Adapted Texts: A Discussion of some Aspects of Reference

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The place of reading, as a receptive skill, is discussed in relation to current foreign language learning and teaching theory. Selected research on adapted texts, as one kind of potentially comprehensible input, and relevant research on reading comprehension are briefly dealt with. Three types of reference in texts are defined, and selected examples of these types in adapted texts are reported and analysed: reference to the outside world, textual reference, and situational reference. Many of the examples discussed point in the same direction as the results of previous research and basic theoretical assumptions such as studies of the comprehension of various forms of anaphoric reference relationships and “the bridge theory”. However, this does not apply to some examples which reveal completely different reference relationships in the adapted version compared with the original text. In some cases this kind of adaptation practice seems to lack any sensible justification and may be the result of negligence.

INTRODUCTION

The place of reading is receiving renewed attention in current foreign language teaching theory. Largely due to the input hypothesis of Krashen’s foreign language learning theory, there is a general interest in the role played by the receptive skills and an emphasis on the value of comprehensible input (cf. Krashen and Terrell 1983). Of the traditional two main types of reading, extensive and intensive reading, the former, i.e. reading without any overt instruction, is the type of reading associated with this kind of input. Mainly as a consequence of this, extensive reading is currently receiving particular attention both in empirical research and practical guides (see e.g. an article by Robb and Susser (1989) with the title “Extensive reading vs skills building in an EFL context”, reviewing previous research and reporting a new experiment).

The type of language material called graded readers is by many practitioners considered ideally suited for extensive reading (see e.g. Bamford 1984). In particular this seems to be so for mixed-ability teaching which dominates foreign language teaching in the Scandinavian countries. Series of graded readers include both original and adapted readers as well as pedagogic readers, i.e. readers specially written for foreign language learners (see e.g. Simensen 1984). The debate in the 1980s about the most suitable reading material has to a large extent been concentrated on the choice between original and adapted texts.¹

¹The term original is preferred to authentic here. For the debate among scholars about a proper definition of authenticity see e.g. Davies 1984 and Williams and Moran 1989. The term adapted is used as a superordinate term for various kinds of alterations of a text. Other terms are: abridged, reduced, retold, rewritten, simplified, and told. Whatever terminology is used, the primary aim of the alterations is in general to make the text more accessible to learners.

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The 1980s also produced a series of empirical studies of what happens to adapted texts in relation to their original counterparts (Bamford 1984, Davies 1984, Campbell 1987, Hedge 1985, Simensen 1990, and Wodinsky and Nation 1988). The present study of reference in adapted texts is within this area.

My own studies of publishers’ guidelines (Simensen 1987), intended as a help for adaptors, show that some publishers are particularly aware of questions of reference. These studies show that publishers deal with the following types of reference in their guideline documents:

1) the relation between a linguistic expression (a referring expression) and an entity in the outside world (a referent), and

2) the co-reference relationship between two (or more) linguistic expressions (referring expressions) in a text where the interpretation of one linguistic expression depends on that of another, either textual reference backwards in the text, i.e. anaphoric, or forwards, i.e. cataphoric.

In connection with the first type some publishers emphasise the problems which may occur when there is reference to things in the outside world with which the foreign language reader is unfamiliar. Such problems may be due to cultural and background differences between the world of the writer of the text and the world of the reader. According to some of the guidelines, such a reference should be spelled out if it is vital to the text; if not, it should be omitted.

Among the guidelines there is also one which suggests that a complex plot of a story should be adapted by reducing the number of characters, i.e. deleting minor or confusing characters. In cognitive terms this may be formulated as a question of how many referents, whether in the real world or in the world of fiction, which the reader can keep track of. The study of publishers’ guidelines calls this kind of text adaptation a control of information.

In connection with textual reference, the second type of reference outlined above, the study shows that some publishers want to make sure that pronouns are used in ways which are clear and unambiguous for the foreign language reader. Heinemann Educational Books, for instance, suggests that in cases of doubt, the common or proper noun, in most cases an antecedent, to which the pronoun refers, should be repeated. This is said to be most relevant when a pronoun is far away from its antecedent. It is even suggested that the common or proper noun should be restated from time to time in the text, even when the antecedent is quite clear.

A more common guideline is the one which suggests that there should be generosity in reference to speakers in direct speech sequences. This means that in order to ensure that the reader knows who among the characters is speaking at any time, an
adaptation must make this verbally explicit by adding phrases such as “Mary said”. The study of publishers' guidelines calls these kinds of text adaptation a control of language.

Some studies have investigated reading comprehension in relation to texts with specific discourse features. Among these are studies of how mother tongue readers cope with anaphoric reference in texts. Experimental studies have for instance shown that less favourable reading comprehension results when the relationship between anaphoric referring expressions and their antecedents have been more indirect or implicit (cf. Haviland and Clark 1974). The classical experiment is the one which showed that subjects took longer to process a sentence like 2b in “an indirect antecedent pair” than a sentence like 1b in “a direct antecedent pair”:

1a We got some beer out of the trunk.
1b The beer was warm.
2a We checked the picnic supplies.
2b The beer was warm.

(Haviland and Clark: 514-515: my underlining)

Such studies have given rise to “the bridge theory” which postulates a taxonomy of directness in the interpretation of one linguistic element on the basis of another in a text: from more direct and straightforward inferences or bridges to more indirect and less straightforward ones (Clark 1977).

Experiments have also shown that reading time increases when subjects read pairs of sentences of the pronominalization type (e.g. I met a man yesterday. He told me a story.) compared with reading pairs of sentences with a verbal repetition (e.g. I met a man yesterday. The man told me a story.) Other experiments have shown an increase in reading time when the number of potential antecedents in the first sentence of the sentence pair was increased from one to two. Similar results were obtained when there was ambiguity involved in assigning a reference relationship between the referring expression and two potential antecedents (cf. e.g. Frediksen 1981). Research has shown that in such cases the reader has to rely heavily on his knowledge of the world in addition to his linguistic knowledge (see e.g. Charniak 1978).

Other investigations have studied the importance in general of prior or background knowledge for success in foreign language reading comprehensions. This applies to research by, among others, Carrell (e.g. 1983), Mohammed and Swales (1984), Steffensen and Joag-Dev (1984), and Urquhart (1987). Of fairly recent date are the theoretical models of the stereotypic knowledge format-types (frames, schemata, scripts etc.) used to account for the role of “knowledge of the world” in reading comprehension (e.g. Anderson and Pearson 1988, Schank and Abelson 1977, and Rumelhart 1980).
The research started by Haviland, Clark and their collaborators has resulted in a series of new and more specific studies, both of L1 and L2-reading. Questions of discourse in general and reference in particular have been dealt with. Assumptions have been made about features of discourse which facilitate the comprehension of a text. Explicit recommendations for the writing of texts have also been made (see e.g. the recommendations for maximal "transparency" in Berman (1984) and for explicit cohesive relationships in general and a liberal use of anaphoric ties, but restricted use of cataphoric ties, for certain groups of readers, (Moe 1979); see also the parameters of simplification in Tommola (1980)).

THE PRESENT STUDY

The purpose of the present paper is to report and discuss selected aspects of reference in adapted texts. The empirical material consists of adapted texts, mainly published in graded readers but to some extent also included in ordinary textbooks. Adapted texts are compared with their original counterparts. Only major types of changes from the original to the adapted version will be dealt with. Changes other than changes in reference relationships will be disregarded. The discussion will include the two types of reference identified in my study of publishers' guidelines (see above). In addition I will report on and discuss a third type: situational reference. This means that examples of the following three types will be dealt with:

1) the reference relationship between a linguistic expression (a referring expression) in a text and an entity in the outside world (a referent). This type will be called reference to the outside world,

2) the co-reference relationship between two (or more) linguistic expressions in a text where both expressions refer to the same entity in the outside world but where the interpretation of one of them depends on that of the other in the text, either reference backwards in the text, i.e. anaphoric, or forwards, i.e. cataphoric. This type will be called textual reference, and

3) the reference relationship between a linguistic expression in a text and an element in the communication situation where the interpretation of the linguistic expression depends on this situation. Deictic forms of space, time and person, such as here, there, this, that, now, yesterday, I, and you are common referring expressions. This type will be called situational reference.

Within these three types I will report and discuss both adaptations which may be and adaptations which may not be justified on the basis of previous research and theoretical assumptions.
Reference to the outside world

As the first step in the analysis two sub-groups will be distinguished. These relate to whether the reference relation between the referring expression and the entity in the outside world is the same in the adapted version and in the original version, i.e. identity, or whether it is different, i.e. non-identity. The outside world is taken to mean the world outside the text.

Identity

As would be expected, this is by far the most numerous sub-group. It is possible to distinguish between two adaptation strategies on the basis of what is done to the referring expression, i.e.:

- an addition of information, and
- a deletion of information.

The first example illustrates an addition of information. (The examples carry the label OV for the original text or version and the label AV for the adapted version. The elements under discussion are underlined by me. Full reference to the text is found in SOURCES below.)

(1) ... he should go to Oxford and Cambridge... (Boys..., OV:38)
(2) ... he could not go to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge...
       (Boys..., AV:12)

(1) shows that the adaptor has found it necessary to add explicit information about these two cities, information which must have been taken for granted in the originally intended readers.

The example with follows illustrates a deletion of information.

(2) He saw several men lying on the Pennsylvania Avenue sidewalks...
       (The secret..., OV:55)
       He ... saw several men lying on the sidewalks ... (The secret..., AV:19)

The OV of (2) contains a specification and, in cognitive terms, a heavier information load which the adaptor has found irrelevant for the new reader. It has therefore been deleted in the AV. Both (1) and (2) are uncontroversial adaptations and, by and large, in accordance with previous studies and theoretical assumptions.

Non-identity

Examples of non-identity are rare, although they have been reported before in the literature on text adaptation (cf. Hedge: 16-18). To illustrate this sub-type I have
chosen an example from a text by an author whose texts often are adapted for foreign language teaching purposes.

(3) ... and would I give her a little luncheon at Foyot’s afterwards? Foyot’s is a restaurant ... (The Luncheon, OV:105)

I led her in the direction of the little restaurant; but suddenly she pointed across the road to the Great Palace. (The Luncheon AV:89)

In (3) the whole situational setting of the story is moved from France to Great Britain as a result of the adaptation process. “Foyot’s” in the OV becomes “the Great Palace” in the AV. The main character of this story, the narrator, is transformed from a poor author in the Latin Quarter in Paris into an equally poor student at some university in Great Britain. The idea here must be that it is easier for the reader, a learner of English as a foreign language, to cope with reference to places and settings with English names that with references to places and settings with French names. This type of adaptation strategy is very special since it to some extent creates a new story by replacing the referents in the outside world. It is, of course, feasible in this story as it is in many other texts with referents of a fictional nature. But whether this type of adaptation strategy is reasonable from a readability point of view is an open question. The study of publishers’ guidelines does not describe any guideline to this effect.

Textual Reference

As in the case of Reference to the outside world discussed above, the first step in the analysis of textual reference distinguishes between two sub-groups. These distinctions relate to whether the reference relationship between the co-referring expressions and the entity in the outside world is the same in the adapted version and the original version, i.e. identity, or whether it is different, i.e. non-identity.

Identity

Again, this is by far the most numerous group. It is possible to distinguish between four kinds.

(a) Avoiding cataphora.

The example which follows illustrates a shift from cataphoric to anaphoric textual reference.

(4) He could allay certain pains by the touch of his cool, firm hands, and by talking to them often induce sleep in men who were suffering from sleeplessness. (Lord...; OV:886)

He could stop certain pains by the touch of his cool, firm hands, and by talking to men who were suffering from sleeplessness, he could often cause them to sleep. (Lord..., AV:95)
Only a few examples of this kind are found in the material I have worked with so
far. The adaptation strategy points in the same direction as the advice in the
literature to use cataphoric reference sparingly.

(b) Establishing a direct antecedent
In the following example an indefinite noun phrase is introduced in the AV, thus
establishing a direct antecedent for the demonstrative reference “that” in the
sentence which carries the main content from the OV.

(5) The secondary modern school across the road was out of the question for
    such an apparently brilliant boy... (Boys..., OV:38)

    There was a secondary modern school across the road from where he lived,
    but his parents thought that was not good enough for such a clever child.
    (Boys..., AV: 12)

According to the bridge theory one way to explain the adaptation in (5) is the
following: the adaptor has found it necessary to introduce an antecedent for a
definite referring expression in the OV. The original seems to presuppose that the
readers are able, without any problem, to establish a bridge or make an inference so
that they can make sense of the sentence. My material contains many examples of
this kind, with minor variations. My impression is, therefore, that text adaptation to
a large extent involves adding such direct antecedents, allowing for more direct and
easy bridging on the part of the reader. The study of publishers' guidelines, however,
does not report any particular guideline to this effect.

(c) Standardising.
In the examples to be discussed under this point there is a common trend towards
standardising the expressions in a co-reference relationship in the AVs. The first
example illustrates a tendency to repeat the proper name.

(6) Summer visitors to the Isle of Wight in the 1860s, strolling down the
    Freshwater Bay, were often startled by the bizarre figure of Julia Cameron .
    . . she . . . Ducking in and out of her camera-cloth, she took repeated
    exposures... (Close-up..., OV:45)

    Summer visitors to the Isle of Wight in the 1860s, strolling down the
    Freshwater Bay, were often startled by the bizarre figure of Julia Cameron .
    . . She . . . Ducking in and out of her camera-cloth, Julia took repeated
    exposures... (A Camera..., AV:227)

The AV of (6) has chosen partly identical expressions (Julia Cameron and Julia).
My material shows that an alternative to partial repetition is to repeat the complete
proper name.
The next example shows adaptation in terms of repetition of the common noun.

(7) The landlord was playing cards. He seemed little pleased ... (A man..., OV:225)

... the landlord was sitting playing cards with some friends. The landlord did not seem pleased... (A man..., AV:2)

Sometimes there is a different common noun instead of a pronoun in the second part of the cohesive tie in the OV. The strategy of standardisation replaces this with a repetition of the common noun, such as in the following example:

(8) ... the countess ...

"Dry your eyes, Duchess," the Frenchwoman said.
(The romantic..., OV:361)

... the countess ...

"Dry your eyes, Duchess," the countess said.
(The romantic..., AV:33)

My material also shows that standardisation sometimes may lead to a preference for pronominalisation in a chain of referring expressions in an adapted version instead of a stylistically varied number of referring expressions in an original version. The following is an example where only one element is replaced:

(9) ... she... her... I answered that I would meet my friend ...
(The luncheon, OV:105)

... she... her... I answered that I would meet her ...
(The luncheon, AV:6-7)

The justification for the types of adaptations we have discussed here, standardisation, seems to be rooted in a wish to prevent any possible confusion about who or what is being referred to. The trend is the opposite of the stylistic ambition of many writers which is to provide a variety of referential expressions.

(d) Adding reference to the speaker
The present material also shows that one fairly common adaptation strategy is to make sure the reader can figure out who the speakers are in direct speech sequences by adding explicit references to them, as in the following example:

(10) When the maid had shown me my room I asked her what I could have to eat.

"What you like," she answered.
I knew well enough the unreality of the seeming profusion.

"What have you got in the house?"

"You can have eggs and ham." (A man ..., OV:225-226).
The woman, who was obviously the maid, took me to room five... Then I felt rather hungry and asked the maid if I could have something to eat. "You can have anything you want," she replied.
When a hotel maid gives this answer, it is usually untrue.
"What have you got in the hotel?", I asked.
"You can have ham and eggs," the maid replied. (A man ..., AV:2)

The AV in (10) shows that reference to the speakers is added in two cases compared with the OV. As will be remembered from above, a supply of verbally explicit references to speakers is in accordance with publishers’ guidelines.

Non-identity
Examples of non-identity of the textual reference type are rare in the material I have worked with so far. I choose to report and briefly discuss two examples here.

(11) At twenty-four he married a girl of eighteen whose father was a duke and her mother a great American heiress, so that she had both position and wealth ... (Lord ..., OV:889)

At twenty-four he had married a girl of eighteen whose father was a duke and whose American mother was very rich, so that he had a good position and wealth. (Lord ..., AV:97)

Because the fact that “she” is replaced by “he”, we get a completely different co-reference relationship in the AV compared with the OV. The change produces a meaning difference between the versions. Our question then becomes: Is this the result of a deliberate act on the part of the adaptor, and, if so, why? Or is it quite simply an error?

The next example is taken from an original text with several characters. Several chains of reference expressions run through the text. A complicating factor in the OV is that the chains include both proper names, common names and pronouns at various stages. This leaves an impression of extensive stylistic variation in referring expressions. Some of the expressions in two of the chains are:

1. The Marquesa de San Esteban » she » Pilar Carreón » Doña Pilar » she » Doña Pilar » Pilar

2. The Countess de Marbella » she » the countess » the Frenchwoman » the countess’s glance

The chains are also woven into each other. This and the variety of referring expressions make it difficult to keep track of the characters. It is against this background that the following adaptation must be seen:
... the countess ... but Pilar could not keep her eyes off that smart carriage ... and, not wishing to catch the countess's glance ...
(The romantic ..., OV:357)

... the countess ... but Pilar could not keep her eyes off that smart carriage ... and not wishing to catch the Marquesa's eye...
(The romantic ..., AV:27)

Because "the countess's" is replaced by "the Marquesa's" in the second half of the tie a different reference relationship is established in the AV, i.e. between "the Marquesa" and "Pilar". The result is a completely absurd sentence: Pilar did not wish to catch her own eye! The adapted version has in this confusing way made it even more difficult for foreign language learners to keep track of the characters. Examples of this kind seem to make it necessary for publishers to invite a second opinion on the adapted products.

Situation Reference
Instances of this type of adaptation of reference are fairly rare in the material I have worked with so far. I will deal with only one example here.

(13) But the album was recognized to be a unique part of our national heritage, ...
(Close-up ..., OV:46)

But the album was recognized to be a unique part of Britain's national heritage, (A camera ..., AV:227).

In the terminology from above the OV of (13) contains a deixis of person. The situational frame of reference between the writer and the readers seems to be taken for granted: it is British and it is shared. As long as this frame of reference is shared by the readers, there is probably no problem of interpretation. But as soon as the readers may be non-British students of English, the interpretation of the deictic form may not be taken for granted any more. And a specification of "our" in terms of "Britain's" in the AV seems to be a very sensible strategy of adaptation.

CONCLUSION
This paper has reported some important results of an investigation of reference in adapted texts. It has analysed central types only. The alterations have been classified into three basic categories. In the category reference to the outside world an example of non-identical reference relationship has been questioned.

In the category textual reference alterations to avoid cataphora, establish a direct antecedent, standardise co-referring expressions, and add reference to the speaker point in the same direction as results of previous studies and theoretical assumptions such as studies of the comprehension of anaphoric relationships, the bridge theory etc. However, the examples reported and analysed of the sub-type non-identity are disturbing and alarming instances of a practice which neither common sense nor previous research can justify.
In the category *situational reference* no controversial instances have been observed in the material so far. The example of this type analysed here is characterised as a sensible adaptation.

Research on adapted texts is important for at least two reasons. From a scholarly point of view it gives valuable evidence about what adaptors think is difficult and therefore should be altered in a text with a new target reader in mind. Whether this is based on intuition alone or combined with recommendations in publishers' guidelines, it is interesting evidence. Furthermore, it gives evidence about what solutions adaptors think are more accessible for such a reader. This type of evidence should be useful for scholars in different fields but in particular, probably, for psycholinguists.

From an applied point of view such research is also important. The field of foreign language teaching needs information about adapted reading material as part of a general control of the quality of teaching materials. Most of the examples of adaptation discussed in this paper seem to be justifiable as one, out of several, means of improving the readability of texts for readers of English as a foreign language. However, this paper has also drawn attention to examples of adaptation which distort reference relationships in a text, making it to a large extent confusing and incomprehensible and thereby impairing rather than improving the quality of this type of teaching material.

**SOURCES**


REFERENCES


