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Anaphora in Conversation: Grammatical Coding and Preference Organization

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1 Introduction

Grammar, understood as an organized system of variably used resources for accomplishing communication, is at the center of functionalist approaches to grammar and discourse. Social interaction, conceived as an organized system providing variably used resources for co-ordinating talk as a social activity, is the focus of attention of conversation analysis. Only recently have researchers started to bring these two traditions of thought together in order to investigate the complex ways in which grammar and social interaction are interrelated (cf. Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson 1996). One of the issues that has gained attention in this line of research is the working of anaphora in conversation (see Fox 1987, Ford and Fox 1996).

My basic assumption is that the functioning of anaphora in social interaction is not limited to referent tracking and information structure alone, but is fundamentally related to the social organization of talk (cf. Pekarek 1998 and 1999). In this article, I will be dealing with one specific social-interactional dimension of anaphoric processes, namely with what conversation analysts call the preference organization of talk-in-interaction (Sacks 1987 [1973]). My aim is to illustrate that preference organization is among the elements that motivate the use of referentially overspecified expressions (i.e. expressions which are more specific than would be necessary for referent identification) as well as some word-order permutations.

The data that will be analyzed consist of transcribed audio-taped face-to-face interactions in French, emanating from various settings, such as TV interviews, discussions among students, research interviews and radio talk-shows. The analysis will concentrate on cases where definite NPs are used to relate to closely preceding antecedents and where pronouns would yield unambiguous referent resolution. It will be shown that preference-organization, and its sequential correlates in talk, can account for some unexpected choices of grammatical coding (namely definite NP) and of syntactic constructions (left-dislocations) of/around highly accessible referents.

2 Some Theoretical and Practical Issues

2.1 Information Structure

Let me start with a concrete example. The following excerpt is taken from a radio-discussion between an interviewer (GM) and the French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, renowned not only for his acting, but also for his sense of humor:

(1) (Greter)[1]
GM: je me suis demandé d'ailleurs si chaque fois que
I wondered by the way whether each time that
quelqu'un vous était sympathique comme ça un réalisateur vous
you liked someone like a producer you
montiez en chambre ou seulement si Godard était votre type
went up to his room or simply if Godard was your kind
d'homme ou éventuellement Drucker . et c'est vrai **l'anecdote**
of guy or maybe Drucker . and is it really true the anecdote
que vous êtes monté dans la chambre
according to which you went up to the room
JPB: non **l'anecdote** est est je vais vous la raconter elle est . (...)
***no the anecdote** is is I am going to tell it to you it is .(...)*

In this example, JPB repeats the lexical NP *l'anecdote* from the immediately preceding clause produced by GM. There are a couple of interesting observations that we can make about this sequence with regard to the way JPB chooses to code the reference to *l'anecdote*.

The first relates to the recoverability of the referent of *l'anecdote*. In studies of discourse anaphora it is commonly assumed that speakers chose the grammatical coding of a given referent by assessing the accessibility or identifiability of that referent to the addressee. If the referent is supposed to be highly accessible, i.e. to be very present in the mental representation of the addressee, for example because it has just been mentioned, then the speaker is most likely to use a pronoun; if the referent is not very present, the speaker tends to use a full NP in order to refer to it (related ideas are developed in the works of Chafe 1976, Givón 1979, 1992 and Ariel 1990). The basic assumption behind this line of research is that the more accessible (i.e. mentally activated) the referent the less explicit the referring expression. As

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[1] Symbols Used in Transcripts: ... short pauses; (3s) pause (no. of seconds); oui: stretching of a sound; alors overlap; xx unidentifiable sequence; THE heavy stress; > rising intonation; < falling intonation; ( ) transcriber's comments.

Chafe (1976) has put it, activation states of referents have formal correlates in the sentence. Givón 1992 calls this the "grammatical code principle": "information that is already activated requires the smallest amount of code" (25). Following this principle, which empirical studies of predominantly monological data have shown to account for 80 to 90 percent of the cases (e.g. Givón 1979), the most likely coding for the second mention of *l'anecdote* in example (1) would be a pronoun, as the referent is highly accessible due to his mention in the immediately preceding clause, and due to absence of competing antecedents (note that *l'anecdote* is produced in overlap with *la chambre*, and therefore the latter cannot have the status of a potential antecedent).

Things, however, are not that simple. A second dimension determining the grammatical coding of reference, and in fact interacting with the identifiability of referents,[2] is the information structure of talk. The work of Chafe (1976), Prince (1981) and many others has shown that old information, which is already in the focus of attention, tends to be referred to with more attenuated forms. This principle, however, cannot account for the use of the full NP in the above example either, as the referent of *l'anecdote* is clearly already in topic status, the story having been evoked by GM and then qualified as an 'anecdote' within the topic-marking construction *c'est vrai l'anecdote que ...* (see Lambrecht 1987, 1994 and Cadiot 1992 for discussions of dislocation in spoken French).

Some first elements of explanation can however be provided by a set of other observations related to information structure, namely those that have been proposed with regard to exceptions to the regularities described so far. Based on evidence from monological, essentially written text production and/or comprehension, Clancy (1980), Fox (1987), Tomlin (1987), Vonk et al. (1992) and others have shown that full NP often mark the thematic structure of discourse and are namely used to signal episode-boundaries and to demarcate new units.[3] This is somehow what occurs in example (1), although it is not exactly what happens. JPB provides an answer that is thematically coherent with previous talk, but by doing so, he shifts from an answer-type activity to a story-telling activity. In terms of action structure, then, only the first part of his turn is strictly speaking the response elicited by

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[2] Topic-related concerns are treated in the literature either as a factors integrated in a model of referent accessibility (e.g. Givón 1992, Ariel 1990) or disjointly, as factors interacting with referent resolution (e.g. Lambrecht 1994).

[3] Fox (1987) finds this to be very rare in her conversational data, as opposed to written expository texts.

the question, the second part of it shows a shift towards a narrative activity, although thematically coherent with the preceding talk.

The lexical repetition of *l'anecdote* explicitly displays the speaker's orientation toward previous talk and at the same time serves as a pivot around which talk is reoriented in a new direction. If we consider that full NP in context of absolute referential recoverability signal, as Tomlin (1987) and (Givón 1992) have pointed out, minimal continuity with regard to preceding talk, then the lexical repetition can in fact be understood as a pre-indicator of a possible reorientation, while *formally* exhibiting a strong link to the preceding turn at talk. In this sense then, what has so far been discussed as a marker of information structure, appears here to be strongly related to the organization of talk as a social activity.

Apart from some exceptions (Duranti & Ochs 1979, Fox 1987), it is only recently that researchers have paid systematic attention to those dimensions which, besides referent identification and information structure, appear to play a role in the formal expression of anaphoric reference. The use of full NP where pronouns would be possible for marking disagreement or assessment has been documented by Fox (1987) and Maes and Noordman (1995) and the possible existence of affective functions has been pointed out by Givón (1992: 51) and Apothéloz (1995). Pekarek (1999) has illustrated the role of referentially overspecified expressions in the structuring of social activities and of interactional positionings, showing that these expressions are part of the means by which speakers manifest (as indexicals) and establish (as regulative devices) various types of discourse organization and of frames for interpretation. And Ford and Fox (1996) have presented a revealing case-study with regard to the use of such expressions in managing attention control and participation structure in multi-party conversations. A particularly interesting point for our concern here has been made by de Fornel (1988) who suggests, on the basis of French conversational data, that certain information-structural devices, namely left-dislocations, are linked to the preference organization of talk.

2.2 Preference Organization

What motivates the use of overspecified referential expressions in example (1) and other cases beyond information structure becomes in fact more obvious if we consider that conversation is not only thematically organized, but also socially. One of the very interesting facts about this social organization is that it is deployed sequentially, i.e. that it has an impact on how talk is sequentially structured. This has been persuasively demonstrated in conversation analysis under the heading of preference organization.

Sacks (1987 [1973]) has shown how we tend to systematically structure interaction so as to first show agreement, alignment and/or contiguity and only then exhibit disagreement, contrast or discontinuity. This is not an overall property of conversation, but a preference: it is a frequently encountered interactional fact. Preference, in this sense, has nothing to do with personal inclination or liking, but relates to a formal apparatus we use in order to organize interaction.

Let me develop this point briefly in order to better understand the relevance of preference-organization to a discussion of anaphora.

According to conversation analysis, talk-in-interaction is organized in adjacency pairs (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), that is, two adjacent turns at talk produced by two different speakers. The relevant fact about this for my purpose here is that the first pair part projects a set of possible alternatives with regard to the second pair part. Put very simply, this means for example that a question demands an answer in response, a greeting another greeting, an offer an acceptance or a refusal, etc. (of course, complex extended adjacency pair structures do exist). This dependency between pairs also means that the first pair part selects a preferential continuation for the second pair part. For example a yes-no question preferentially requires an answer of the same type. Such preference-related elements influence the sequential organization of social interaction and are one of the motors of thematic continuity in talk. The preference for agreement, namely, means that if speakers produce a non-preferential utterance, they tend to either specifically mark it as such or to start of with agreement, and only then follow up with disagreement. We might, again very simplistically, call this something like a 'yes-but' principle. The preference for agreement is thereby related to a preference for contiguity, which Sacks (op. cit.) exemplifies as follows: "In general, it is the case that when a question occurs in a turn that includes other things or when an answer does, then the question goes at the end of its turn, and the answer at the beginning of its turn" (57/58).

This is exactly what happens in example (1). JPB perfectly maintains the type-relation between question and answer: he gives a negative answer to a 'yes-no' question. But the negative answer is in fact followed by further explanations relating to the question—but not asked for by the question. Thereby, the repetition of the full NP serves as an anchor point for further thematic expansions, while overtly displaying the speaker's orientation to the preceding question. And the sequential order in which this is done allows to formally maintain a preference for contiguity.

Note, that the negative answer does not constitute a disagreement, as the question remains neutral as to a preference for positive or negative answer, exhibiting only a preference for a 'yes' or 'no' answer: "if a question is built

in such a way as to exhibit a preference as between 'yes' or 'no', or 'yes-' or 'no-' like responses, then the answerers will tend to pick up that choice" (Sacks, op. cit.; 57). In this sense then, the answer itself agrees with the preference of the question, the dispreferred part (which 'includes other things', i.e. the story telling) being deferred to the second part of the turn. The referentially overspecified expression serves as a kind of preface to the story telling while exhibiting a formal link to previous talk and thereby plays a crucial role in the formal-sequential organization of this [question] - [answer-story] sequence.

Having provided, with the help of an empirical example, some conceptual instruments for interpreting anaphora in face-to-face interaction, we can now turn to a more systematic analysis of the use of identificationally overspecified anaphoric expressions.

4 The Sequential Management of Preference Organization

4.1 The Role of Left-Dislocations in Sequentially Organizing Disagreement

Example (2) is taken from a research interview on an advanced learner's (P) experience with the French language.

(2) (MH/LA, ent., i.)

P: mais si on aime eh une langue c' est plus facile .. je crois
but if you love eh a language it is easier . . I think
la motivation est très importante
***the motivation** is very important*

-> S: **la motivation** c'est important mais aussi eh. le talent .
***the motivation** it's very important but also eh . the talent .*
je veux dire . la: disposition à apprendre une lange eh. (...)
I mean . the: disposition to learn a language eh . (...)

Speaker P here introduces the theme of *la motivation*, which is then taken up by S as the dislocated constituent in a left-dislocated construction. No constraints related to referent recoverability seem to prohibit the use of a pronoun in the second turn. On the contrary, the left-dislocation is very unusual here. Left-dislocated NP are used to promote a recoverable (i.e. known or inferable; Prince 1981), *but not yet given* referent to topic status (Lam-

or to switch topics (cf. Lambrecht 1987, Cadiot 1992), i.e. to pose elements as topics to which information can then be attached.

What is intriguing about example (2) is that *la motivation* is used as a left-dislocated definite NP while already being established as salient and given entity in subject position by the immediately preceding clause, and without having any piece of new information attached to it (the predication proffered by speaker S is repeated by P in a weakened form: 'est [très] important').[5]

While the level of information structure does not provide a satisfactory account of the left-dislocated construction,[6] an interpretation in terms of the sequential and preference-related organization of talk as a social activity can shed some interesting light on it. What happens here is that P presents a certain disagreement (or at least a partial agreement only) in the second turn with regard to a statement presented by the speaker in the first turn: in P's point of view motivation is important, but so is talent. In a first step, the repetition of the full NP exhibits a formal orientation to previous talk as a part of preference organization, which is somewhat moderated in a second step. The logic of preference for agreement seems here to motivate a two-part construction of the second turns, which is perfectly in line with Sack's argument about the fact that disagreement tends to be held off: "there is an apparent interaction between the preference for contiguity and the preference for agreement, such that, if an agreeing answer occurs, it pretty damn well occurs contiguously, whereas if a disagreeing answer occurs, it may well be pushed rather deep in to the turn that it occupies" (59). Most importantly, as Sacks remarks further, "things going in front of" disagreement have a signaling function with regard to forthcoming disagreement. This double func-

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linguistic study, Givón (1992) reports a mean RD of 15 clauses. Duranti & Ochs (1979), examining Italian conversations note: "there is one type of discourse tie that has no tokens for left-dislocated constituents, namely, that of topic continuity (...). Left-dislocations do not appear to repeat an item that has already assumed the status of topic in the local discourse history" (401). They document that these constructions play a role in speakers' competing for the interactional floor, which is clearly not the case in the example under discussion, as the second speaker is solicited by the first speaker to provide an answer to a question, which he does at the moment intended by the first speaker.

[5] This predication also excludes any other concurrent antecedent (*la langue* or *c'* [ce]).

[6] Note that the left-dislocation might be partially motivated by signaling an upcoming contrast, namely the one between *la motivation* and *le talent*. Contrasts, however, are usually established through other constructions (Y-movement (Givón 1992) or clefts (see Cadiot 1992 for spoken French)).

Sacks remarks further, "things going in front of" disagreement have a signaling function with regard to forthcoming disagreement. This double function as a preface and a pre-indicator for disagreement is what explains the use of the referentially overspecified anaphoric expression in the present case.

Interestingly, a parallel signaling function, specifically related to left-dislocations, has been documented with regard to information structure. According to Chafe (1976) and Lambrecht (1994) they indicate a shift in attention and Givón (1992) suggest that they signal discontinuity (hence their use as paragraph initial devices in narrative; Fox 1987, Givón 1992). This is clearly not the case in example (2), although the signaling function appears to apply here too. We can conclude from these observations, that left-dislocations seem to have, at least partly, a comparable function at the level of the information structure of discourse and at the level of the activities accomplished by talk.

Something similar happens in an example which de Fornel (1988) used much earlier to draw our attention to possible relations between left-dislocations and preference organization. The example is worth quoting again:

(3) (de Fornel 1988)

B: vers deux heures dix> mais comment tu peux faire si
around ten past two> but how can you manage if

C: ouais
yes

B: ton si ton cours est à deux heures>
your if your class starts at two

C: non mon cours à moi est à deux heures et demi ah (souffle)
no my (emphasized) course starts at two thirty ah (breathing)

B: ah et le cours à **Babette>**
*ah and **Babette's** course >*

-> C: **Babette** elle vient pas monter je:: je sais pas je crois qu'elle vient
***Babette** she doesn't come to ride I:: I don't know I think she comes*
plutôt pour apprendre à seller et à brider
to learn to saddle and to bridle

B: ah bon
ah well

In this example, B asks C about the time when Babette's class is taking place. C, however, provides only an indirect answer, saying that Babette doesn't attend a riding class but a saddling and bridling class. C thereby

avoids either admitting that she does not know when Babette's class is taking place or directly rejecting the presupposition implied in the question by stating, for example, that Babette has *no* class that day. In his analysis, de Fornel (op. cit.) draws our attention to this link between indirection and left-dislocation as a way of maintaining preference organization.

Note that here again, the management of preference structure is sequentially organized: the repetition of the full NP in the beginning of a turn allows for a construction that first exhibits a direct link to previous talk and then turns into thematic elaboration and indirect reaction. However, it is in my view difficult, in this case, to identify a clear preference-related motivation that would be dissociated from information structural constraints. If we agree with Lambrecht (1987), that French has a strong constraint against the co-mapping of topic and subject position, and that therefore left-dislocations are used to establish or to switch topics, then this information-related dimension plays a crucial role in the case under analysis: the discussion in fact switches from talk about the class (*le cours à Babette*) to Babette herself. A sequence that would run 'B: et le cours à Babette? - C: elle vient pas monter' would at least sound unusual. This does not invalidate de Fornel's claims, it rather shows that information structure and the social organization of talk interact in complex ways, being sometimes interdependent, and at other times working independently.

4.2 The Role of Lexical Repetitions in Sequentially Organizing Disagreement

Further examples show that the grammatical coding itself, i.e. referential overspecification itself, and not necessarily detachment constructions, can be a functional elements in the speaker's orientation to preference organization of talk as social activity. The following sequence is taken from a similar type of situation as example (2).

(4) (MU/GE ent. i.)

P: on peut dire que **les fondements** sont importants
*you can say that **the basics** are important*
et qu'on peut apprendre à parler dans la région
and that you can learn to speak in the region

S: donc ce n' est pas difficile **les fondaments** étaient là et pour
so it's not difficult the basics were there and as to
apprendre la langue de tous les jours ça va de soi après
learning everyday language it then happens by itself

P: **les fondaments** bon au début il y avait beaucoup de gens qui
the basics well in the beginning there were many people who
m'ont dit que je parle relativement bien le français et j' ai pensé
told me that I speak fairly well french and I thought
ce n'est pas le cas parce que j' ai eu beaucoup de problèmes (...)
that's not the case because I had many problems (...)

P's answer here is again shaped as a 'yes-but' sequence. His point runs as follows: 'the basics, well , some people said they were there, but I didn't feel that was the case ...'. Note that S's preceding remark is clearly built so as to project, as a preferred second pair part, a confirmation of the existence of basics, previously mentioned by P herself. Here, P's orientation to this preference is reduced to the simple repetition of the definite NP, followed by a *bon* that foreshadows a dispreferred reaction. Similarly to what we have observed in examples (1) and (2), the repetition of the definite NP serves as a kind of preface for further development of discourse. The dispreferred reaction is here even further deferred in the turn, being preceded by the statement according to which people complimented P on his basic knowledge of French. We then see here again a typical sequence for organizing a dispreferred reaction, the overspecified referential expression alone functioning as a simple and very much reduced agreement token (Pomerantz 1984) preceding a stepwise transition towards disagreement. The turn-initial position and the signaling function of the overspecified expression, however, is parallel to what we have observed for left-dislocations.

4.3 When is Agreement (Dis)Agreement?

Let us close the analysis with an example where a whole clause, including a long definite description, is being repeated by the second speaker. The example is taken from the same radio-interview with Jean-Paul Belmondo as example (1).

(5) (Greter)
MD: est-ce que dans l'ensemble vous considérez que . que la profession

all in all do you think that . that the profession .
eh: vous a bien traité: et que la presse . a été le reflet assez fidèle . de
eh: treated you well and that the media . were the true mirror . of

de votre carrière

of your career
JPB: ben oui je crois que je: . je peux pas me plaindre hein
well yes I think that I: . I can't complain can I
MD: c'est plutôt **l'itinéraire d'un enfant gâté**
*it's rather **the itinerary of a spoiled child***
JPB: voilà c'est plutôt **l'itinéraire d'un enfant gâté** parce que si
*that's it it's rather **the itinerary of a spoiled child** because if*
un type comme moi se plaint . de sa carrière: et des gens
someone like me is complaining . about his carreer: and the people
qui ont été atour de lui alors qu'est-ce que vont dire: les autres (...)
that were around him then what will the others say: (...)

The repetition of a whole clause serves here as a confirmation-token underlining the point made by MD. Interestingly, a similar procedure, comprising the repetition of a full NP, to what we have documented so far as prefaces to disagreement, seems also to be used in the context of agreement. However, what agreement or disagreement is can not always be established unambiguously. JPB's response in the above example is very revealing with this regard. Isn't there a good portion of irony involved when he answers: 'yes, I am a spoiled child ... because anyway, I can't possibly be complaining...'? If the second part is not annihilating the first part of this response, it nevertheless definitely puts it into perspective: He has been spoiled, but what else can a successful actor tell his public? And this is again sequentially organized: The open agreement, taking literally up the other speaker's words, precedes the somewhat moderating part of JPB's turn at talk.

The variations and manipulations of the so far described patterns when disagreement is or is not supposed to be exhibited as (dis)agreement raise some interesting questions to be explored.

4.4 Underlying Patterns and Open Questions

The use of referentially overspecified expressions in all the quoted examples seems to follow a similar principle: a speaker takes up a full NP used by the first speaker which refers to a highly accessible referent, generally already established as a topic; but he does this only in a first step, maintaining a preferential orientation towards agreement and contiguity before reorienting talk towards disagreement and/or thematic elaboration. The overspecified referential expression and the left-dislocated constructions which it is sometimes part of thereby formally manifest the speaker's orientation toward previous talk while at the same time signaling a possible reorientation of the activities accomplished by talk. This is by far not what speakers always do,

information structure, appears to be a relevant factor in the formal structuring of clauses, and, more generally, in the grammatical coding of anaphoric reference.

Many questions remain open after the analysis presented in this paper. How, exactly, are information structure and interactional organization interwoven to motivate grammatical codings and constructions? What functions and constraints differentiate the various grammatical patterns (simple lexical repetitions, left-dislocations, full clause repetitions) that appear to be motivated by speakers' orientation toward preference organization? Can same or similar functions be identified with regard to left-dislocations involving full NP and those that involve pronouns as extracted constituents (as in *moi, j'ai faim*)?

Despite these and many other questions, I hope to have demonstrated that the linguistic resources usually used for managing information structure are also used to organize conversational structure. This indicates that the working of anaphora in face-to-face interaction is not limited to a purely referential functionality nor to the structuring of information flow, but also pertains to the social-interactional dimension of talk as a social activity.

5 Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have focused on identificationally overspecified referential expressions in order to illustrate one way in which grammatical resources, information structure and the social organization of talk interact in complex ways to shape speakers' choices for establishing anaphoric reference. It has been shown that the sequential management of preference organization in talk serves as an organizing principle for these choices, affecting namely their grammatical codings (such as lexical NP) as well as the syntactic construction around them (namely left-dislocations). This finding provides further empirical support for the idea that anaphoric codings do not merely play a role in the information structure of the discourse but have a communicative function in projecting the structure of activities (Pekarek 1999) and thereby attracting the attention of the interlocutors to the very fact that an interaction-organizational step is being accomplished.

Such observations, finally, also reveal that interesting insights can be gained by treating, as Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) have suggested, the functional organization of linguistic and discourse structure not only in terms of information management, but as part of the interactional and social dimensions of talk.

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