THE SYSTEM OF REFERENCE IN "THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE" *BY ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE*

Mădălina CERBAN*

Abstract: *There are two major cohesive types: the system of conjunction and the system of reference. The system of conjunction represents a resource for semantically linking the complex sentences into a text. The system of reference represents a resource that marks the status of the text, namely values that are assigned to elements of the discourse in order to make the readers and the speakers process these elements. The two textual statuses, Theme and New, have different functions in the flow of text. Theme represents the departure point in a complex sentence, while New retains the information expressed by the Theme. This paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, we are going to discuss all types of references, pointing out that reference is made in the context of situation. In the second part we are going to analyse the system of reference in the short story "The Red-Headed League" by the English writer Arthur Conan Doyle, pointing out all types of references the author used: exophora and endophora, co-reference (personal and demonstrative) and comparative reference (general and specific).*

Keywords*: reference, exophora, endophora, co-reference, comparative reference.*

I. General Considerations about the System of Reference

In this paper we are going to use in our analysis Halliday and Hasan's model of cohesion set up in 1976. According to them, cohesion and coherence can be studied only within a text pointing out that in fact we study the *product* of the process of talking or writing, listening or reading. Generally, we refer to text as a written product because it is easier to notice the structural organization of it.

The organization of text is both formal and semantic, but it is important to think of it as "an outgoing process of meaning" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 524).

Cohesion studies the textual metafunction of the text which refers to the system of Theme, achieved by marked or unmarked Theme selections, giving prominence to a certain pattern (also known as "method of development", Halliday, 1995), e.g chronology and focus on Subject in narrative and biographical discourse, and angle of assessment, e.g. hypothesis in scientific discourse. The textual metafunction develops a set of lexicogrammatical systems which, alongside the semantic and contextual resources, create and interpret a text.

There are four ways by which cohesion is created in English: conjunction, reference, ellipsis and lexical organization. In this paper we are going to analyse the reference system as a relationship between things or facts which may be established at various distances in texts.

At a level of textual metafunction there is a close semantic relationship between the system of information and the system of Theme, namely between information structure and thematic structure. These two structures have totally different functions within the flow of the text. The Theme represents the point of departure for

* University of Craiova, mcerban15@gmail.com

BDD-A29916 © 2017 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.172 (2026-09-15 01:26:41 UTC)

the information presented further in the text while New retains this information. The Theme and the New belong to textual structure of the clause; at the same time the textual status (reference and ellipsis) does not. "[…] while an element is marked cohesively as identifiable by means of a grammatical item such as the nominal substitute *they*, or as a continuous by means of a grammatical item such as the nominal substitute *one*, the textual statuses of identifiability and continuity are not structural functions of the clause or of any grammatical unit." (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 550).

The textual status which concerns the system of reference is that of identifiability. As reference is a semantic relationship the reference item is not constrained to match the grammatical class of the item it refers to but it has to match the semantic properties. Reference has semantic properties because a conversational element can be identified and recovered or identified by the listener at the relevant point in the discourse with the help of its semantic properties. According to Martin (1992), the core reference paradigm is this:

	[presenting]	[presuming]
[comparison]	a beautiful woman	the beautiful woman
[-]	a woman	the woman

"Presenting reference signals that the identity of the participant in question cannot be recovered from the context; presuming reference signals that it can. Presenting reference is strongly associated with first mention and presuming reference categorically associated with second mention" (Martin, 1992: 102).

If the element cannot be identified, then the listener has to establish it as a new element of meaning in the interpretation of the text.

The referential system consists of two types of references: one which is present in the text and another one which is situational, related to the context ("accompanying text", Halliday and Hasan, 1976:32). Situational reference must come due to the fact that there is a logical continuity from referring to a thing without mentioning the context of the situation, passing through the reference of a thing as identified in the context of the situation to referring to a thing which is identified in the context of the situation. The situational reference is called *exophoric reference* (pointing outwards to the environment), and the textual reference is called *endophoric reference* (pointing inwards to the text).

(i) *Exophoric reference* gives us the possibility to identify the reference item which can be recovered from the text environment. This type of reference does not contribute to the cohesion of the text directly, but only indirectly when references to one and the same referent repeat themselves, forming a chain. Such chains can commonly be noticed in spoken dialogues.

(ii) *Endophoric reference* means that the identity supposed by the reference item can be recovered from within the text itself. As the text unfolds, the participants in a dialogue build up a system of meanings. Endophoric references can be divided into

BDD-A29916 © 2017 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.172 (2026-09-15 01:26:41 UTC)

two categories according to the direction they point to: anaphoric reference and cataphoric reference.

(ii.a) Anaphoric reference is that reference which points backwards to the unfolding text, to a referent that has already been introduced and, as a result, becomes part of the text's system of meanings.

Anaphoric reference is very spread in narrative texts where we can find long chains of anaphoric references.

(ii.b) Cataphoric reference is that reference which points forwards to the unfolding text, e.g. the reference has not been introduced yet. Cataphoric reference appears less often than the anaphoric one. Cataphoric reference is used for introducing a person into the text or to anticipate a passage of text.

Exophora and endophora have in common the fact that they presuppose referents, but they differ in the type the reference which can be the same (co-reference) or another reference of the same class (comparative reference).

Co-reference can be divided into three types: personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference. In this paper we are going to analyse which types are more or less used and how they influence the story, by adding information about the characters and events.

II. The system of reference in the short story in Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Red-Headed League"

As we have already stated, the system of reference creates cohesion by creating link between elements. In this story, we can notice that exophoric reference is more used than endophoric reference. If we take into account the fact that exophoric references is encountered especially in spoken discourses, we can understand why the author uses it a lot as the story contains many dialogues which offer the necessary information about the murder the detective Holmes has to solve. The exophoric references do not contribute directly to the cohesion of text but they do it indirectly when the same reference is repeated over and over again forming a chain. Such chains are common in spoken exchanges with repetition of references to the interactants by means of forms *I, we, you*:

e.g. *"**You** could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson", he said in his most cordial manner.*

*"**I** was afraid that **you** were busy".*

*"**I** am. Very much indeed."*

*"Then **I** can wait in the next room".*

Because *The Red-headed League* is narrated from the first-person perspective of Dr. Watson, who participates in all aspects of Sherlock Holmes's case, the pronoun *I* is used more frequently than the other pronouns expressing interactants.

In terms of endophoric reference, the author uses it because once introduced in the text, it becomes part of the system of meanings. "Endophoric reference may point

BDD-A29916 © 2017 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.172 (2026-09-15 01:26:41 UTC)

'backwards' to the history of the unfolding text, that is, to a referent that has already been introduced and is thus part of the text's system of meanings" (Halliday & Matthiessen: 2004, 552).

e.g. *"What is **the name** of this helpful young man?" asked Sherlock Holmes.*

*"**Vincent Spaulding**, and **he**'s not young either. It's hard to say his age. He could do better for himself, and earn twice what I was able to give him. But, after all, if **he** is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"*

As we previously mentioned, this type of reference is called anaphora, and it is very common in discourses because it makes a significant contribution to the text.

In other cases, endophoric references point to the information that is going to be presented later in the discourse. This type of reference it is sometimes used to introduce a new participant. In detective stories endophoric references are quite necessary as the author needs to unveil additional information in order to solve the mystery. This type of reference, pointing forward to the future text, is called cataphora:

e.g. *"This is **Mr. Jabez Wilson**", said my assistant, "and he is extremely well suited for it", the other answered.*

"And he is extremely well suited for it. He has everything he needed. I cannot remember when I have seen anything so fine".

Cataphora is less common than anaphora. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the only exception is structural anaphora whose characteristic is that the reference is expressed by the same nominal group where the reference item appears:

e.g. *"[...] with instructions that the interest should be used to find easy jobs for men **whose** hair is of that colour"*

*This assistant of yours **who** first called your attention to the advertisement – how long had he been with you?*

All references presuppose other references, but they do in two different ways: if the reference is the same, this is co-reference, and if there is another referent from the same class it is called comparative reference. The co-reference is expressed by personal or demonstrative items:

e.g. ***He** took a step backward, turned **his** head to one side, and then expressed **his** pleasure at my success.*

*But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing **this** trick upon me.*

All the examples we have discussed are co-referential, and in the last part of our paper we are going to analyse comparative reference.

Unlike personal and demonstrative pronouns which express co-referential relations due to the fact that the same entity is referred over and over again, the comparative reference is part of a frame of reference, expressing a comparison between the reference and what it is being talked about. Syntactically, comparative references

BDD-A29916 © 2017 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.172 (2026-09-15 01:26:41 UTC)

carry out the function of predicatives and adverbial modifiers. They express a relation of identity (identical, identically, equal, just as, the same), similarity (similar, similarly, likewise, such, so) and difference (otherwise, different). In the story we analyse, the author uses a lot of comparative references in order to explain and to order all the information related to the case the characters investigate:

e.g. *Well, you can easily think that that made me listen, for the business has not been good for some years, and an **extra** couple of hundred would have been very useful.*

*If you can do nothing **better** than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere.*

Conclusions

The system of reference represents a resource that marks the status of the text, namely values that are assigned to elements of the discourse in order to make the readers and the speakers process these elements. The co-reference is the part of the system which creates cohesion of the text in a direct way. In the story we have analysed, anaphora is more frequent than cataphora, personal co-reference is more often encountered in the discourse than demonstrative co-reference.

In the case of comparative references, we can conclude that there here is no structural relationship between the reference and the item it refers to. The author uses it in order to introduce more details about the plot of the short story.

References

Berry, M., *Systemic Linguistics and Discourse Analysis: a multilayered approach to exchange structure* in "Studies in Discourse Analysis", R.M. Coulthard and M. Montgomery (eds), London, Routledge & Kegan, p. 120-145, 1981

Conan Doyle, A. *The Red-Headed* league. In *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Black and White Classics, copy write 2015

Eggins, S., *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics.* London: Pinter, 1994

Halliday, M.A.K.,*On Grammar*, eds. Jonathan Webster, London & New York: Continuum, 2003

Halliday, M.A.K., Hasan, R. *Coherence in English*, London: Longman, 1976

Halliday, M.A.K. and Martin, J.R. (eds), *Readings in Systemic Linguistics.* London: Arnold, 1981

Halliday M.A.K., *An Introduction to Functional* Grammar, 1st edition, London: Arnold, 1995

Halliday M.A.K., Matthiessen, C., *An Introduction to Functional* Grammar, 3-rd edition, London: Arnold, 2004

Hasan, R., *Coherence and cohesive harmony*. In J. Flood (Ed.), "Understanding Reading Comprehension: Cognition, Language, and the Structure of Prose", Newark, DE: International Reading Association, p. 181–219, 1984

Hawkins, J. A. (1978). *Definiteness and Indefiniteness: A Study in Reference and Grammaticality Prediction*. London: Croom Helm

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

Jordan,M. P., *Pragmatic, stylistic and grammatical limitations on choice: a study of cause-effect signalling in English*. In A. Sanchez-Macarro & R. Carter (Eds.), "Linguistic Choice across Genres: Variation in Spoken and Written English", Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 65–86, 1998

Martin, J.R. (1992). *English Text: System and Structure*, Amsterdam: Benjamins

BDD-A29916 © 2017 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.172 (2026-09-15 01:26:41 UTC)