Third person anaphoric reference by Turkish speakers of French

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Abstract

Rather than being a random sequence of unrelated sentences and clauses, a text must have solid sense relations between its units to be logically and semantically consistent for the reader-hearer. This logical and semantic consistency relating to the construction and configuration of sense in a text is called coherence by text linguists. Coherence is vital for a complete meaning and understanding of a text. As a cohesive device, reference, especially anaphoric reference, has been examined in many studies in recent years. This study aims to investigate anaphoric expressions by Turkish speakers of French in their spontaneous speech. 29 undergraduate students (23 females and 6 males) with 22-25 age range studying at a French language department in Turkey as well as five native speakers of French (three females and two males) with 35-55 age range participated in the study. French dubbed version of an animated cartoon, A Christmas Carol (Mickey et la Magie de Noël), was used as material in this study. The participants were asked to watch and then comment on various themes in the cartoon. Results revealed an overuse of third person pronouns, almost cumulative, in students. Possible reasons of this aggregate usage were then discussed in light of other studies in literature.

Keywords: Cohesion, anaphora, spontaneous speech.

1. Introduction

Oral or written discourse is not comprised of randomly sequenced sentences. Intelligibility of discourse is closely related to strength of logical, semantic and structural connections between sentences. Elements of a discourse are linked to each other in different ways. For a complete understanding and interpretation of an utterance, the reader/hearer needs to link sentences to each other. In utterance (1) that follows, the reader/hearer would have no difficulty to make a logical connection between tardiness and traffic jam and consequently would relate two sentences to each other by cause effect relationship.

(1) This morning, there was a big traffic jam in the city. She was late for work.

Logical and semantic connection between the two sentences in utterance (2) is also supported by a grammatical relation. In previous example, cause-effect relationship is established by a logical inference while in the present example, this relationship is made by a grammatical particle, the conjunction because and thus coherence is obtained.

(2) She was late for work because there was a big traffic jam in the city this morning.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesion as a semantic relationship between two textual elements in which one is interpreted by the other. In their seminal work Cohesion in English, they identify five general categories of
cohesive devices that create coherence in texts: a) reference, b) substitution, c) ellipsis, d) conjunction and e) lexical cohesion.

1.1. Reference

In its broad sense, reference is a grammatical cohesion device in a text that can only be interpreted with reference to some other parts of the text. Without links to others sentences, a sentence within a discourse risks being incoherent, thus incomprehensible. Reference has two parts: the referring item (the presupposing element) and the item that it refers to (the presupposed element; antecedent). For a perfect understanding and interpretation of a reference, the antecedent has to occur somewhere in the text before. Depending on the places of referring items, there are two types of reference; anaphoric and anaphoric.

1.1.2. Anaphora and cataphora

The term anaphora is derived from the Greek word anaphorein (ana- = backwards, - phorein = carry) which literally means “carrying back”. Linguistically speaking, this term designates “a process where a word or phrase (anaphor) refers back to another word or phrase which was used earlier in a text or conversation” (Richards & Schmidt 2002, 36). The reference of an anaphora can only be ascertained by interpreting its antecedent (Bussmann 1996, 58). In utterance (3) that follows, the third person pronoun She refers back to the proper noun Cécile in the first sentence.

(3) I took Cécile to the airport this morning. She was late.

She is the referring item and Cécile is the item to which She refers. In other words, Cécile is the antecedent of the referring item. Anaphora is often contrasted with cataphora where referring items precede antecedents as in the utterance (4).

(4) When I saw her, Cécile was arguing violently with a taxi driver in the street.

In this utterance, the object pronoun her refers forward to the proper noun Cécile in the sentence. In other words, the referring item her precedes the antecedent, Cécile. In the present study, we will only focus on anaphoric reference and make no attempt to examine other types of references.

1.1.2.1. Types of anaphoric expressions

Following Riegel et al. (2004), we identify two mains types of anaphoric expressions for this study with reference to French: pronominal and nominal anaphora.

1.1.2.1.1. Pronominal anaphora

Being a special case of anaphora, pronominal substitution contributes to organization of text by avoiding repetition of a noun or noun phrase as well as to thematic progression of text, especially by the use of third person pronoun which functions as marker of thematic continuity. For Riegel et al. (2004), pronouns may differently represent a noun phrase; third person pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relatives and indefinite pronouns. In the present study, we will only focus on third person pronouns.

1.3.2. Nominal anaphora

Nominal anaphora includes definite determiners such as definite articles and possessive or demonstrative determiners. Riegel et al. (2004) classify four types of nominal anaphora; anaphore fidèle (“faithful anaphora”), anaphore infidèle (“unfaithful anaphora”), anaphore conceptuelle (conceptual anaphora) and anaphore associative (associative anaphora). During this study, our focus will only be on the two first types of nominal anaphora. Anaphore fidèle consists to repeat the name with a simple determinant change. It’s restricted to cases in which the referent is not recategorized (Willemse et al. 2009). Resumption of noun phrase is carried out by replacement of an
indefinite determiner by a definite determiner (definite article, possessive determiner or demonstrative) as in examples (5) and (6) that follow.

(5)  Le dessin animé se passe dans un château. Dans le château, il y a une fête pour Noël (NNS-Y2/9)

(6)  Donald Duck a vu un rêve. Dans son rêve, il a vu son futur (NNS-Y2/12)

Contrary to anaphore fidèle, the referent is recategorized with lexical changes in anaphore infidèle. Anaphoric noun phrases contain elements which are different from their antecedents. The repetition of name may be synonymous or equivalent to the first item as in the example (7).

(7)  Plus tard dans la nuit, le premier esprit fait son apparition en sortant Scrooge de son sommeil, c’est le fantôme des noëls passés (NS1)

2. Research questions

This paper aims to investigate anaphoric expressions by Turkish speakers of French in their spontaneous speech and then to compare these expressions with those of native speakers of French. For this purpose, following research questions were stated:

1) What types of anaphoric expressions are used by both Turkish speakers majoring French and native speakers of French?

2) What particular reference type(s) dominate(s) the spontaneous speech of both groups, and why?

3) To what extent do the oral narratives of both groups display similarities and/or contrasts in terms of anaphoric reference use?

3. Participants

The participants in this study are categorized into two groups. In the first group, there are Turkish students of French studying at the French Language Teaching Department, University of Çukurova (TG), all being trained to be prospective French teachers (n=29; 23 females, 6 males; 22-25 years of age range). The other group consists of five native speakers of French (CG), three females and two males, of 35-55 age range, all university graduates.

4. Instruments

The material used in this study is an animated cartoon, A Christmas Carol dubbed into French (Mickey et la Magie de Noël). The participants were asked to watch and then comment on various themes in the cartoon. This cartoon was chosen due to its relatively small number of characters (Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit -Scrooge's overworked employee and the ghosts, being the major persona), and the relatively less complex plot. Thus, commenting on the themes in the movie proved easy not only for nonnative speakers but also for the natives.

5. Results and discussion

The distribution of frequencies of reference forms and their percentages in the oral narratives of TG members appear in Table 1 below. As noted, the total number of reference forms in narratives of TG is 203.

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† In non-native speakers’ utterances, NNS-Y2/9 means respectively: Non-native Speaker, Year 2 and subject 9.
‡ In native speakers’ utterances, NS1 means respectively: Native Speaker and subject 1.
Table 1. Distribution of reference forms in the narratives of TG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Types</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Pronouns</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaphore fidèle</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaphore infidèle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, the dominant preference in using an anaphoric reference form is for pronouns; 167 pronouns constituted about 82% of the total anaphoric references. The second most frequent type of anaphoric reference is anaphore fidèle, 16.5 in the total distribution. The least used reference type is anaphore infidèle, having 1.5 value (only 3 occurrences). Bearing in mind that the participants were commenting on a movie, we think that the dominance of the pronouns in the narratives should not be surprising because it is the characters that first come to mind when the issue is a movie.

Regarding the pronouns that are the most employed reference forms, TG members seem to have mastered the difference among third person pronouns (il/elle; ils/elles) although Turkish is a pro-drop language with a unisex third person -singular-pronoun. We, nevertheless, should emphasize that the issue handled is not as simple as the difference between four third person pronouns in French. Researchers in SLA have conducted studies to observe the effects of changing parameters in the acquisition of second and third languages. White (1985), for instance, tested 73 adults learning English, 54 of whom were native speakers of Spanish a [+pro-drop language] and 19 native speakers of French a [–pro-drop language]. When subjects were asked to judge the grammaticality of 31 written sentences, Spanish speakers were less successful than French speakers, which proved, according to White, that Spanish students did show evidence of [+pro-drop] carry over into English and that although the [+pro-drop] parameter is the marked form, Spanish speakers will continue to use the marked form until they have received negative evidence of [–pro-drop] in the L2. At first sight, Turkish speakers succeed in mastering [–pro-drop] parameter and this is highly promising for their L2 acquisition struggles. A parallelism has been observed between non-native and native speakers in terms of anaphoric reference forms. The distribution of frequencies of reference forms and their percentages in the oral narratives of CG members appear in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of reference forms in the narratives of native speakers (CG)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Types</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Pronouns</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaphore fidèle</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaphore infidèle</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, for native speakers too, the dominant anaphoric reference form is pronouns; 87 pronouns constituted about 73% of the total anaphoric references. The second most frequent type of anaphoric reference is anaphore fidèle, 18 in the total distribution. Although anaphore infidèle is also the least used reference type in NSs (16%), it is ten times more frequent than in NNS’s.

With regard to third person anaphoric pronouns, at first glance, it may seem that there is no difference between native and non-native speakers in terms of distribution of anaphoric reference types. However, both groups are different in terms of quantities and qualities of utterances they produced. That is to say, 29 students in TG totally produced 4584 words in their utterances whereas five native speakers generated 3629 words in total; the average number of words created per student in TG is 159 while on the contrary it is 726 in CG. In other words, considering
word count-speech size ratio, we can say that third person anaphoric pronouns were stacked in heaps in oral narratives of NNS while this is not the case for NS. This stacked use of person pronouns may be accounted for by the fact that NNS had difficulties in joining sentences in different ways by different elements. In utterance (8) that follows, NNS chose to create sentences separately instead of combining them by, for instance, the relative pronoun qui and thus had to use several times third person pronouns il/ils.

(8) Donald Duck est un ...un homme avaré. Il ne ...n’aime ...il ne ...il ne l’aime personne. Il injure tout ...les mondes (NNS-Y3/7)

As for native speakers, it has been observed that they economically used third person pronouns by linking sentences with the relative pronoun qui. An example for this is shown in utterance (9).

(9) ...c’est l’histoire d’un ...d’une personne qui est avaré, ...et qui a des remords et qui... décide de changer complètement de comportement à la fois vis-à-vis de sa famille, de ses amis et de ses employés. (NS4)

Many students did not drop person pronouns after the conjunction et connecting two sentences with same subject. Not elliptically used, these pronouns might be the cause of intensive use of anaphoric person pronouns. Utterance (10) illustrates this phenomenon.

(10) Et après ce ..ce cauchemar il ..il changeait soi-même et il commençait à un bon homme et il commençait à aider les others (NNS-Y3/7)

As opposed to NNS, NS dropped third person pronouns in coordinate clauses as follows.

(11) Et en voyant cette scène Monsieur Scrooge regrette effectivement comprend ses erreurs et regrette d’avoir laissé tomber son ancienne amoureuse (NS1)

This paper, aiming to study anaphoric expressions in oral narratives by Turkish speakers of French compared to those by native speakers, draws our attention, as French teachers, to the tendency of our students to make a extremely successive and frequent use of third person pronouns in their spontaneous speeches. We believe that students’ ability to authentically produce oral narratives in French is hampered by this stacked use of third person pronouns. When teaching the relative pronoun qui;

a) Importance of this relative for authentic production of person pronouns has to be clearly expressed.
b) Logic in use of this relative should be analyzed by examples from oral narratives by native French speakers
c) Students should often be encouraged to use the relative pronoun qui in their oral narratives.

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References

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