

# EXOPHORIC REFERENCE AS AN INTERACTIVE RESOURCE<sup>1</sup>

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Certain items of talk, for example demonstratives such as 'this' and 'that', have the property that "instead of being interpreted semantically in their own right, they make reference to something else for their interpretation" (Halliday and Hasan 1976:30). Halliday and Hasan (1976:31) note that such items "are directives indicating that information is to be retrieved from elsewhere" and use the term exophoric reference to designate cases where the information to be retrieved is not in the talk being produced but rather in the situation within which that talk occurs.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I wish to examine some ways in which exophoric reference might constitute a resource for the accomplishment of particular tasks posed in the construction of the turn at talk. Data for this analysis will consist of videotapes of actual conversations recorded in a range of natural settings.<sup>3</sup>

Exophoric reference provides a structure organizing the actions of both speaker and recipient within the turn at talk. By using it the speaker sets the recipient the task of finding the object being pointed to with the demonstrative<sup>4</sup> and the recipient's performance of this task constitutes the second move in a two move sequence.<sup>5</sup>

A similar task is of course set when the recipient is instructed to find an item not in the surrounding environment but in the talk itself (a situation Halliday and Hasan (1976:33) refer to as 'endophoric reference'). However in the case of exophoric reference the recipient is frequently

required to perform some definite physical movement in order to accomplish the task, such as bringing his gaze to a particular place, and this movement can be observed by the speaker. It is thus possible for the speaker to make inferences within the turn itself, immediately after the use of the exophoric term, about whether or not the recipient has successfully performed the task set him by finding the appropriate item.

One way in which the relevance of the recipient's task for the state of talk being sustained by the participants might be investigated is by examining what happens when this task is not successfully performed. In the following, though a recipient searches for the items referred to by 'these', she is not able to find them and this failure becomes relevant for subsequent talk.

(1) G.26:530 (Simplified Transcript)

A: They didn't have all the colors. The orange is really nice but they only had it in these bowls, and uhm, (0.5) the coffee mugs.

B: Which is orange.

C: The reddy orange.

A: This one.

B: °Oh::.

The recipient's failure shifts the talk following it away from the activity which had been in progress, discussing A's new dishes, to talk repairing the failure of reference.<sup>6</sup> In this process B's inability to find the bowls or the color that A considers 'really nice' is displayed to all present.

This example highlights the fact that selecting the correct referent from the set of possible referents requires from recipient the use of particular types of competence, as well as close orientation to both the speaker and the event being constructed through his talk.

Successful reference also requires work on the part of the speaker. For example, as part of his task of designing his talk for its recipient<sup>7</sup>, the speaker can and should orient in detail to the particularities of his recipient and the immediate situation in which they are located and analyze whether or not the recipient will be able to find the object being indicated with the chosen demonstrative. If this appears problematic the speaker has the ability to facilitate the recipient's task with other actions, for example further specifying the location of the referent by pointing with some other part of his body. In the present data the speaker in fact directs her face and gaze toward the appropriate bowls.

However, prior to the production of 'these' the recipient has been looking down rather than at the speaker. This raises the possibility that inadequate work on the part of the speaker, as well as the recipient, precipitated the failure of reference, i.e. B is observably not looking at either A or the objects under discussion and might therefore not be situated so as to be able to find the item pointed to with the demonstrative.

Some examples will now be investigated in which the properties of exophoric reference are utilized to accomplish other tasks posed in the construction of the turn at talk. It will be found that in some cases a speaker uses exophoric reference even when he can clearly see that his recipient is not situated so as to be able to see the item pointed to with the demonstrative. Such a finding is relevant to A's use of a demonstrative when B was not looking at her in the last example.

In the following the word 'this' in the phrase 'this wide' locates a gesture being made with the speaker's hands:

(2) G.76:145

A: Ma::n she's this wi:de.

At the time these words are spoken the recipient is gazing away from the speaker and is therefore not able to perceive the gesture (see Figure 1). Further, the speaker is not only able to see this but has in fact just instructed the



Figure 1: 'Ma:n she's this wide.' The speaker is the man in back. Note that his recipient is not positioned to see the hand gesture being pointed to with 'this.'

recipient to move his gaze away from their group to a person in the common scene in front of them:

A: See that one.

B: Huh?

A: The one right straight down there? In the Purple?  
(1.5)

B: Where. Down here?

A: No. Right straight down. Down by the horseshoes.

B: Oh yeah.

[[

A: Right down there.

B: Yeah?

A: Ma::n she's this wi:de.

The speaker is therefore using a demonstrative to point to an item that he knows his recipient is not situated to see. Such action does not appear to be consistent with the constraint of recipient design.

The recipient does, however, eventually find the item being pointed to. Immediately after this utterance is produced he moves his gaze to the speaker and then produces a next utterance which is tied to the hand gesture:

A: Ma::n she's this wi:de.  
(0.8)

B: And that high.

It appears that rather than simply analyzing whether or not his recipient is positioned to perceive the item pointed to with the demonstrative, the speaker in this example expects his recipient to be able to recognize what would be

required in order to find the relevant item and to take action, in this case moving his gaze back to the speaker, to put himself in a position where this task can be accomplished.

The action taken by the recipient is relevant not only to the problem of determining what is meant by 'this' but also to other tasks posed in the interaction. Within the turn at talk the recipient is expected to gaze at the speaker when the speaker is gazing at him.<sup>8</sup> In the present example the recipient has just moved his gaze and bodily orientation away from the encounter and is thus not positioned appropriately for further talk. By requesting that the recipient gaze at a particular place the speaker brings his recipient's gaze back to him. The use of exophoric reference thus results in the recipient physically moving and has the effect of realigning the participants into a configuration appropriate for subsequent talk. From such a perspective the speaker's talk is in fact designed in detail not only for the particularities of its recipient but more relevantly, for the tasks facing him in the collaborative work of constructing the turn at talk.

This example supports the possibility that particular items of talk might be produced not on the assumption that their recipient is able to understand them (in the present case by finding the pointed to item) but rather to induce action on the part of the recipient to bring about a state of affairs where understanding becomes possible, such action also being relevant to other tasks posed in the interaction.

Further support for this possibility is provided by the following in which a speaker uses exophoric reference to regain the gaze of a recipient who looks away from her while she is talking:

(3) G.79:22.7

A: So he bought his pillow from a little place where they slept up there. And it was a long pillow. About this long. Feathered pillow. He put it all the way up my back.

Over "and it was a long pillow" one the speaker's recipients disattends her by moving his gaze from her to a pipe he is filling. Over "about this long", which requires for its comprehension attending the speaker's hand gesture, the orientation of this recipient to the speaker's turn is regained when he brings his gaze back to the speaker. Once again a speaker's use of a term instructing its recipient to attend something in the immediate environment has the effect of accomplishing a particular interactive task posed in the construction of the turn, regaining the gaze of a nongazing recipient.

It may be further noted that by dealing with tasks involving the coparticipation of a recipient indirectly, i.e., by posing problems of comprehension whose solution also establishes appropriate orientation by the recipient to the speaker and his turn, the fact that any problem might exist with the orientation of the recipient to the speaker is never made explicit. Rather, unlike what happened after the recipient's failure in example (1), the official focus of activity within the turn remains on the substance of what the speaker is saying.

It was noted above that one factor implicated in the recipient's failure in example (1) was the fact that the speaker there used an exophoric demonstrative when the recipient was not looking at her. The last two examples raise the possibility that this might not demonstrate an inadequate analysis of the recipient. Rather, when faced with a nongazing recipient a speaker can systematically utilize the properties of exophoric reference to regain that recipient's gaze, as indeed happened in example (1), though too late for successful reference.

The data considered in this paper support the argument that exophoric reference is an interactive accomplishment, requiring for its achievement the collaborative work of both speaker and recipient. Further the work they do can be put in the service of the accomplishment of other tasks posed in the construction of the turn at talk. This line of analysis is consistent with the possibility that the elements utilized to construct utterances in states of talk are selected not simply because of linguistic constraints but rather for their interactive properties.

NOTES

1. The research reported here is one aspect of a larger study investigating the interactive organization of gesture, which will be reported in more detail in "Gesture as a Resource for the Organization of Mutual Orientation During Talk", to appear in Approaches to Gesture, a special issue of Semiotica coedited by Adam Kendon and Thomas Blakely.
2. Exophoric reference is a special case of what is sometimes referred to as 'deixis' or, after Peirce, 'indexicality'. The issues such phenomena pose for both the analysis of human thought and for the construction of social phenomena have received some attention from philosophers and sociologists (see for example Bar-Hillel 1954 and Garfinkel 1967). In a very different vein Bernstein (1964, see also the commentary on his work in Halliday and Hasan 1976:34-36) has associated exophoric reference with his 'restricted code' because it realizes particularistic, context-bound meanings. (For a very different perspective on the importance of linguistic formulations 'exhibiting the particulars of the situation of their use' see Schegloff 1972:424-433, footnote 16). The analysis in this paper is not consistent with the argument that exophoric reference possesses such attributes of Bernstein's restricted code as lack of reflexivity.
3. Tape G.26 is a recording of a dinner between two couples in a large city in the eastern United States. Tape G.76 was recorded at a family picnic of the Loyal Order of the Moose in a midwestern city. Tape G.79 is a family reunion in another midwestern city. For further information on the data and how it was recorded see Goodwin 1981. Data is transcribed according to the Jefferson transcription system (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974:731-734).
4. Thus Lyons (1977:655) notes that "the English demonstratives 'this' and 'that' used as deictics, can be understood as instructing, or inviting, the addressee to direct his attention to a particular region of the environment in order to find the individual (or group of individuals) that is being referred to."



5. This structure has many of the properties of the two move sequences that Sacks and his colleagues have analyzed as Adjacency Pairs (see for example Sacks 1972, Schegloff and Sacks 1973:295-9, and Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974: 716-718). For some consideration of other ways that Adjacency Pairs organize phenomena within the turn see Goodwin 1981.

6. Thus Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977:379-380) noted that "other-initiations of repair locate problems of hearing and/or understanding as 'obstacles' to the production of what would otherwise occupy the sequential position in which they are placed -- an appropriate 'next turn' sequentially implicated by prior turn."

7. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974:727) have noted that "perhaps the most general principle which particularizes conversational interaction (is) that of RECIPIENT DESIGN."

With respect to the task of reference Lyons (1977:655) notes that "when the speaker refers to a specific individual by whatever means, he tacitly accepts the convention that he will provide any information (not given in the context) that is necessary for the addressee to identify the individual in question."

For detailed investigation of the types of analysis participants make of each other in order to formulate one phenomenon, place, appropriately see Schegloff (1972). With respect to reference to persons Sacks and Schegloff (1979) note that speakers employ different types of identification to signal whether or not the recipient is expected to recognize the person being referred to.

8. For a more complete analysis of the participants' orientation to this state of affairs, and the procedures utilized to achieve it, see Goodwin (1981, Chapter 2). For other analysis of the organization of gaze within the turn see Kendon (1967).

9. On this issue see Sacks (10/10/67:12). Goffman (1953: 34) notes that "in conversational order, even more than in other social orders, the problem is to employ a sanction which will not destroy by its mere enactment the order which it is designed to maintain."

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