'World-to-Language' Shifts between an Antecedent and its Pro-Form

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Philippe De Brabanter
Institut Jean Nicod, CNRS-EHESS-ENS
1bis avenue de Lowendal, 75007, Paris, France
phdebrab@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

In this paper, I offer a preliminary description of a phenomenon that has, to my knowledge, rarely been discussed before by specialists of anaphora. My focus is on utterances, or sequences of utterances (discourses), of the following type:
(1)   (X says) That's a rhinoceros (and Y responds) A what? Spell **it** for me. (Lyons, 1977: 667)
In this example, the *it* in Y's utterance stands for the word *rhinoceros* in X's. However, *it* is not coreferential with its 'antecedent': whereas *(a) rhinoceros* denotes a class of animals in 'the world', *it* denotes the word-type used as a name for that class, a word-type of which the antecedent is a token. In other words, there has been a shift in the universe of discourse, from 'the world' to 'language'. Or, to use the standard terminology originally proposed by Quine (1940), whereas the word *rhinoceros* is 'used' ordinarily in the first sentence, it is 'mentioned' (by means of *it*) in the second.

The various patterns

Although I have not been able to carry out any systematic corpus-based survey of the phenomenon that is the main focus of this paper, I have the feeling that it is significant both because it appears to be widespread and because of the novel issues it raises for theories of anaphora. My first contention is that world-to-language shifts are common, an impression reinforced by the fact that they are processed smoothly by hearers/readers, who often do not seem to feel that there are such shifts, and that these raise special interpretation difficulties. My second contention is that world-to-language shifts are not a mixed bunch of isolated cases, but a homogeneous class of instances that are subject to similar constraints and are susceptible of a common explanation. My third contention is that world-to-language shifts present theorists with just another case of anaphora without (strict) coreferentiality, and that it would be best, therefore, to provide an account of those shifts in terms that are an extension of the theories offered for previous cases of partial mismatch between antecedent and pro-form.

World-to-language shifts are not restricted to cases like (1), in which a metalinguistic *it* is grammatically related to a noun that has its ordinary denotation. There exist many similar examples involving other sorts of 'pro-forms', notably adverbs used in a pronominal capacity (2), demonstrative pronouns (3), interrogative and relative pronouns (4), NPs with a metalinguistic head (5), and (quotational) repetitions of the antecedent (6):

(2)   Giorgione was **so** called because of his size. (W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, 139)

(3)   He loved her, among other reasons, because he so violently loathed that ghastly degenerate (**that** was the word) Beppo Bowles. (Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza*, 122)

(4a)   It means nothing to you, I suppose, he said, it was just a, **what** do they call it, a one-night-stand. (David Lodge, *Nice Work*, 297)

(4b)   Yes, everything went swimmingly, **which** is a very peculiar adverb to apply to a social event, considering how most human beings swim. (Julian Barnes, *Love, etc.*, 70-71)

(5)   A: 'I think of him as a family man.'
B: 'Funny, I've always considered **that phrase** an oxymoron.' (Julian Barnes, *England, England*, 64)

(6)   He kept his hands in the side pockets of his belted grey suit. That was a belt round his pocket. And **belt** was also to give a fellow a belt. (James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 9)[1]

I do not intend in these pages to provide an exhaustive overview of all the possible configurations. However, I would like to make it clear that most of the patterns distinguished above can be realised by more than the one form illustrated in examples (2) to (6). Thus, next to *so* in (2), which also 'hosts' a shift in such phrases as *so to speak* and *so to say*, one finds the adverb *as*, in parenthetical clauses like *as X says*, *as X puts/calls it*, *as it is called*, *as the jargon/cliché/title/slogan has it*, *as the saying/phrase/legend/proverb goes*. Besides, this *as* has an interrogative counterpart *how*, in such examples as *You wish his books were a bit more cheerful, a bit more ... **how** would you put it, life-enhancing?* (J. Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*: 132-33). What all these examples have in common is that the adverb that hosts the shift functions as a manner adverbial of the speech verb.

Case (3) has fewer alternatives, but instances with *this* (**this** may not be the right word), *these* (**these** are my own words) and *those* (**those** were the adjectives used in the Dublin press) are perfectly possible too. In all the cases I have encountered, the demonstrative is the subject of a predicate that includes a metalinguistic noun or verb. Case (4a) overlaps with (3), as it is in part its interrogative analogue. But, as can be seen in example (4a), the host of the shift can also be the direct object of a speech verb. Like the interrogative *what* in (4a), the sentential relative *which* is the only possible 'host' of a shift in (4b). As for case (5), there is a wide range of possibilities, since all that is required is an NP headed by a metalinguistic noun. A similar remark holds for (6), where any sort of previously used string can be quoted.

To sum up, the pro-forms used to achieve world-to-language shifts are language-denoting arguments of a

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[1] This may look like a strange example, until one is told that the narrator is supposed to be about six years old. In this passage, it is as if he is 'rehearsing' his vocabulary: next to the noun *belt*, there is a verb *to belt* which means 'to hit hard" or "to hit with a belt".

metalinguistic predicate (cases 1, 2, 3, 4), metalinguistic predicates (case 5), quotations that refer to a singular linguistic object (case 6). Though there is some variation as to what the pro-forms are, all the world-to-language shifts above exhibit the same central features, of which, as far as I can see, there are four: (i) trivially, there has been a shift from world talk to metalinguistic talk between antecedent and pro-form: whereas the antecedent unequivocally denotes objects in the world, its pro-form just as unequivocally mentions a linguistic object; (ii) the linguistic object mentioned by the pro-form is iconically related to the antecedent in ordinary use: it is usually the expression-type of which the antecedent is a token (but it could conceivably also be a token of the same type as the antecedent);[2] (iii) the antecedent cannot undergo truth-preserving substitution by a coreferential term; (iv) appearances notwithstanding, world-to-language shifts 'block translation', just as well as quotations do. Literal translation of (6) is barred in any language that does not have a noun for belts that is homonymous with a verb meaning "to hit hard". Although translating (1) to (5) may seem unproblematic, it fails in the strict sense that the referent of the pro-form is affected each time the antecedent is translated. Thus, though the translations are usually perfectly intelligible, they are no longer entirely about the same objects! For example, if I were to translate (3) or (5) into French, the metalinguistic comments would now be about, say, *dégénéré* and *bon père de famille*, not about *degenerate* and *family man*. Only (2) would escape unscathed, and this only because the antecedent is a proper name, i.e. the sort of constituent that is not translated.

But let me return to the second and third features, which are probably the most significant. They prove to be interdependent: it is because of the iconic relation between the referent of the pro-form and the antecedent that truth-preserving substitution fails. Iconicity makes the context of the anaphoric relation opaque.[3] Thus, in (2), if *Barbarelli* is used instead of *Giorgione*, *so* now refers to the expression-type *Barbarelli*, which lacks the suffix *–one* that is necessary to make the utterance true. The resulting utterance is false. Similarly, if, say, *reprobate* is substituted for *degenerate* in (3), the sentence in brackets is no longer true: *reprobate* is not the word the speaker has in mind. In (4a), if *one-night stand* is replaced by, say, *one-night sexual liaison*, the truth-conditions are affected too. The same story can be told regarding *swimmingly* in (4b) and *belt* in (6). Even (5) must be explained in a similar way: although speaker B might find fault with other expressions similar in meaning to *family man*, he might have trouble regarding them as oxymorons. Thus, *good father* or *man who is fond of his wife and kids* are not obvious candidates for oxymoronicity.

However, it is necessary to note the (somewhat unusual) fact that what the replacement of the antecedent affects is the truth-value of <u>the proposition expressed by the independent clause containing the pro-form</u> (which may or not be the same clause as that containing the antecedent). Here the link with (ii) must be stressed once again: failure of substitutivity should not, as has often been done (cf. Rey-Debove, 1997: 254; Recanati, 1979: 83; Saka, 1998: 115), be attributed to the fact that the antecedents in those examples 'mention themselves' at the same time as they are used ordinarily. If that assumption was correct, then it is the truth-value of the clause containing the antecedent that would be affected. Yet, that is never the case when the antecedent and the pro-form occur in distinct sentences — (1), (3), (5) and (6) — or distinct independent clauses — (4a) and (4b). With point (ii) in mind, it is easy to explain why the truth-value of the pro-form-clause is affected. As we have seen above, the fact that the pro-form refers to a linguistic object that is iconic to that antecedent entails that the 'very form' of the antecedent enters into the truth-conditions of the sentence containing the pro-form. If the form of the antecedent changes (via substitution), the truth-value of the pro-form-utterance is affected.

Anaphora or deixis?

There are two reasons why I wish to address this issue. First, world-to-language shifts being an unexplored phenomenon, on which there can therefore be no consensus yet, I cannot presume a priori that it falls into the category 'anaphora'. Second, among the few writers that have simply mentioned the existence of the phenomenon, some have linked it to anaphora — Ross (1970), who talks of 'metalinguistic anaphora' — while others have linked it to deixis — Lyons (1977: 667), who talks of 'textual deixis'. Lyons really commits himself on this choice: in connection with example (1), he writes that "[d]emonstrative pronouns and other deictic expressions may be used to refer to linguistic entities of various kinds (forms, parts of forms, lexemes, expressions, text-sentences, and so on) in the co-text of the utterance" (1977: 667). I assume that Lyons's main motive is a notion that the co-text is part of context; hence, since deixis is the means by which language can be 'rooted in a context that provides singular expressions with referents', what occurs in (1) — demonstrative expressions picking out a referent in the co-text — can count as an instance of deixis.[4]

The question whether we are dealing with deixis or anaphora is a tricky one.[5] Here, I will be content with examining just a few things that deserve our attention.

[2] For a thorough discussion of iconicity and metalinguistic expressions, see Recanati (2000).

[3] This is an intriguing finding for any student of quotation. A distinction is often made between two types of mention, 'autonymous' (i.e. quotation) and 'heteronymous' (as in examples 1 to 5) (see Recanati, 2000). What is usually stressed is the fact that only the former is essentially iconic in its reference. But we see here that heteronymous mention has an (indirect) iconic dimension, and that in spite of this indirectness it is sufficient to create opacity.

[4] Lyons would probably draw a parallel between his (1) and less controversial cases of 'discourse deixis', like the following from Levinson (1983: 63, 85):
I bet you haven't heard this *story.* [where one is about to tell the story]
in the next chapter or *in the previous chapter*
This *is what phoneticians call a creaky voice.* [where *this* is uttered in a creaky voice]

[5] And perhaps, ultimately, one that does not matter that much: at the end of this section, I'll say a word about a recent proposal by François Recanati for a unified account of anaphora and deixis.

(i) absence of coreferentiality between antecedent and pro-form; (ii) how a reference is assigned to the pro-form; (iii) what conclusions can be derived from the wide range of means that are used to achieve a world-to-language shift.

As regards (i), an unsophisticated theory of anaphora would assume the antecedent and pro-form to be coreferential. This would derive from the notion that "anaphoric pronouns are referring expressions that inherit their referents from other referring expressions" (cf. King 2004). Recent research, however, has shown that anaphors are often not coreferential with their antecedents. Take this example of 'associative anaphora': *The police searched <u>the car</u>*. **The wheels were full of mud** (cf. Kleiber, 2001: 9). Or this example coined by Karttunen: *The man who gave <u>his paycheck</u> to his wife was wiser than the man who gave **it** to his mistress*, where coreference can be said to obtain on the 'type plane' rather than the 'instance plane' (cf. Langacker, 1996: 375-76). Or think of so-called 'donkey sentences'. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that lack of coreferentiality is far from being sufficient to infer that we are dealing with deixis.

As regards (ii), there may well be something deictic about one form of metalinguistic reference, namely quotations. Many writers, notably Davidson (1979) and Cappelen & Lepore (1997), have upheld a so-called 'demonstrative' theory of quotation, according to which a quotation is like a pointer to a linguistic referent. Thus, it is quite possible that the sorts of repetitions that occur in examples like (6) function demonstratively, i.e. deictically.

The question is whether this observation can be extended to some or all of the other cases. There is some pro and some con here. Pro is the fact that the various 'hosts' for world-to-language shifts often appear to be interchangeable: in examples (1) to (5), for instance, the pro-form can always be replaced by a quotational repetition, without any impact on truth-conditions. Conversely, *belt* in (6) could also be replaced with at least a metalinguistic NP, a bare demonstrative, and a relative (if one accepts some minor syntactic changes in the latter case and increased ambiguity in the latter two). These major similarities in referential behaviour suggest a strong kinship between (6) and (1) to (5). But once again, and here is the con, this does not warrant the conclusion that world-to-language shifts are essentially deictic. Consider an analogous case: there exist major similarities in referential behaviour between proper names and (referential) definite descriptions. Still (on one theory of proper names) only the former can be said to be 'directly referential'.

Let us now examine point (iii): what can the pro-forms tell us about the nature of the phenomenon under discussion? Cases like (3) and (5) seem to point in the direction of deixis. But one must bear in mind that bare and complex demonstratives also have anaphoric uses. Besides, the fact that possible pro-forms include the pronoun *it* and, more significantly even, the relative *which* significantly complicates matters. As regards the former, although it is primarily anaphoric, it may have deictic uses too:

(7) * And what did you buy? —!I bought **it** [pointing at a bottle]

(8) ? And what saved your life? **It** did [pointing at a Swiss army knife])

These examples suggest that, as a deictic, *it* is prosodically marked: as in (8), it is stressed and is the syllable on which the intonational nucleus falls. It is the fact that such prosody is incompatible with the reply in (8) that makes the sequence ungrammatical. Now, the marked pronunciation of the deictic is not what we find in example (1), where *it* is unstressed and the intonational nucleus is on the verb *spell*; all of which suggests that *it* is rather used anaphorically in (1).

How about *which* in (4b)? Unaware that he is threatening his own position regarding (1), Lyons writes that "[r]elative pronouns, unlike demonstratives, are restricted to anaphoric function" (1977: 659). Even uses of *which* as a sentential relative pronoun appear to be anaphoric in nature:

(9) I have realized that most of the words are insults, **which** is rather funny. (Webpage)

The sentential relative clause can be replaced by an independent clause with an anaphoric demonstrative pronoun:

(9') I have realized that most of the words are insults, and **that** is rather funny.

The picture that emerges so far is particularly blurred. None of the evidence examined allows settling the issue. There are two findings that I would none the less regard as especially significant, but they point in opposite direction. First, the fact that the referential (and truth-conditional) behaviour of (6) and (1) to (5) is very similar. Second, the apparent incompatibility between deixis and the use of a relative pronoun.

In these closing paragraphs, I would like to suggest that my inability to determine positively whether world-to-language shifts pertain to deixis or anaphora may not be so disastrous after all. As hinted above, François Recanati has recently presented arguments in favour of a unified theory (for pronouns). Recanati starts from the notion of 'free uses' of pronouns, i.e. pronouns which are not bound by a quantifier and whose referent is "salient in the conversational context".[6] Although deixis is usually assumed to be the prototype of free use, it is not the only one: pronouns are also used in cases where the situation of utterance does not provide the referent, but where this referent "is cognitively accessible because the speech participants "have it in mind", that is, are thinking about it or about matters with which it is closely associated in their memory […]." (Think of a Belgian tennis fan visiting the Roland Garros centre court a few days after the 2003 final and exclaiming "She must have been so happy", in reference to the winner of the women's singles, Justine Henin.) In the case of deixis, the referent is identified because it is perceptually salient. In the other case, because it is 'associatively' salient. From here, it is only a short step to including a third form of salience, namely discursive salience, i.e. that which provides a referent in anaphoric uses.

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[6] All the quotes in the rest of this section are to Recanati (forthcoming).

Recanati goes on to argue that anaphoric uses should ultimately be regarded as the prototype of free uses. Here's how the argument goes: the "different sources of salience […] (perceptual, discursive, and associative salience) correspond to different bodies of knowledge exploited by the speaker". These bodies of knowledge can be dubbed 'mental files'. The suggestion is that anaphoric uses typically exploit such mental files for giving anaphors a referent: the hearer processes discourse and builds a mental representation on its basis. This mental file contains, notably, information on the referents of antecedents. When the hearer comes to an anaphor, he uses the information stored in the file to provide a suitable antecedent to the anaphor and accordingly assigns it a referent. Though this is typical of anaphoric uses, Recanati continues, the same exploitation of mental files occurs in deictic uses, with the only difference that the mental file is created as a result of perceiving the object that is the referent of the deictic pronoun. A similar account holds for associative uses.

Some suggestions for analysis

I now wish to draw upon the previous discussion to indicate how world-to-language shifts might be analysed. First, let me point out the following interesting fact: two forms of salience are involved in (1) to (6). First, the antecedent is discursively salient, just because it is a recent addition to the mental file that is built gradually as discourse proceeds. Second, (a token of the same type as) the referent is perceptually salient: it is a material 'object' (made of sound or of ink) that has just been perceived in the immediately preceding co-text. Anaphora or deixis? Probably either.

What is needed to understand how a linguistic referent is assigned to the pro-form is an account of what makes the referent salient. Clearly, Recanati's discussion of deixis and anaphora supplies important indications. But I would like to mention another useful theory, one that was developed by Paul Saka (1998) for mention and quotation. Saka starts from the premise that any lexical item occurring in an utterance 'directly ostends' its token form, and 'deferringly ostends' various aspects of its being a linguistic sign (conventional meaning, grammatical function, associated concept, extension, etc.). In language use, every form we utter is accompanied by multiple ostensions. Typically, when we talk about 'the world', we intend "to direct the thoughts of the audience to the extension of" the words we use (Saka, 1998: 126).[7] At the same time, however, (some of) the linguistic features of the words we use are ostended deferringly (i.e. these features are 'activated'). This means that, should the need arise, they can easily be foregrounded in a latter part of the utterance or even a subsequent utterance. By way of connecting this account with Recanati's, I need only say that the features activated as a result of uttering a word are (temporarily) included in the mental representation of the unfolding discourse. In other words, they are available for helping in identifying the referent of a possible subsequent

metalinguistic pro-form. Hence, perhaps, the unobtrusiveness, the ordinariness of world-to-language shifts.

Reverse shifts

There is one final fact that calls for an explanation: whereas world-to-language shifts appear to be very widespread and smooth (at least in my random corpus), the reverse language-to-world shifts prove extremely rare. In my research, I have come across only one unequivocal example — and it definitely feels odd:

(9)   Now what is the meaning of this word *retreat* and why is **it** allowed on all hands to be a most salutary practice for all who desire to lead before God and in the eyes of men a truly Christian life? (James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 109)

In this confusing example, it is presumable that the *it* in bold type has mundane reference, namely to a kind of religious activity. This reading is suggested by the fact that it would be odd to attribute to a word, *retreat*, the property of being a salutary practice.

Now how can we account for the imbalance between the two sorts of shifts? In the previous section, I have ventured an account of why shifts from the mundane to the linguistic plane feel so smooth. Is it compatible with an account of the weirdness of the reverse shift? Here is a suggestion: most of our talk is about the world rather than about words (and particular features of expressions). As a result, the threshold for activation of a word's extension is probably lowered. This means, that unless there are indications to the contrary, the extension will usually be the feature of an expression that is most highly activated. Now cases of mention are precisely 'indications to the contrary': when an expression is mentioned, as is *retreat* in (9), its extension needs to be blocked out to allow access to other features deferringly ostended by the utterance of the expression. This comes at a cost: quite a bit of 'effort' is needed to inhibit the highly activatable extension. It is not unreasonable to assume that reactivating the link to the (now strongly inhibited) extension (the sort of thing needed in an example like (9)) will usually seem too costly an operation. Hence, perhaps, the low frequency of language-to-world shifts.

Conclusion

To sum up, my primary goal in this paper has been to give my readers a fair idea of the various shapes that the world-to-language shift can take. I have also attempted to isolate the central features that characterise this shift. I have then tried to determine whether it was best to classify the phenomenon under consideration as anaphoric or deictic. What little evidence I have been able to gather has proved inadequate to settle the issue. But it has turned out that this probably does not matter much: there are good grounds for assuming that deixis and anaphora are two sides of the same coin. Actually, world-to-language shifts may strengthen this hypothesis, as the pro-forms involved seem to rely, for the identification of their referents, on two sources of salience, discursive and perceptual, i.e. the forms of salience typically associated with anaphora and deixis,

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[7] Those that have an extension, that is. This is a minor drawback of Saka's theory which I cannot discuss here.

respectively. From this observation, I have gone on to show how Recanati's account could be fruitfully combined with the main claim of Saka's (1998) theory of quotation. And finally, I have used the very same instruments to provide a tentative response to the question why language-to-world shifts appear to be much less pervasive and much harder to process than world-to-language shifts.

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