FUNCTIONAL IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPANTS AT DISCOURSE LEVEL

Mădălina CERBAN[*]

Abstract: *Identification is concerned with tracking participants, namely introducing people and things into discourse and keeping track of them. These resources are textual, being interested in how discourse makes sense to the reader. Identification systems involve two systems: one for presenting the identity of the participants in questions and another for relating their identity to another identity through comparison. This paper discusses the types of participants that can be identified. The first part explains the concept of 'tracking' and the ways we can done it, e.g. the use of pronouns, proper names, the definite determiner 'the'. The second part analyses the types of things that can be identified: things, institutions and abstractions, what people say and things in special discourses, as well as the ways these types of things can be tracked, paying a special attention to administrative texts.*

Keywords: *identification, tracking, participants*

I. Identification and tracking

The way in which participants are identified is an important aspect of how a text unfolds. Stories use the most the reference resources to introduce and track participants through a discourse. In other genres, such as newspaper's articles, general participants are presented and only briefly tracked.

In order to make sense of discourse, one of the first things that a reader should do is to be able to track of who or what the discourse is about in any moment. During a conversation about somebody or something, the speaker or the write should name them. After naming the participants, the speaker/reader uses the pronominal reference, using pronouns such as *he, she, it*. By this means the speaker/reader can keep track of the participants in the discourse, namely we know exactly which person or thing we are talking about.

For example, when the author of this newspaper article presents the political problems involving the new British EU commissioner, he introduces several participants: David Cameron, his candidate (Lord Hill of Oareford), top EU job, his views, economic portfolio.

e.g. *David Cameron's candidate for a top EU job was warned yesterday that he could be blocked by Brussels because of his Eurosceptic views.*
Lord Hill of Oareford is the prime minister's choice as Britain's next EU commissioner and Mr. Cameron had travelled to Belgium yesterday promising to secure a key economic portfolio for the peer.
However, the campaign immediately ran into trouble as the president of the European parliament launched an outspoken attack on the former lobbyist and self-declared Eurosceptic, warning that he could be blocked when MEPs vet candidates in September.

(The Times, 16th of July, 2014)

[*] University of Craiova, mcerban15@gmail.com

BDD-A14542 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 17:12:17 UTC)

Some of these participants are introduced indefinitely: a top EU job, an economic portfolio, an outspoken attack.

But, after introducing the participants, they author uses the definite article *the* (*the former lobbyist, the campaign*), assuming that we know whom he refers to. Other participants are things referred to with *the*, assuming that we already know what the author is talking about: *the EU parliament.* We can notice that there are a range of resources for introducing participants into a discourse and for keeping tracking them in the text. We can express this as a set of choices, first between introducing participants and then tracking them. Then we can make a difference between pronouns, names and things preceded by the pronoun *the*: *he, Lord Hill of Oareford, the candidate.*

II. Types of participants that can be identified:

1. Identifying people

In this article the main character, *Lord Hill of Oareford,* is introduced by using a Noun Phrase which tells us that there is someone whose identity we cannot assume yet. When we cannot assume an identity, this means that this identify is 'indefinite'. On the other hand, when we can assume an identity, the participant is considered to be 'definite'. Once it is introduced, the main participant is tracked using pronouns, in this case *he*.

Another tracking resource is *the* in the expressions such as *the former lobbyist*.

Comparing people

Unlike many other languages, the English language tend to insist on signaling the presence of a participant, and this is the reason why comparison is not very used, being optional. However, the resources used compare one participant to another, and so are known as comparative reference. Comparative reference may involve simple contrast, numbers such as *first, second*, and the superlatives such as *best, better*.

Possession

Another important resource for identifying participants is possessive pronouns that work in the same way as *some, the, this, those* in order to tell us whom participant we are talking about.

These are the main resources of identifying participants within a text. According to Martin and Rose (2003: 150), "technically, we can say that resources that introduce people are **presenting** reference, and those who track people are **presuming** reference". However, we should notice that comparative reference and possessive reference are a bit different because they are used in both presenting and presuming reference. In an example as the following:

*e.g. British people have become too inclined to blame **someone else** when something goes wrong, the justice secretary said yesterday.*

someone else presents a new person, at the same time as the British people presume the person they are compared with.

In conclusion, the resources for identifying people are: indefinites, e.g. *a, one, someone, one*, having the function of presenting people, definite article, demonstratives, personal pronouns, e.g. *the, this, these, that, those, I, you, etc*, having the function of

BDD-A14542 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 17:12:17 UTC)

presuming, possessives, e.g. *my, his, etc,* comparatives, e.g. *similar, another, same, different, else.*

2. Identifying things

Different entities can be identified in different ways. Identifying things refers to identifying objects, institutions and abstractions.

2.1 Identifying objects

Concrete objects can be identified as people, namely indefinitely, and they are subsequently tracked by using the definite article *the* or the pronoun *it.*

e.g. *He put the ring on her neck, and she admired **it.***

There are some ways to introduce plural participants. One way is to use the plural with no determine.

e.g. *We saw twenty people waiting in the lobby. **These people** wanted to take part to the political meeting scheduled later.*

Another resource is the use of the plural of *a,* namely *some.*

e.g. *There were **some friends** at my house. While waiting for me they looked for **some sugar** to put in their coffees.*

As we know, the English language uses the indefinite plural *some* with things that can be counted (*some friends),* and things that cannot be counted, mass nouns, (*some sugar).* However, with plural things or with masses we also have the option of presenting participants without *a* or *the.*

e.g. *I put **flowers** in all the vases in the house.*
*I put **honey** in my tea.*

In informal English, it is possible to introduce major participants with *this* or *these* (comparable to the expression *a certain* in formal language)

e.g. *I met **this** guy last night at a party.*

2.2. Identifying institutions and abstractions

Less concrete things, like institutions (*national parliaments, The European Parliament)* and abstractions (*a closet look, democratic scrutiny, recent proposals, national parliamentary involvement*) are identified similarly with objects:

e.g. *We examine the role of national parliaments and the European Parliament in law-making and decision-making in the EU. We take a closer look at democratic scrutiny, subsidiarity and at recent proposals to enhance national parliamentary involvement in EU affairs.*

Comparison can also be used to distinguish types of abstractions:

e.g. ***Freedom** of expression is the touchstone of American democracy, but there is **another freedom** that is also very important: freedom of information.*

There are some other resources for comparative reference, like *same, other, else.*

e.g. *I would have done the **same** as you, but I thought you were wrong.*

BDD-A14542 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 17:12:17 UTC)

Another means used to identify things is by comparing the intensity of their qualities with adverbs such as *better, the best.*
e.g. *I saw how he tried to achieve **the best** performance he could.*

They can also be identified by comparing their quantity, with words such as *most, more, fewer, less, so much, so little.*
e.g. *What is wrong with him? Could he have changed **so much**?*

Things can also be identified by comparing their order:
e.g. *More than one year ago, I met **my first** love with the help of my cousin.*

Other resources for identifying things by their order include *first, second, third, next, last, preceding, subsequent, former, latter.*

Beyond abstractions, we can also identify what people say. The most used reference is *this:*
e.g. *Does God exist? **This** is not a frivolous question, but a very serious issue.*

2.2.1.Tracking in administrative discourse

In administrative discourses almost every participant and everything mentioned is generic due to the fact that provisions are drawn up to be generally applied. The exception is represented are the specific participants and institutions set up to fulfill these provisions. In administrative discourses, these provisions are numbered very precisely, paragraph after paragraph and so on as the text unfolds.

Referring to the previous example (*Does God exist? **This** is not a frivolous question, but a very serious issue),* this type of reference is used to what has just been said, to refer to a point that's just been made, possibly to evaluate it. Generally, what was said before is tracked by using the demonstratives *this, that:*
e.g. *Everybody is scared of earthquakes. **This** is generally true.*

According to Martin and Rose (2003: 154) "The advantage of this kind of tracking is that stretches of meaning can be packed up to play a new role as the argument unfolds". In the following text (quoted from the Lisbon Treaty), the author packages up the content of lawmaking in oder to expand on its areas:
*e.g. Lawmakin**g:** the 'co-decision procedure' (renamed 'ordinary legislative procedure') has been extended to several new fields. **This** means that Parliament now has the same degree of lawmaking power as the Council in some areas where **it** used to be merely consulted or not involved at all. **These** areas include legal immigration, penal judicial cooperation (Eurojust, crime prevention, alignment of prison standards, offences and penalties), police cooperation (Europol) and some aspects of trade policy and agriculture.*

(*Lisbon Treaty, www.europe.eu)*

This kind of tracking of what was said is called *text reference.* We can notice that this text reference is used to go from big meanings to little meanings in order to understand better what we talk about. New meanings can grow, and the meaning also moves along.

BDD-A14542 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 17:12:17 UTC)

The method of tracking things in administrative and legal discourses is quite different, because the resources used for doing it have to be very precise. This includes some specialized features that can be seen from the example below:

e.g. *For the purposes of this Convention the term **forced or compulsory labour** shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the **said** person has not offered himself voluntarily.*

(Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), www.ilo.org)

The word *said* is used alongside *the* to refer precisely to what have been said. *Said* is the specialized version of *the*, specifying that the identity it refers to can be found in the previous text. Another example of specialized reference is the tracking device *therewith* which refers to a specific location in the text. *Therewith* is more general than the demonstratives because it treats discourses as meaning, in opposition to a collection of people.

e.g. *The mission of the commission is to offer special powers and certain functions and to provide matters connected **therewith**.*

Conclusions

Identification is concerned with tracking participants, namely introducing people as well as things into a discourse and keeping track of them once put into the text. These textual resources are concerned with how discourse makes sense to the reader, by keeping track of identities.

We used several examples, some from newspapers, in order to illustrate especially the means of tracking institutions or other abstractations.

References

Bloor, Thomas, Bloor, Meriel, *The Functional Analysis of English. A Hallidayan Approach.* Second eds. London: Arnold, 2004.

Butler, C.S., *Systemic Linguistics: theory and applications*, London: Batsford, 1985

Cumming, S, Ono, T., " Discourse and Grammar". In T.A. van Dijk [ed.] *Discourse as Structure and* Process, London: Sage, 112-137.

Halliday, M.A.K., *Introduction to Functional Linguistics*. London: Arnold, 1985.

Halliday & Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, London: Longman, 1976.

Halliday, M.A.K. Martin, J.R., *Readings in Systemic Linguistics*, London: Batsford, 1981

Halliday, M.A.K., Matthiessen, C., *Introduction to Functional Linguistics*. London: Arnold, 2004.

Hoey, M., *On the surface of discourse*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1993.

Martin, J.R., *English Text: System and Structure*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1983.

Martin, J.R. , Rose, D., *Working with Discourse. Meaning beyond the clause*, London & New York: Continuum Publishing House, 2003.

Wodak, R., *Disorder of Discourse*, London: Longman, 1996.

Lisbon Treaty, www.europe.eu, 8 August, 2014

BDD-A14542 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.58 (2026-11-16 17:12:17 UTC)