It is essentially a series of attempts to extend the techniques so successful in linguistics beyond the unit of the sentence. In general discourse analysis focuses on the structure of spoken language, while text analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the structure of written language. However, this distinction is not clear-cut. Both 'discourse' and 'text' can be used in a much broader sense to include all language units with a definable communicative function, whether spoken or written.

(3) The term 'presupposition' is used informally in this paper, referring merely to uses of language that suggest that some of the information communicated is seen as taken for granted rather than being conveyed as 'new information'. The term 'new information' refers to information which is additional to that already supplied by the previous context of speaking. 'Given' or 'old information', by contrast, refers to the information already available. For a more detailed description, see Levinson (1983) Ch. 4.

(4) Adapted from a BBC program broadcast in 1972 entitled 'In Your Own Words'.

(5) This is also from the same BBC program as in Note (4).

(6) The method of classification and some data are from Quirk, *et al.* (1985) Ch.12

(7) Any native speaker of a natural language knows that there are special relationships among sentences in the language. We call them anaphoric relationships. When two items X and Y in a given discourse are anaphorically related, the full specification of the meaning of Y involves (I) referring to the fact that X and Y are anaphorically related, and (II) repeating some part of the meaning of X. The item playing the role of Y in this characterization will be referred to as anaphors. The items upon which anaphors depend for the specification of their meanings are called their antecedents. The collective term for anaphoric relations is anaphora.

(8) Cataphoric is used for the process or result of a linguistic unit referring forward to another unit. 'Cataphoric reference' is one way of marking the identity between what is being expressed and what is about to be expressed ... Crystal (1985) p.43.

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