

Relevance-theoretic Accounts of Anaphoric Expressions: Metarepresentation and the Accessibility of Contextual Assumptions

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**Relevance-theoretic Accounts of Anaphoric Expressions:
Metarepresentation and the Accessibility of Contextual Assumptions**

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This paper examines computational processes of anaphoric expressions through a relevance-theoretic framework. In this framework, anaphora resolution regarding pronouns and elliptical expressions undergoes a process of saturation: an instruction on referent identification by way of linguistic clues (i.e. pronouns and ellipses themselves). Besides, it is regarded as a specific type of saturation in the sense that the referent of anaphoric expressions is found in the representation of a representation the addressee accesses as the source of anaphoric resolution. The proposal of the paper is that referent identification is based on non-linguistic ‘metarepresentation’ (cf. Wilson (2000); Noh (2000)) — that is, the addressee’s thought of a source representation such as someone’s utterance or thought, or sensory representation— because it is a process of constructing contextual assumptions on the basis of an item of information in the preceding discourse or the immediate physical environment. Considering the interpretive guidance or instructions anaphoric expressions are responsible for, the meaning encoded by those expressions is definitely procedural. From a procedural viewpoint, pronouns and ellipses encode a procedure instructing the addressee to access their referent within the metarepresentation in order to reach the intended interpretation of the utterance in which they occur.

We have every reason to think that an anaphoric expression is an indispensable communicative device to point the addressee economically towards its intended referent. However, it is also evident that accessibility of a contextual assumption or the processing effort involved in accessing it varies according to the types of anaphoric expressions. As the relevance-theoretic comprehension strategy (cf. Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995); Carton (2002)) predicts, a more accessible contextual assumption is one that requires less processing effort. With regard to this issue, this paper also examines that the differences in both accessibility and processing effort involved in referent identification stem from degrees of interpretive resemblance between a source representation and its metarepresentational thought which is constructed and utilized as a contextual assumption in terms of referent identification. Degrees of interpretive resemblance affect the accessibility of a contextual assumption and the processing effort involved in accessing it. Greater literal interpretive resemblance of the metarepresentation to a source representation means greater accessibility of the metarepresentation as a contextual assumption (as anaphoric processes of syntactic ellipses indicate). The more implicit resemblance between two representations, the less accessible a contextual assumption and the greater the effort involved in accessing it (as deep anaphoric expressions such as ‘do it’ anaphora indicate). If a contextual assumption the addressee accesses bears an implicit resemblance to the source representation via implications, however, the addressee must expect to achieve some additional cognitive effects, being consistent with a presumption of relevance.

The significance of interpretive resemblance in the account of anaphoric processes is not to be underestimated. Interpretive resemblance between a source representation and the metarepresentation satisfies the presumption of relevance because it yields an adequate contextual assumption to be utilized in the referent identification of anaphoric expressions for the minimum possible processing effort.