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THE COGNITIVE STATUS OF ANTECEDENTS IN ENGLISH DISCOURSE ANAPHORA: A COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC APPROACH

*The article examines the cognitive status of antecedents in English discourse anaphora. It argues that anaphoric interpretation cannot be explained only by grammatical agreement, syntactic position, or linear proximity between an anaphor and its antecedent. In discourse, an antecedent is not merely a preceding noun phrase, but a discourse entity represented in the reader's mental model. Its interpretation is guided by cognitive accessibility, which is influenced by how recently a referent has been mentioned, its topicality, grammatical role, discourse continuity, semantic plausibility, inferential support, and the presence of competing referents. The article draws on W. Chafe's theory of information flow, M. Ariel's Accessibility Theory, E. Prince's taxonomy of given-new information, J. Gundel, N. Hedberg and R. Zacharski's Givenness Hierarchy, and B. Grosz, A. Joshi and S. Weinstein's Centering Theory. Examples from J. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and V. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* show that pronoun interpretation is closely connected with narrative focus, character salience and the distribution of attention in discourse. The article concludes that the cognitive status of antecedents is essential for explaining coherence, referential continuity and pragmatic meaning in English discourse. The analysis demonstrates that the cognitive status of antecedents is central to the interpretation of anaphora in English discourse. A purely grammatical account cannot explain why some pronouns are easily interpreted while others remain ambiguous. Nor can it explain why writers sometimes repeat a proper name when a pronoun would be grammatically possible. These choices become clear only when reference is analyzed in relation to discourse cognition. The study has shown that antecedents differ in their cognitive availability.*

Keywords: anaphora, antecedent, cognitive status, discourse, accessibility, givenness, literary prose.

Statement of the Problem. Anaphora is one of the main mechanisms by which discourse achieves coherence. In English, pronouns, demonstratives, definite descriptions, and other referring expressions refer to persons, objects, events, and abstract entities that have been introduced or made inferable in discourse. Forms such as *he*, *she*, *it*, *they*, *this*, *that*, *the man* and *the event* help avoid unnecessary repetition and make discourse more compact. However, the interpretation of these forms is not a purely grammatical operation. In traditional grammar, anaphora is often described as a relation between an anaphoric expression and a preceding antecedent. This definition is useful, but it is not sufficient for discourse analysis. In many cases, the antecedent of a pronoun is not simply the nearest noun phrase. It is a discourse entity that has entered the reader's mental representation of the text. This entity may be active, accessible, inferable, backgrounded or reactivated. Therefore, anaphoric interpretation depends not only on grammar,

but also on cognitive accessibility and discourse salience. A simple example may illustrate the problem: *Mary entered the room. She looked around.* Here, *she* is easily interpreted as referring to *Mary* because the referent is recent, singular, female and topical. However, the situation becomes more complex in the following example: *Mary entered the room and greeted Anna. She looked around.* In this case, *she* may refer to either *Mary* or *Anna*. Both referents are grammatically possible antecedents. The interpretation depends on which character is more salient in the discourse. If *Mary* has been established as the main topic, the reader is likely to select *Mary*. If attention has shifted to *Anna*, *Anna* may become the preferred antecedent. Thus, the interpretation of anaphora is guided by discourse organization and cognitive prominence, not by grammar alone.

The central problem addressed in this article is how the cognitive status of an antecedent influences the interpretation of anaphoric expressions in English

discourse. This question is particularly relevant to extended discourse and literary prose, where readers must follow multiple characters, changes in perspective, and shifts in attentional focus.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.

The study of antecedent status has developed at the intersection of discourse linguistics, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics. Although earlier approaches to anaphora emphasized grammatical agreement and syntactic structure, later research demonstrated that grammar alone cannot explain how anaphoric expressions are interpreted in actual discourse. W. Chafe's theory of information flow is one of the important starting points for the cognitive analysis of anaphora. He distinguishes between active, accessible and new information in consciousness [1, p. 30]. This distinction is directly relevant to anaphora because reduced referring expressions usually presuppose that the intended referent is already active or easily recoverable. H. Clark and S. Haviland's given-new contract also emphasizes that successful communication depends on connecting new information with something already given or inferable for the hearer [2, p. 4]. E. Prince further refined the notion of givenness by showing that discourse status is not a binary opposition. Referents may be new, evoked, unused, inferable or textually and situationally available [3, p. 236]. M. Ariel's Accessibility Theory develops this idea by treating referring expressions as accessibility markers: pronouns usually indicate highly accessible antecedents, while proper names and descriptive noun phrases signal lower accessibility or stronger competition [4, p. 73]. J. Gundel, N. Hedberg, and R. Zacharski's Givenness Hierarchy relates referring expressions to a set of cognitive statuses: in focus, activated, familiar, uniquely identifiable, referential, and type identifiable. [5, p. 275]. B. Grosz, A. Joshi and S. Weinstein's Centering Theory explains local discourse coherence through centers of attention and shows why pronouns often refer to highly ranked discourse entities [6, p. 204]. T. Givón's work on topic continuity is also relevant because it demonstrates that discourse referents differ in persistence and prominence across discourse segments [7, p. 17]. Psycholinguistic research supports the view that anaphora is interpreted through mental representations of discourse. A. Garnham argues that readers interpret pronouns in relation to mental representations built during comprehension [8, p. 7], while A. Sanford and S. Garrod emphasize that discourse comprehension extends beyond sentence-level processing [9, p. 141]. F. Cornish also treats anaphora as a discourse-based

phenomenon depending on linguistic form, discourse representation and contextual knowledge [11, p. 35]. M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan's theory of cohesion is relevant because anaphora is considered one of the major devices through which textual unity is created [12, p. 31].

Task Statement. The main task of this article is to examine how the cognitive status of antecedents influences the interpretation of anaphoric expressions in English discourse. The study aims to demonstrate that anaphoric interpretation cannot be reduced to grammatical agreement or linear textual proximity, but depends on the interaction of cognitive, pragmatic, and discourse-structural factors.

Outline of the Main Material of the Study.

The cognitive status of antecedents in English discourse anaphora can be understood only if anaphora is treated as a discourse-level phenomenon. In traditional grammar, an antecedent is usually described as a noun phrase to which a pronoun refers. However, in actual discourse, the antecedent is not simply a previous linguistic form. It is a discourse entity represented in the reader's mental model. This entity may be explicitly introduced, contextually activated, inferred from a discourse frame, or reactivated after a period of absence. Not all discourse entities are equally accessible. Some referents are foregrounded and can be referred to by pronouns without difficulty. Others remain in the background and require fuller expressions, such as proper names or definite noun phrases. Therefore, a pronoun is not merely a substitute for a noun; it is a signal that the intended referent is sufficiently active in the reader's consciousness.

For example: Emma met Sophia after the lecture. She looked tired.

In this example, she may refer to either Emma or Sophia, since both are female and grammatically possible antecedents. The interpretation depends on which character is more salient in the discourse. If the previous context has been centered on Emma, Emma is likely to be selected as the antecedent. If the discourse has shifted to Sophia, Sophia may become the preferred antecedent. This example demonstrates that anaphoric interpretation is shaped not only by grammatical agreement but also by discourse prominence. From this perspective, antecedents in English discourse may be classified according to their cognitive status.

Highly accessible antecedents are discourse entities that are recent, topical and central to the current focus of attention. They are usually referred to by personal pronouns or other reduced referring expressions. For example: Laura opened the window. She

looked out into the street. Here, Laura is a highly accessible antecedent. It has just been mentioned that it is the grammatical subject, and it functions as the topic of the discourse segment. The pronoun *she* is therefore interpreted without difficulty. In terms of the Givenness Hierarchy, such a referent can be described as in focus [5, p. 275].

Highly accessible antecedents are especially common in narrative discourse. In J. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet often functions as the focal character. When the narrative follows Elizabeth's perception, feminine pronouns referring to her remain clear even when other female characters are present. Her role as the central observing consciousness strengthens her antecedent status [13, p. 142]. This example demonstrates that accessibility is shaped not only by textual distance but also by narrative perspective and focalization.

Activated but non-central antecedents are referents that have already been introduced into the discourse but are not the main center of attention. They are identifiable, yet not always prominent enough to be referred to by a pronoun without ambiguity. For example: David entered the office with Michael. The secretary greeted him.

The pronoun *him* may refer either to David or to Michael. Both referents are possible antecedents. If David is the discourse topic, he may be selected. If Michael has been foregrounded, the interpretation may change. In such cases, a fuller expression is often needed: David entered the office with Michael. The secretary greeted David. The repetition of the proper name reduces ambiguity. From the perspective of M. Ariel's Accessibility Theory, the use of a fuller referring expression indicates lower accessibility or stronger competition among possible antecedents [4, p. 73]. This type of antecedent often occurs in literary scenes with multiple characters. In F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, scenes involving Nick, Tom, Daisy, Jordan and Gatsby require careful management of reference. When Tom Buchanan is introduced and described in detail, subsequent masculine pronouns can refer to him because he has become the local center of attention [14, p. 2]. However, when several male characters are present, proper names and descriptive expressions are often necessary to maintain clarity.

Familiar antecedents are referents that are already known to the reader or have been mentioned earlier, but are not currently active in the immediate discourse. Such referents may remain in the reader's discourse memory, but they often require reactivation before pronominal reference becomes possible.

E. Prince's taxonomy of given-new information is useful here because it shows that discourse status has several degrees [3, p. 236]. A familiar referent is not new, but it may not be currently active in the reader's discourse representation. It may be part of the reader's general knowledge of the text, yet not prominent in the current discourse segment. Reactivated antecedents are closely related to familiar antecedents. They are referents that were previously introduced, then backgrounded, and later brought back into the discourse. Reactivation usually requires a more explicit referring expression, such as a proper name, a full noun phrase, or a definite description. For example, in an extended narrative, a character may remain absent from the discourse for several pages. When that character returns, the writer usually uses the character's name before continuing with pronouns. This strategy restores the referent's accessibility and prevents confusion. V. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* provides a clear example of this process because the novel frequently moves between different characters, memories and states of consciousness. Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh and Septimus Warren Smith occupy different zones of narrative attention. When the narrative shifts from one consciousness to another, the reader must update the discourse model. In one Clarissa–Peter context, feminine pronominal reference is interpretable because Clarissa remains recoverable through discourse continuity and character salience [15, p. 177].

Inferable antecedents are referents that have not been explicitly mentioned before but can be recovered from the discourse context or from shared world knowledge. This type is often connected with bridging anaphora. For example: They entered an old house. The roof was almost destroyed.

The expression *the roof* does not refer to a previously mentioned noun phrase. Nevertheless, it is easily understood because the concept of a house activates knowledge of its parts. The antecedent is therefore not a word in the preceding text, but a conceptual frame associated with the house. H. Clark's work on bridging is important for this type of anaphora. H. Clark showed that discourse comprehension often requires the hearer to construct links between explicitly mentioned entities and inferable associated entities [10, p. 169]. This means that anaphoric reference cannot be reduced to direct co-reference. Sometimes a referent is accessible because it belongs to a frame activated by the discourse. Inferable antecedents are also frequent in literary prose. If a narrative mentions a wedding, the reader can easily interpret later references to the bride, the guests or the ceremony. These expressions do not require prior explicit men-

tion because the frame supplies the necessary inferential background. Thus, cognitive status may depend not only on textual presence but also on conceptual knowledge.

Competing antecedents occur when two or more discourse entities are grammatically and semantically possible antecedents for the same anaphoric expression. This type clearly shows the limits of a purely grammatical explanation of anaphora. For example: John spoke to Robert after the meeting. He looked worried. The pronoun *he* may refer either to John or to Robert. Both are masculine, singular and recently mentioned. The interpretation depends on discourse cues such as topicality, semantic plausibility and contextual expectation. If the previous discourse has been centered on John, John is likely to be selected. If Robert has been presented as the emotionally affected participant, Robert may become the intended antecedent. Competing antecedents increase processing difficulty. A. Garnham argues that pronoun interpretation depends on mental representations built during comprehension [8, p. 7]. When more than one referent fits the pronoun, the reader must evaluate salience, plausibility and coherence. In ordinary discourse, excessive ambiguity may weaken coherence. For this reason, writers often avoid unclear pronoun reference by repeating a proper name or using a definite description. In literary prose, however, competition between antecedents may sometimes be used deliberately to create suspense, irony or psychological complexity.

The classification above shows that antecedent status is not fixed. It changes according to several interacting factors. Recency makes a referent easier to retrieve, but it is not always decisive. A recently mentioned referent may be peripheral, while an earlier referent may remain topical. Topicality is often stronger than recency. A referent functioning as the main topic may remain accessible across several sentences. T. Givón's account of topic continuity is relevant here because discourse referents differ in persistence and prominence [7, p. 17]. Grammatical role also influences accessibility. In English, subjects are often more prominent than objects. Centering Theory explains this tendency by connecting grammatical ranking with local discourse coherence [6, p. 204]. However, context may override subject preference. Semantic plausibility affects interpretation when more than one antecedent is grammatically possible. For example, in the sentence "The mother comforted the child because she was crying," the pronoun *she* could grammatically refer to either the mother or the child if both are female; however, semantic plausibility favors the child as the more likely antecedent. Discourse continuity refers to the mainte-

nance of the same center of attention. When discourse continues with the same character or idea, pronouns are natural. When attention shifts, fuller forms are often needed. Inferential support allows readers to identify referents that have not been directly mentioned. Expressions such as the menu following a reference to the restaurant, or the platform following a reference to the train station, are interpreted through conceptual frames. Competition reduces accessibility. If several possible antecedents share the same gender, number, or semantic class, pronominal reference becomes more ambiguous. In such contexts, English often favors proper names or fuller noun phrases. These factors do not operate separately. In most discourse contexts, they interact. The cognitive status of an antecedent is therefore a dynamic result of multiple discourse conditions.

English literary prose provides valuable material for the study of anaphora because narrative discourse requires continuous tracking of characters, objects and states of consciousness. Unlike isolated grammar examples, novels show how reference operates across longer textual stretches and how anaphora contributes to viewpoint, characterization and narrative coherence. In J. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet often functions as the central consciousness through which events are evaluated. When the narrative follows Elizabeth's observations, the pronoun *she* can refer to her even in scenes where other female characters are present. Her antecedent status is strengthened by her role as the focal character [13, p. 142].

In F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, anaphoric reference is closely related to Nick Carraway's role as narrator and observer. Characters such as Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby become salient when Nick's narrative attention is directed toward them. Once a character is established as the local topic, pronouns can maintain reference efficiently. However, when several male characters are present, proper names are often necessary to prevent ambiguity [14, p. 2].

V. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* presents a different kind of referential complexity. The novel is structured around interior consciousness, memory, and shifting perspectives. Pronouns must therefore be interpreted in relation to the current consciousness being represented. When the discourse follows Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts, feminine pronouns referring to her are supported by continuity of consciousness; when the narrative shifts, the reader must update the discourse model [15, p. 177]. These examples show that literary anaphora is not merely a grammatical device. It helps organize narrative attention, preserve character continuity and guide the reader through changes

of viewpoint. Thus, the choice between a pronoun, a proper name and a definite description has both cognitive and stylistic significance.

Conclusions. The analysis demonstrates that the cognitive status of antecedents plays a key role in interpreting anaphora in English discourse. Anaphoric expressions cannot be explained only through grammatical agreement, syntactic position or linear proximity. The antecedent of an anaphoric expression is not merely a preceding noun phrase, but a discourse entity represented in the reader's mental model and interpreted according to its accessibility, salience and contextual relevance.

Some referents are highly accessible because they are recent, topical and central to the current focus of attention. Others are activated but not central and require fuller forms when ambiguity is possible. Familiar antecedents may need to be reactivated after being absent from the discourse for some time. Inferable antecedents show that anaphoric reference may depend on frames, background knowledge and pragmatic inference. Competing antecedents reveal the limits of purely grammatical explanations. The proposed classification treats anaphora as a dynamic process shaped

by cognitive and pragmatic factors. Highly accessible, activated, familiar, inferable, competing and reactivated antecedents represent different positions on a scale of discourse accessibility. A referent may move from one status to another as discourse develops. The discussion of English literary prose confirms that anaphora is closely connected with narrative organization. In J. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet's role as a focal character supports repeated pronominal reference. In F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, pronoun interpretation depends on local character salience within Nick Carraway's narrative perspective. In V. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, shifts of consciousness make antecedent status especially dynamic. The article concludes that English discourse anaphora is best understood as a system for managing shared attention. A pronoun signals that the intended referent is highly accessible; a definite description signals identifiability; a proper name or fuller noun phrase may re-establish a referent whose accessibility has weakened or whose interpretation is threatened by competition. Therefore, the cognitive status of antecedents is essential for understanding coherence, referential continuity and pragmatic meaning in English discourse.

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Раджабова С. КОГНІТИВНИЙ СТАТУС АНТЕЦЕДЕНТІВ В АНГЛІЙСЬКОМОВНІЙ ДИСКУРСНІЙ АНАФОРІ: КОГНІТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧНИЙ ПІДХІД

У статті досліджується когнітивний статус антецедентів в англійській дискурсній анафорі. У ній стверджується, що анафоричну інтерпретацію не можна пояснити лише граматичною узгодженістю, синтаксичною позицією або лінійною близькістю між анафорою та її антецедентом. У дискурсі антецедент – це не просто попередня іменникова фраза, а дискурсна сутність, представлена

в ментальній моделі читача. Його інтерпретація керується когнітивною доступністю, на яку впливає те, як недавно було згадано референт, його актуальність, граматична роль, безперервність дискурсу, семантична правдоподібність, висновок та наявність конкуруючих референтів. Стаття спирається на теорію потоку інформації В. Чейфа, теорію доступності М. Аріеля, таксономію нової інформації Е. Прінса, ієрархію даності Дж. Гюнделя, Н. Хедберга та Р. Захарського, а також теорію центрування Б. Гроса, А. Джоші та С. Вайнштейна. Приклади з «Гордості та упередження» Дж. Остін, «Великого Гетсбі» Ф. С. Фіцджеральда та «Місіс Деллоуей» В. Вулф показують, що інтерпретація займенників тісно пов'язана з наративним фокусом, виразністю персонажів та розподілом уваги в дискурсі. У статті робиться висновок, що когнітивний статус антецедентів є важливим для пояснення когерентності, референційної безперервності та прагматичного значення в англійському дискурсі. Аналіз демонструє, що когнітивний статус антецедентів є центральним для інтерпретації анафори в англійському дискурсі. Суто граматичне пояснення не може пояснити, чому деякі займенники легко інтерпретуються, а інші залишаються неоднозначними. Воно також не може пояснити, чому письменники іноді повторюють власне ім'я, коли займенник був би граматично можливим. Цей вибір стає зрозумілим лише тоді, коли референція аналізується у зв'язку з дискурс-пізнанням. Дослідження показало, що антецеденти відрізняються своєю когнітивною доступністю.

Ключові слова: анафора, антецедент, когнітивний статус, дискурс, доступність, даність, художня проза.

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