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A Gricean Approach to Referring Terms in Discourse

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1. Introduction

A television talk show has become highly popular form of communication and conversation lately. It represents spontaneous forms of conversation and direct address to the audience, and provides a lively conversation by listening to and eliciting information from a wide range of guests. While participating in this vigorous conversation, it seems like many guests use various reference terms about things the audience may want to know more about. When a quick-paced interview takes place, the audience may have to give special attention to reference terms in order to properly interpret the guests' utterances which are not mutually shared. In this sense, an intended referent can be cooperated with both the speakers' and the hearers' point of view depending on indefinite/definite, and explicit/inexplicit referring terms. The difference in both definiteness and explicitness among referring terms can be associated not just with pragmatics but also with the Gricean maxims of quantity and relevance. In this project, a particular script from Oprah Winfrey Show is used to analyze referring sequences. In this study, referring terms will be analyzed by the perspective of Gricean pragmatics.

2. The Data

Stories can be very useful when analyzing referring sequences. According to Shiffrin in 1994, stories offer the opportunity to find referring sequences in which new referents are introduced, and continually used in particular framework to which they are relevant. For this reason, two separate parts from the dialogue between Oprah Winfrey and Ricky Martin, a Latin celebrity, in famous Oprah Show was carefully selected for successful analysis on referring sequences. Those parts of the dialogue script are presented below with dialogues including referring expression alphabetized.

The first part of the dialogue

WINFREY: It is just unbelievably heartbreaking. International singing sensation Ricky Martin is not here for a new album or a hit song. Just a few days ago, Ricky went to Thailand to get a firsthand look at the devastation left in the wake of the tsunami that left almost five million people homeless, but now it's the youngest survivors that Ricky fears for the most.

Mr. MARTIN:

OK. Now we're going to school. You know, it's all about charity and how amazing it is to

(a) find **locals[1]** doing whatever **they[1]** can to help in any way, shape or form. **This lady[2]** made her home a school.

WINFREY:

(b) **Suda[2]** lives in a village where many schools were demolished. To help out, **she[2]** turned her small home into a classroom for 116 students. Almost all of these children lost their

(c) homes and many of them lost family members like **12-year-old Uma[3]**.

Mr. MARTIN:

(d) Is it comfortable for **you[3]** to tell us your story? Is it OK?

UMA: OK.

(Foreign language spoken)

Unidentified Woman #5:

(f) **She[3]**- her mother passed away three years ago so **she[3]** was living with her father. Her father actually ran the restaurant by the beach, and when the big wave

(g) came, her father just went missing and **nobody[4]** still find him.

Mr. MARTIN: To hear children's stories is very difficult.

The children are so vulnerable. Life is not going to be as it was anymore.

(End of excerpt)

The second part of the dialogue

WINFREY:

(h) Ricky says in the midst of so much gut-wrenching heartache, he found **a little miracle[3]**, though. Take a look.

(Excerpt from videotape)

WINFREY:

(i) **They[1]** call **him[3]** **Little Wave[3]**, but **he[3]**'s **a big local hero[3]**.

(j) His story is a beacon of hope to **a community[1]** that has lost so much.

Mr. MARTIN:

(k) **This[3]** is **a star[3]** in Thailand. **This[3]** is **a star[3]**. **This[3]** is **a miracle[3]**.

WINFREY:

- (l) **No one**[4] is sure how **this one-month-old baby**[3] survived the deadly tsunami.
- (m) **He**[3] was discovered three days later abandoned in a park.
- (n) **Little Wave**[3] is **the last unclaimed orphan**[3] at this local hospital.
- (o) **He**[3] was found with a short note pinned to his blanket.

Mr. MARTIN:

- (p) 'Please adopt **this baby**[3]. I cannot afford to take care of **him**[3].
- (q) His parents are missing because of the tsunami disaster at Patong.
- (r) If you cannot adopt **this baby**[3], please take **him**[3] to the orphan helping center, please.'

WINFREY:

- (s) **The nurses**[2] have hidden Little Wave's crib in a cramped back office worried about his safety.

Mr. MARTIN:

Many people pretending to be doctors, pretending to be relatives have come to say,

- (t) 'This is **my baby**[3]. I want to take **this baby**[3] with me.'

(End of excerpt)

The referring terms to be discussed have bracketed into numbers in order to index referents and to help trace the participants prior mentions. This sample analysis will follow Grice's view that "the identity of any reference" is part of the information relied upon to calculate conversational implicatures to resolve referential ambiguity (Grice, 1975). Furthermore, it is more important to go over referential processes rather than reference itself, allowing the use of Gricean pragmatics. In this perspective, it may be helpful to account for distributional differences between definite and indefinite forms, and explicit and inexplicit forms. Although the definite-indefinite and explicit-inexplicit distinctions are not easy to be made, it is essential to distinguish those attributes in order not to make the analysis more complex. Referring terms that are definite mean noun phrases with the definite article the, possessives, pronouns, names, titles; those that are indefinite include noun phrases with the indefinite article a, with quantifiers, and with numerals (Schiffrin, 1994). The distinction between explicit and inexplicit depends whether it is close to nominality or pronominality.

This analysis focuses on each human referent with a continued existence in the story. Since full discussions of each referring sequence would spend too much time, the analysis will be limited in comparing the sequences of similar referring terms which are used in two sections of the story. These referring terms are listed below with the information regarding the sequential location (first or next mention) of each referring term, whether the terms are indefinite (Indf) or definite (Df) and explicit (Ex) or inexplicit (Inex).

Part 1		Part 2	
First Mention	Next Mention	First Mention	Next Mention
Referent 1 Indf/Ex locals(a)	Df/Inex they(a)	Referent 1 Df/Inex they(i)	Indf/Ex a community(j)
Referent 2 Df/Ex This lady(a)	Df/Ex Suda(b) Df/Inex she(b)	Referent 2 Df/Ex The nurses(s)	zero
Referent 3 Df/Ex 12-year-old Uma(c)	Df/Inex you (d), she (f)	Referent 3 Indf/Ex a little miracle(h)	Indf/Ex a big local hero(i), a star(k), a miracle(k) Df/Ex Little Wave(i, n), this one-month-old baby(l) the last unclaimed orphan(n) this baby(p,r,t) my baby(t) Df/Inex He(i,m,o), him(i,p,r), This(k)
Referent 4 Indf/Inex nobody(g)	zero	Referent 4 Indf/Inex No one(i)	zero

In this chart, it is important to point out that these descriptions of referring terms represent common patterns. That is to say, referring terms that are mentioned for the first time are often indefinite noun phrases and explicit, while they are mentioned again tend to be definite and less explicit. In the first section, first-mentions such as ‘*locals*’ and ‘*116 students*’ are indefinite and explicit, whereas next mentions of equivalent referents are definite and inexplicit. However, the chart also shows other referring sequences that are less typical. Referent 3 ‘*a little miracle*’ are mentioned both nominally ‘*a big local hero, a star, this baby, the last unclaimed orphan*’ and pronominally ‘*he, him, this.*’ In other cases, referent 2 ‘*the nurses*’ of the second part of the dialogue and referent 4 ‘*nobody, no one*’ are mentioned only once.

3. The analysis

Out of Grice's four maxims, it is seen that the maxims of quantity and relation work together in a very general way for the hearer to identify the speaker's intended referent. In other words, the maxim of quantity helps hearers get information that can provide clues about the identity of a referent. The maxim of relation leads hearers to search for the relevance of a particular referent. Therefore, this analysis will focus on how referring terms fit into the information presented in a text, and made relevant to that information, centering on first-and next-mentions.

3.1 Referent 1: locals(Part 1), they(Part 2) - First mention

As we noted in the chart above, referent 1 is introduced as an indefinite explicit noun '*locals*' and its next-mentions are explicit terms '*they*' in the first part of the dialogue. The dictionary meaning of "locals" is residents who live in a particular area. Although the first mention tends to rely on a shared knowledge in the world, there is no clue about any particular place hearers may want to know within the clause. For this reason, it seems to violate the maxims of quantity and relation. However, prior textual information is already provided when Winfrey introduce Ricky's story. She mentioned the tsunami which happened in Thailand so the hearers can realize the initial indefinite '*locals*' is relevant to prior textual information. Nevertheless, it still does not provide enough information for the audience to whom the speaker intend. In the same clause, next mention '*they*' can be quickly interpreted by relating it to already existing, relevant information. In this sense, prior textual information also allows next mention to be inexplicit.

In the other part, the first mention presents reference 1 as '*they*.' When Winfrey talks about another story, the first mention '*they*' looks problematic because it is so inexplicit that we cannot be sure who '*they*' might refer to. In this case, it is difficult to know whether '*they*' is a first-mention of a new referent or a next mention of a prior referent. However, the hearers can identify who '*they*' refers to because a collective noun '*a community*' is presented as a next-mention in the same clause. Furthermore, the accurate area is described as '*at Patong*' in the following utterances. In this sense, both first mention '*they*' and next mention '*a community*' are introduced in ways relevant to surrounding information and informative to the identity of the referent.

In these two separate parts of the dialogue, it is quite interesting to see the opposite sequence patterns of referring terms: *locals* (Indf/Ex) - *they* (Df/Inex) and *they* (Df/Inex) - *a community* (Indf/Ex). Although the sequence location of a referent is different, it is viewed '*they*' as evoking a referent that is anchored in the prior text or in the following text. In other words, the former is called anaphoric relations that means those which look back in the text and the latter is mentioned cataphoric relations that means those which look forward in the next for their interpretation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The interpretation of '*they*' can be more broad in the first part than that in the second part. This is because '*locals*' can include all people who live in several different areas where the tsunami happened, while '*a community*' indicates the people who live only in Patong. This different interpretation of '*they*' can make the hearers confusing during the quick exchange of conversation. Lyons (1977) points out that whether a referent is specific or non specific can raise the so-called ambiguity of the interpretation if it is referred to

without contexts. In spite of the ambiguity of the interpretation, the maxim of relation and quantity can be explained in the relationship between first mention and next mention, depending on textual information.

3.2 Referent 2: This lady(Part 1), The nurses(Part 2) - First mention

In the first section, next mentions of '*This lady*' alternates between explicit '*Suda*' and inexplicit terms '*She*'. The first mention '*This lady*' is definite rather than indefinite because '*this*' is used when a person is pointed at, judging by the context. However, it is still problematic for the hearers to know who this lady is. Winfrey presents information that would allow them to expect the existence of such a person. To be more concrete, '*This lady*' is given a first name '*Suda*' in the next mention. In addition, Winfrey's description of '*Suda*' matches the quantity of information that the hearers have to know about her. Meanwhile, first-mention and next-mention are related to the prior topic of the conversation and to the following. That is to say, the referring term can include both appropriate and relevant information.

On the other hand, first mention of '*The nurses*' is definite and is not connected with any referring terms as next mention in second part 2. Nevertheless, background information is textually presented regardless of the relationship between first-mention and next-mention. The textual mention of '*this local hospital*' in a prior utterance is informative enough to allow the hearers to assume that a particular entity '*The nurses*' is in a particular setting '*this local hospital*'. In this sense, the hearers can infer the existence of a referent by providing a framework within which the existence of such a referent is expected.

3.3 Referent 3: 12-year-old Uma(Part 1), a little miracle(Part 2) - First mention

First mention of '*12-year-old Uma*' is definite in section part 1, while first mention of '*a little miracle*' is indefinite in section part 2. In the first section part, the utterance provides the hearers with information that '*12-year-old Uma*' is one of the children who have lost their family members. In this sense, other information in the clause relates the referent to both prior and upcoming topics. In contrast, '*a little miracle*' in the second part would not allow the hearers to expect the existence of such an entity because Winfrey does not present further information.

In terms of next mention, one referent '*12-year-old Uma*' is mentioned only pronominally '*you, she*', whereas the other '*a little miracle*' is mentioned symbolically, nominally and pronominally: a big local hero, a star, and a miracle; Little Wave, this one-month-old baby, the last unclaimed orphan, this baby and my baby; He, him and This. In part 1, next mentions of '*12-year-old Uma*' alternate between *you* and *she*. This may sound confusing to hearers because it switches either to the second person '*you*' or third person '*she*'. If more than two interlocutors participate in a conversation, one might use a few of inexplicit descriptions for a first mention. Likewise, it usually requires hearer's attention on how many people are exchanging their ideas in a particular conversation. In part 2, next mentions of '*a little miracle*' provide too much information by repeating the explicit noun throughout the whole text. One possibility is that speakers sometimes avoid pronouns because they use their own discourse model as a proxy for their addressee's (cf.

Dell & Brown, 1991; Pickering & Garrod, 2004). In this perspective, when the referent is less accessible in their own discourse model, they choose more explicit referring expressions because they assume that the referent is less accessible in their addressee's model and the addressee requires more information to identify the referent. In this case, like the initial reference to '*a little miracle*', symbolic expressions such as '*a big local hero*', '*a star*', and '*a miracle*' are assumed to be more familiar and readily accessible. Thus, it can be said that information that is given either too much or not enough can violate the maxim of quantity.

3.4. Referent 4: nobody (Part 1), No one (Part 2) - First mention

'*Nobody*' and '*No one*' as reference 4 are indefinite pronouns and have no next-mentions. The referring expressions used for referent 4 raise several important issues. The first issue concerns the interpretation of the referent. In fact, both can mean an absence of someone, or they can imply the same as 'not anybody' and 'anyone' in semantics. The distinction of two meanings is also quite ambiguous in a pragmatic sense. Such particular types of referents can depend on mutual knowledge of speaker-hearer interaction. Green (1989) proposed that the mechanism by which referring expressions enable an interpreter to infer an intended referent is not strictly semantic or truth-conditional, but involves the cooperative exploitation of supposed mutual knowledge. In the sentence "nobody still find him", *nobody* can be narrowly interpreted as the absence of professionals who have specific jobs such as policeman and fire officers. Otherwise, it can be broadly interpreted as the absence of ordinary people who have been trying to find someone near them. On the other hand, in the sentence "No one is sure how this one-month-old baby survived the deadly tsunami", *No one* can be broadly interpreted as the absence of any person who is aware of the news regardless of his or her location, or it could be narrowly interpreted as the absence of those who watch the baby in the real situation. In this point of view, the referent 4 violates the maxim of quantity because it provides hearers with insufficient information to comprehend the referent 4. According to cooperative principles, however, it is not always necessary to choose the right interpretation among various possibilities.

Another issue is whether the indefinite pronouns like 'nobody' and 'No one' are singular or plural. It is important to take number agreement between first mention and next mention into consideration. The indefinite pronouns require a singular pronoun as next mention. For this reason, the speaker has to use the grammatically correct pronouns so that the hearers could clearly understand what the pronoun is referring to. Successful reference depends on the hearer's identifying, for the purposes of understanding the current linguistic message, the speaker's intended referent, on the basis of the referring expression used (Brown & Yule, 1983). Thus, in order for communication to be more efficient, the speaker needs to use the referent accessible to the listener, meanwhile, the listener needs to know what the speaker is referring to.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the maxims of quantity and relation are found effective when applied to explain referring terms, depending on their definiteness and explicitness. Nevertheless, the sequential location of a referent (first-mention, next mention) influences the source of information in relation to its interpretation. A first-mention is to be interpreted based on the context that is provided

with background assumptions about shared knowledge. Meanwhile, next-mention brings out an additional source of information. Accordingly, the maxims themselves do not reveal the identity of a speaker's intended referent; rather, referring sequence leads hearers to infer needed information and help them recognize a speaker's referential intention. Thus, it is very helpful to create sequential patterns of referring terms for pragmatic process in discourse. For further study, it is quite interesting to look at how the sequential patterns influence the speaker's or the listener's mental process especially in Korean EFL context.

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