

ON ANAPHORIC POSSIBILITIES BETWEEN NOUN PHRASES IN ENGLISH

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1.0. Introduction

In a paper "Pronouns and Reference 1 & 11"⁽¹⁾ 1968 (My copy is from the Indiana University Linguistics Club) George Lakoff makes a claim that epithets and definite noun phrases can be included in his theory of output constraints for pronominalization. He has good structural reasons for this attempt, because the epithet, "the bastard", which he uses in examples 1 (a) - (d) obeys the same structural constraints as the appropriate pronoun -

- 1(a) Mary slugged Dirksen when the bastard insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.
- (b) Mary slugged the bastard when Dirksen insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.
- (c) Dirksen was slugged by Mary when the bastard insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.
- (d)* The bastard was slugged by Mary when Dirksen insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

He writes: (P16 Pronouns and Reference 1): "The generalization concerning the conditions under which an N P can serve as an anaphoric expression involves a distinction among four types of noun phrases. "

He sets up the following hierarchy:

- 1. proper names
- 2. definite descriptions
- 3. epithets
- 4. pronouns.

He adds - "In general a noun phrase with a lower number in the hierarchy may be an antecedent of a noun phrase with a higher number, but not vice versa."

Now let us consider a definite noun phrase example which Lakoff includes in his claim. He uses, first of all, expressions such as 'The Illinois Republican'. Then he writes: "Lest readers consider this just another example of an epithet, let us consider some more innocuous examples."

- 2(a) Mary slugged Dirksen when the man in the blue suit insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.
- (b) Mary slugged the man in the blue suit when Dirksen insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.
- (c) Dirksen was slugged by Mary when the man in the blue suit insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.
- (d)* the man in the blue suit was slugged by Mary when Dirksen insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

Lakoff has no problem in finding "the man in the blue suit" anaphoric to "Dirksen". If I could agree with him on this point, then, I would certainly agree that the definite noun phrase follows the same structural constraints of pronominalization discussed above in (1a) - (1d).

But I cannot consider "the man in the blue suit" anaphoric to "Dirksen", nor can I find any co-dialectal speaker who does.* On the other hand, I find the following sentence acceptable, and suggest that this indicates a complexity between co-referential noun phrases which goes beyond structural constraints and Lakoff's hierarchy.

- (3) Mary slugged Dirksen when the man insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

Here, for me, "the man" can be anaphoric to "Dirksen", as it can for the majority of my informants.

The differences between the anaphoric possibilities of these two noun phrases (i.e. "the man in the blue suit" and "the man") not only create a problem for Lakoff because they upset his "Anaphora Hierarchy",⁽²⁾ but also raise interesting questions on the nature of anaphoric qualities in definite noun phrases and ultimately, pronouns.

1.1. Differing Definite Noun Phrases

Let us compare sentences (2a) and (3):

- (2a) Mary slugged Dirksen when the man in the blue suit insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.
- (3) Mary slugged Dirksen when the man insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

* Prof. Mowatt, Dept, of German, Newcastle, has suggested that this is a journalistic style, used by reporters when they want to get a maximum number of facts into a minimum space, and here we may tend to accept it.

Because of the length of the noun phrase in (2a), the stress seems to me stronger on "the man" than it is in (3), although I am aware that this is contrary to the principles of stress in Chomsky, Halle's The Sound Pattern of English. Since a noun phrase must be unstressed to be anaphoric, we might see this as an explanation for the unacceptability of (2a).

Notice, however, the following sentence:

- (4) Mary slugged Dirksen when the boss insinuated that she liked
Lyndon Johnson.

In (4) the definite noun phrase "the boss" contains the same number of syllables as "the man" and must therefore, in the same context, carry the same stress. But this sentence is completely unacceptable if we are to consider "the boss" as anaphoric to "Dirksen". Why should we accept "the man" and reject "the boss"?

A further difference between the noun phrases in (2a) and (3) is that the one in (2a) includes the relative clause "who was wearing a blue suit". Another way to express it, although stylistically awkward, would be "the blue-suited man". Noam Chomsky has in fact claimed that adjectives are derived from embedded relative clauses, e.g. "the tall man" is derived from "the man who is tall". Following this line of thought, we might extend it and say "the boss" is derived from "the man who is the boss".

Emmon Bach (1968) suggests that all nouns come from relative clauses based on the predicate nominal constituent. He first draws attention to the difference between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses. Thus, of the following examples

- (i) Eskimos who live in igloos have lots of fun
(ii) Eskimos, who live in igloos, have lots of fun

he writes:⁽³⁾ "Sentence (ii) asserts both that Eskimos have lots of fun and that they live in igloos, while (i) makes the more modest claim that the class of fun-loving objects contains wholly the class of igloo-inhabiting Eskimos." Bach claims that, though it seems reasonably clear that non-restrictive relative clauses (i.e. as in example (ii)) may be analyzed as a conjunction of sentences, it is unclear what the analysis of restrictive relative clauses (as in (i)) might be.

The above examples (which, without punctuation, are one ambiguous sentence) are not of the same type as the relative clauses which underlie the N P's "the man in the blue suit" and "the boss". Neither of these provides an ambiguous reading. In other

words, they are both restrictive relative clauses only. In each case, the restrictive relative clause adds a further attribute to the basic attribute of "the man".

Consider the following lists of adjectives:

(5a)	(5b)
tall	cunning
ugly	sly
slim	clever
dark	lazy
blue-eyed	stupid
red-faced	poor
pimplly	silly

Now look at example (3) again:

(3) Mary slugged Dirksen when the man insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

If we insert an adjective from (5a) before the word "man" in (3), the resulting noun phrase is unacceptable anaphorically, whereas if we use an adjective from (5b) the phrase can be anaphoric to "Dirksen". Similarly, there are adjectives which range in degrees of acceptability, somewhere between (5a) and (5b); adjectives such as "emotional", "experienced", "ambitious", "angry", "rich", "effeminate".

The differences between the adjectives in (5a) and (5b) seem, at first glance, to be connected with the alienable or inalienable quality of each adjective. Those in (5a) seem to reveal inalienable qualities which might block the anaphoric possibility of the noun phrase. But it is easy to find exceptions to this theory. The adjective "young", for instance, would seem to be as inalienable as "tall" and yet I find "young man" but not "tall man" acceptable in (3). Of course, we do tend to say "young man" almost as one word, and indeed, it has a synonym in "youth", so it could almost fall into a category similar to "man". But there are other problems with this approach. I'm not at all sure how I would classify "effeminate" or "ambitious". Are they alienable or inalienable qualities?

If we look again at these two lists of adjectives, we find that those in (5a) are much more objective than those in (5b). In fact, words such as "lazy", "cunning", "stupid", or "silly", are highly emotive words reflecting the speaker's attitude to his subject, but not necessarily the truth about it. Of course, these adjectives can be used

objectively and truthfully, but when they are used anaphorically, particularly with an appropriate epithet, they act like a semantic overlay used by the speaker to convey his subjective feelings.

Epithets, on their own, act in the same way. We rarely mean that a man was born out of wedlock when we call him "a bastard". This is a strongly emotive word and it seems that the more emotive the word, the better it will work anaphorically; "clever bastard", "lazy bum", "cunning devil", for instance, are very effective anaphoric expressions. But there are also less intense noun phrases which can be used anaphorically; words such as "creature", "child", "woman", "fellow", "thing", "pet", "chap", and of course, "man". Even though these definite noun phrases are of a somewhat milder nature, they still contain a degree of subjectivity. For me, the use of "the man" in (3) is still slightly derogatory, whereas the pronoun "he" conveys no such hint.

Apart from this emotive quality, however, there are other factors, semantic factors, at work in these anaphoric noun phrases. Consider example (4) again:

- (4) Mary slugged Dirksen when the boss insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

Now consider the following lists of definite noun phrases:

- | | | | |
|------|----------------|------|--------------|
| (6a) | the boss | (6b) | the man |
| | the student | | the woman |
| | the engineer | | the youth |
| | the labourer | | the girl |
| | the secretary | | the child |
| | the politician | | the creature |
| | the father | | the lad |
| | the uncle | | the lass |

The noun phrases in (6a), like the adjectives in (5a), are unacceptable as anaphoric expressions. In a series of tests, all co-dialectal speakers were found to agree with my rejection of these N P's as co-referential with "Dirksen" in (4), though once again, the majority of these speakers were happy to accept those in group (6b).

If we take the first example from each of the two groups (i.e. "the boss" and "the man") and attempt to analyze them in the manner set out by Katz and Fodor in The Structure of a Semantic Theory,⁽⁴⁾ we might get diagrams like Fig. I and Fig. II.

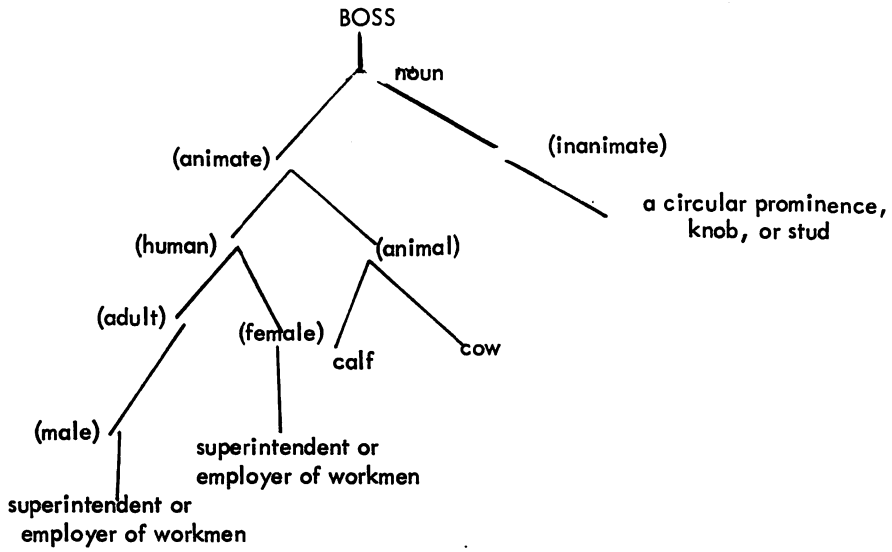


FIGURE I

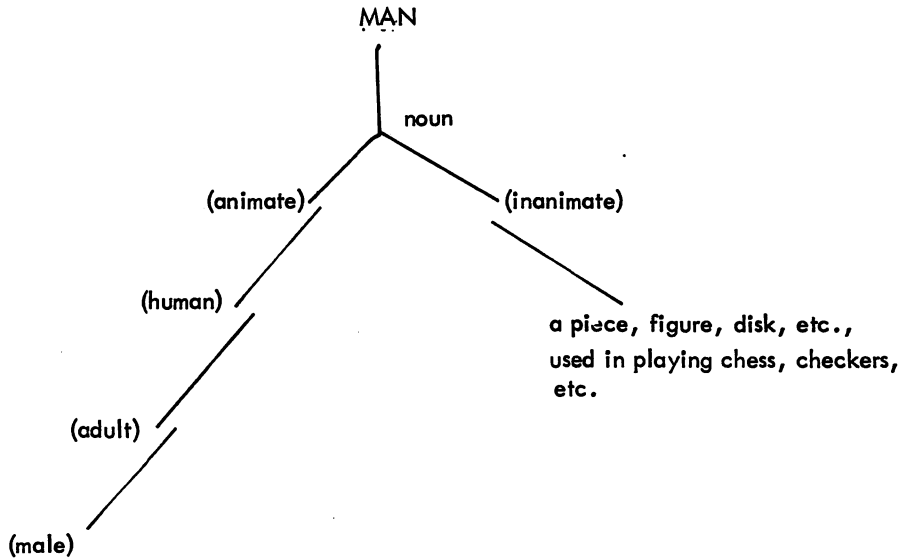


FIGURE II

The meaning I am concerned with in Fig. 1 is that which subdivides under (human) into (male) and (female) and hence into two identical "Distinguishers". In Fig. 11 the left hand side of the diagram follows the same pattern, but stops at the semantic marker of (male). There is no need for the lower step, as in the distinguisher of "boss".

If we look again at the nouns in (6a) and (6b), we can say that each of those in (6a) would come into a lower category than those in (6b). The nouns in the latter group seem to contain more general attributes, whilst those in (6a) contain these general attributes, plus something more specific. "The father", for instance, contains all the attributes of "the man", but has, in addition, that attribute which expresses a certain human relationship. Words like "the boss" and "the secretary" have an extra attribute expressing capacity, whilst others like "the engineer" or "the labourer" express an additional attribute of ability or skill.

Now, coming back to our friend Dirksen, we find that Lakoff's description of him as "the man in the blue suit" seems to be acting in the same way as the nouns in (6a). That is, the phrase, "in the blue suit" is telling us something more about "the man", or providing him with an additional attribute, and this seems to be why we can't accept (2a).

(2a)* Mary slugged Dirksen when the man in the blue suit insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

These non-emotive, additional attributes seem closely linked to the problem of anaphoric possibilities in noun phrases and the presuppositions which underlie co-referentiality.

1.2. On Presupposition

In a recent criticism of Lakoff's approach to "Generative Semantics", ⁽⁵⁾ Noam Chomsky comments on a proposal by Lakoff that a grammar should not generate sentences in isolation, but rather "pairs, (P,S), consisting of a sentence, S, which is grammatical only relative to the presuppositions of P." Consider example (7):

(7) John called Mary a Republican, and then she insulted him
(where the underlined words are more heavily stressed.)

Referring to the above example, Lakoff observes that the speaker's judgements as to well-formedness will depend on his beliefs, i.e. about Republicanism. Chomsky points out that "...the situation is still more complicated. Thus the decision as to whether (7) is 'well-formed', in this sense, depends also on John's and Mary's beliefs. I can insult someone by attributing to him a property that I think admirable, but that he regards as insulting. Similarly, even someone sharing Lakoff's beliefs couldn't insult Barry Goldwater by calling him a Republican." Chomsky advocates the following terminological proposal:

"(I) define "well-formed" so that (7) is well-formed independently of the beliefs of John, Mary, or the speaker;

(II) assign to the semantic component of the grammar the task of stipulating that (7) expresses the presupposition that for John to call Mary a Republican is for him to insult her. "

He adds: "The relation between (7) and the presupposition, of course, holds independently of anyone's factual beliefs; it is part of the knowledge of the speaker of English, quite apart from his beliefs, or John's or Mary's. In general, according to this terminology, the grammar generates sentences and expresses the fact that these sentences carry certain presuppositions. It makes no reference to specific beliefs. "(6)

Lakoff's proposal, on the one hand, is admittedly attractive because the whole of language certainly does include assumptions about the nature of the world, but this involves individual belief, emotion, imagination, and perception, and I can conceive of no way of formulating a grammar which would include these things and a host of other subjective factors. On the other hand, I find Noam Chomsky's proposal sound and sensible, remaining within the realm of linguistic possibility.

Following the latter approach, it is possible to explain the unacceptability of (2a) on the grounds of presupposition. It is interesting to note that before Lakoff presents the paradigm (2a) - (2d) he instructs the reader to "assume that Dirksen is wearing a blue suit". (7) He thus provides us with extra information about Dirksen which might enable us to recognize him as "the man in the blue suit". But surely this is cheating, although I don't suggest Lakoff is conscious of doing so. Yet, even though we are told of Dirksen's "additional attribute", we reject "the man in the blue suit" as an expression anaphoric to Dirksen. Is this because Lakoff is trying to make us adopt a presupposition which the sentence itself does not convey? Similarly, is example (4) out because there is nothing in the sentence itself to make us presuppose that "Dirksen" is "the boss"?

(4)* Mary slugged Dirksen when the boss insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

Repeating example (3),

(3) Mary slugged Dirksen when the man insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

I suggest that we accept it because

- (i) we tend to assume Dirksen to be a man, especially since the proper name has no title;
- (ii) "the man" is a general term, with no enforced, objective, additional attribute;
- (iii) there is an emotive overlay of meaning by the speaker's use of "the man" which enforces the presupposition of the sentence, (i.e. that for Dirksen to insinuate that Mary likes Lyndon Johnson is for Mary to be angered enough to slug Dirksen).

The speaker's use of "the man" fits in well with his use of the untitled "Dirksen" and the verbs "slugged" and "insinuated" to suggest a somewhat contemptuous attitude towards Dirksen. This is even more apparent in (1a):

- (1a) Mary slugged Dirksen when the bastard insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

It is interesting to consider these discoveries about epithets and definite noun phrases and their relation to pronouns. In (8),

- (8) Mary slugged Dirksen when he insinuated that she liked Lyndon Johnson.

we find that the pronoun fits in more naturally than any of the previous noun phrases. I tentatively suggest that this is because the pronoun, though specific in number, gender, and case, is a "general" term (i.e., "he" can be any male) and that because of this general, somewhat "neutral" quality, it does not provide extra information to conflict with the presupposition of the sentence, -the presupposition which allows it to be co-referential with some other noun phrase within that sentence.

1.3. Further "Dirksen" Sentences

Examples (2a) and (3) are complex sentences with the relevant noun phrases contained in a main clause and a time adverbial clause. I tested these noun phrases in various other combinations, such as main clause with adverbial clauses of concession, reason, and manner; main clause with adverbial phrase, and main clause with subordinate noun clause. Generally, these combinations followed a similar pattern of acceptance. However, the last combination provided an interesting divergence. Here is the paradigm:

- 9 (a) Mary asked Dirksen if the man in the blue suit would be late for the meeting.

- 9 (b) Mary asked Dirksen if the man would be late for the meeting
- 9 (c) Mary asked Dirksen if the fellow would be late for the meeting.
- 9 (d) Mary asked Dirksen if he would be late for the meeting.

Of these four sentences, only (9d) was found to be acceptable to all tested speakers. The other three were completely rejected. On the basis of the results from previous examples, however, one might expect a degree of acceptability in (9b) and (9c). The explanation for this rejection seems to lie in the change from direct to indirect speech, which is contained within the sentence. In the actual speech situation, Mary would have asked Dirksen: "Will you be late for the meeting?" She certainly wouldn't have asked: "Will the fellow be late for the meeting?" The original communication act would have contained the property of person deixis,⁽⁸⁾ i.e., the identify of Mary's audience. In other words, in the circumstance of Mary's utterance, it would have been clear to Dirksen that he was the person addressed, by the direction of Mary's eyes, perhaps, by the volume and tone of her voice, and by her proximity to him. These factors would certainly contribute to the presupposition that "Dirksen" and "you" were co-referential. When the sentence is transformed into indirect speech, the presupposition is retained by the use of the pronoun "he" which has become a substitution for the original "you". If, on the other hand, the noun phrases such as "the man", or "the fellow" are used, the deictic property is lost, and hence the presupposition of co-referentiality.

1.3.1. Main Clause plus Adverbial Phrase

The paradigm I used for this grammatical combination was as follows:

- 10(a) Mary slugged Dirksen in the man in the blue suit's apartment.
- 10(b) Mary slugged Dirksen in the man's apartment.
- 10(c) Mary slugged Dirksen in the bastard's apartment.
- 10(d) Mary slugged Dirksen in the tall man's apartment.
- 10(e) Mary slugged Dirksen in the young man's apartment.
- 10(f) Mary slugged Dirksen in the silly fool's apartment.
- 10(g) Mary slugged Dirksen in the boss's apartment.
- 10(h) Mary slugged Dirksen in his apartment.

In tests, the response to these sentences followed a familiar pattern. For instance, there was a complete rejection of (10a) and (10g), and an almost complete rejection of (10d) whilst there were varying degrees of acceptance of (10b), (10e) and (10f), with (10c) coming a close second to (10h) in complete acceptability. There were, however, several speakers

who rejected all sentences except (10h), the one using the pronoun. One of these speakers said, however, that he could accept (10b) (10c), and (10f) if the word "own" were inserted before the word "apartment". Other formerly dissenting speakers agreed with this. Why should "own" make a difference for these speakers?

Paul Postal has observed that⁽⁹⁾ "... there are...forms, reflexive and not, which manifest properties essentially identical to those of simple reflexive forms. One of these is "own". Typically, this can occur in an N P just in case that N P has a co-referent in the same clause:

- (11.) (a) I save my own father.
- (b)* Harry saved my own father.
- (c) Harry saved his own father.
- (d)* I saved Harry's own father.

My examples (10a) - (10h) are all sentences in which the two relevant noun phrases are contained within the same clause. It seems therefore, that the insertion of the word "own" in these sentences would tend to make the second noun phrase operate like a reflexive and thus co-referential with a preceding noun phrase within the same clause. I suggest then, that these speakers are instinctively creating an anaphoric quality for the second noun phrase to make the sentence acceptable.

To summarize then, I think I have shown that there is a great deal more involved in pronominalization than structural constraints alone. The "Dirksen" sentences reveal that structural constraints play an important role, perhaps the major role in pronominalization, but they also show that there are many complex, semantic factors at work as well. The inclusion of the word "own" in my last example is surely a semantic factor. Likewise, the difference in effect of emotive and non-emotive terms, general and particular terms, are semantic factors. These semantic factors extend not only to the relationship between two words, but to the scope of the whole sentence, to embrace its embodied presupposition.

References

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7. G. Lakoff. op.cit. p. 16.
8. See C.J. Fillmore. "Toward a Theory of Deixis", April 1971, for an interesting discussion of this linguistic property.
9. P. Postal. "On Co-referential Complement Subject Deletion", Linguistic Inquiry Oct. 1968. p. 447.