Anaphora's Creating Irony by the Aid of Context*

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The core function of anaphora is to serve as a substitute for a certain linguistic component in texts, but it actually has other missions such as creating the rhetorical effect—irony. However, anaphora alone cannot contribute to ironic effect, and only by resorting to other resources like contextual information, can anaphora generate irony. Therefore, Yus' s classification of contextual sources is employed to analyze with examples how anaphora creates irony by the aid of context. Ultimately, the conclusion has been drawn that anaphora is able to produce irony with the help of six groups of contextual information classified by Yus except the category—speaker's nonverbal behavior and anaphora sometimes has to interact with several groups of contextual information in order to create irony.

Keywords: anaphora, irony, contextual information

Introduction

Anaphora mainly acts as a substitute for a certain linguistic element in texts or conversations and has engaged so much attention of scholars that it has been a hot research topic in linguistics field. An ocean of research has been conducted concerning definitions, functions, and classifications of anaphora from the textual, grammatical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives. The theory proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) serves as a landmark in the area of anaphora, which broadens the scope of research on anaphora and takes anaphora as an important means of achieving textual cohesion. Another representative theory is Ariel's "anaphora accessibility" (1990), which deals with the psychological distance or the relationship between anaphora and its mental entity. Other theories, such as Chomsky's binding theory (1981), Fauconnier's mental spaces (1985), the centering theory of Grosz, Joshi, and Weinstein (1995), and Bednarek's theory (2005) that focuses on the relationship between texts, context, and cohesion, devote much attention to exploring the nature of anaphora and clarifying the process of substitution. Besides, some Chinese scholars also made great efforts to study anaphora, especially the substitution in Chinese language. XU Yu-long (2004) contributed largely to anaphora in Chinese language by research on functional-pragmatic model of discourse anaphora. XU Jiu-jiu (2003) classified anaphora in Chinese language into three types, namely zero anaphora, pronominal anaphora, and nominal anaphora. WANG Jun (2013) emphasized on indirect anaphora in both Chinese and English texts and conducted an experimental research on indirect anaphora in these two languages. GAO Wei-dong (2008) interpreted this kind of substitution as anaphora's retrieving old information and placed an emphasis on the

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dynamic performance of anaphora in texts.

Despite a substantial body of work on anaphora, there seems to be less sufficient research on its rhetorical function. Some scholars attach importance to anaphora's rhetorical tasks to some degree, like XU Jiu-jiu (2003) who touched upon the rhetorical function of anaphora while analyzing nominal anaphora in his book. GAO Wei-dong (2008) dug a deep analysis of anaphora's functions: accessing and non-accessing functions; and his research sheds light on rhetorical role of anaphora in texts by expounding how anaphora realizes its non-accessing tasks that cover contextual anchorage, pseudo-presupposition, and rhetorical retrieval. He puts a stress on how figures of speech are created when anaphora substitutes a linguistic element without clarifying the role of context.

However, context also plays its part in the production of a certain figure of speech, especially in creating irony that is heavily context-dependent, so the role of context deserves close attention. Therefore, this paper, employing exemplification as well as classification and taking cognitive approach, aims to provide a deep insight into how anaphora creates ironic effect with the help of context. This paper firstly makes a clear classification of contextual information; additionally, there will be a focus in depth on the process of anaphora's creating ironic effect by the aid of context, the role of which is also to be probed into; finally, the conclusion is to be presented that anaphora can generate irony against the contextual background and contextual clues are essential to the production of this rhetorical effect.

Theoretical Bases for Anaphora's Creating Irony

Since generation of irony is dependent on context to a great extent, defining clearly what context refers to is far essential to understanding the process of anaphora's producing irony. Actually, there is no firm agreement on what context covers. The previous study concerning context focuses mainly on the clues hidden between lines, which falls into static research. With more efforts made to discuss what context is, scholars broaden their research on context in pragmatics, philosophy, anthropology, and other fields. As Martin (1999) concludes, systemic functional linguists hold that context is grouped into the following: context of culture, context of situation, and context of context (p. 35). More classifications are easily able to be found, but there seems no space to include them all. However, one division by Yus (2000) does merit considerable attention in that this classification involves factors related to producing irony. Yus classified contextual information connected with the creation of irony into seven groups (pp. 33-42):

- A. Encyclopedia, Factual Information;
- B. Mutually manifest physical environment (setting);
- C. Speaker's nonverbal behavior;
- D. Addressee's background knowledge of addresser's biographical data;
- E. Mutual knowledge;
- F. Role of previous utterances in the conversation;
- G. Linguistic cues.

In light of Yus's theory, these mentioned factors all commit themselves to generating irony, which can be seen as positive contextual information eliciting ironic effect, so this classification is employed in this paper to analyze how anaphora produces irony with the aid of context. Additionally, two points need to be discussed: one

is whether anaphora has the potential to produce irony; the other is that anaphora alone cannot lead to irony even if anaphora is potential to create ironic effect, and only with the help of context, can anaphora generate irony.

Exploring whether anaphora is latently active to produce irony is able to provide a key to understanding that not other linguistic elements but anaphora can generate irony against the contextual background. According to Yus (2000), linguistic cues include the grammatical and lexical forms that can convey the addresser's intentions. In addition, broadly speaking, anaphora is one of grammatical forms that has referential function and is a special linguistic means, so in this sense anaphora is a kind of linguistic cue (LIU, 2014, p. 116). Thus, theoretically speaking, anaphora is able to create irony, but irony is heavily context-dependent, so without the help of context, irony is unlikely to be interpreted clearly and smoothly. The following example is a case in point.

(Background: On Saturday morning, mother is busy with arduous household chores, while Jack is absorbed in playing games in his messy room without any intention of helping mother with housework.)

Mother looks at him and says to his father, "Look at your son".

Father, "Oh, a hard-working boy!".

In this example, the anaphoric expression "boy" with a modifier "hard-working" substitutes for the antecedent "son", and anaphora firstly accomplishes the task of substitution. Without referring to background information, anaphora conveys that their son is a hard-working boy, but with background information considered, the opposite meaning comes out which is hidden in anaphora. According to the background, it is concluded that this boy seemingly slacks off and pays no attention to mother's dissatisfaction, so the implication is that this is a lazy boy. But what is contained in anaphora is that the boy is diligent, which seems to result in a semantic conflict. In order to resolve the conflict, the contextual information has to be taken into account to deduce why the father makes such a comment and then the conclusion is reached with ease that the father aims to show an ironic meaning by this expression—a hard-working boy. It is seen from the example that anaphora cannot provide sufficient information and evidence to produce irony and it has to interact with context to gain more clues so that anaphora is able to be assigned a reasonable interpretation. In this example, mutual knowledge and manifest physical environment devote themselves to interpretation of the anaphoric expression.

Anaphora's Creating Irony With the Aid of Different Contextual Information

As is discussed, ironic meaning can be generated by anaphora interacting with context, and all irony-relevant contextual sources contribute to the addresser's ironic purpose except speaker's nonverbal behavior in that there is no anaphora present in this group. And what follows is a detailed analysis of the processes, during which irony is created with the help of contextual information that is mainly limited to the six groups of contextual sources classified by Yus.

Encyclopedia, Factual Information

According to Yus (2000), the first group of contextual source covers macrosocial norms and factual information, commonsense assumptions, and microsocial, situational expectations (pp. 33-36). There seems no space to discuss in detail what they respectively refer to, but it needs to be pointed out that they belong to existing information in interlocutor's cognitive schemes, under which irony is produced when utterances are processed. Some factual assumptions constitute a background against which in-coming information is weighed (Yus, 2000, p. 34). Production of irony is largely dependent on the previously stored information or assumptions deduced

from the concrete situation or previously existing in their cognitive frames.

Example one:

Employer: One with full attendance will get a fat bonus which will be put in an envelope.

One employee with full attendance: Look at this thank-you note in the envelope. What a substantial reward!

In the above example, ironic effect is apparently produced due to the interaction between anaphora and context. The word "reward" is used to retrieve the antecedent "thank-you note", while "thank-you note" is used to replace "bonus". This is a chain substitution. "A fat bonus" provides commonsense assumption that there will be a large sum of money as an incentive, but in fact only one "thank-you note" is found in the envelope. Although the employee views it as a "substantial reward", it is certainly not equal to "a fat bonus". Why "substantial reward" is employed to refer to "thank-you" note is that the employee intentionally levels a satire at the employer who has broken his/her promise. Consequently, irony is produced in this example by anaphora interacting with commonsense assumption, without which conflict may arise in communication.

Mutually Manifest Physical Environment (Setting)

According to Yus (2000), mutually manifest physical environment (setting) refers to a particular situation where a conversation is dealt with and which is known to both addresser and addressee. And it may also mean a cognitive environment "available for the interlocutors during the interaction, and which, in this case, reaches the interlocutors' minds through perception" (Yus, 2000, p. 37). This physical environment is essential to identifying the addresser's attitude and determining the irony hidden in utterances.

Example two:

Mindy is doing homework in his messy room.

Mommy: What a clean place!

In the above example, the anaphoric expression "a clean place" is deduced to refer to "the messy room", and realizes the basic task—substitution. The premise to understand the meaning of Mommy is to notice the mutual manifest physical environment, against which Mommy's comment is made. The mutual manifest physical setting, which is known to both Mindy and Mommy is that Mindy's room is dirty and disorderly, so their cognitive frame should be limited to the fact that this is not a clean place. However, Mommy gives such comment that this is a clean place as is apparently contrary to the fact, so this anaphoric expression obviously devotes more efforts to create a rhetorical effect—irony than to substitute the antecedent. Therefore, irony is produced owing to the interaction between anaphora and the mutually manifest physical setting.

Addressee's Background Knowledge of Addresser's Biographical Data

In conversations, both addresser and addressee have knowledge of some specific beliefs, assumptions, and background information involved in dialogs, which is of great significance for both interlocutors to continue an effective communication. Addressee's background knowledge of addresser's biographical data is also extremely crucial to the generation of irony, which is based on the assumed proposition that the cues connected with a smooth communication are known to both interlocutors.

Example three:

A: I wish Jason were Pinocchio.

B: A liar!

In this dialog, irony is obviously produced, which is attributed to the involvement of anaphora and contextual source. "A liar" is used to stand for its antecedent "Pinocchio", retrieving the old information and conveying new information. To make a successful conversation, the addressee B should have thorough knowledge of the addresser A's background data that is about Pinocchio and Jason who might be naughty and might make trouble occasionally. The addressee should know who Pinocchio is and what happens to him. And actually Pinocchio told lies at first, but finally he turned out to be an honest and brave boy, so this boy is characterized by several personal traits. The addresser assumes that the addressee knows who Pinocchio is and what is wrong with Jason. Therefore, what the addresser conveys is to wish Jason eventually a boy with some good personalities like Pinocchio. But the fact is that the addressee does have knowledge of Pinocchio, so the addressee supposes what the addresser means should firstly go to the typical feature—lying, uses this anaphoric expression, and makes such a comment, due to which ironic effect is created for humor.

Mutual Knowledge

Mutual knowledge is another kind of contextual clue which is implicit in conversation and not contained in verbal communication, and actually it is shared by both addresser and addressee. This group of contextual information is also essential to the production of irony, but there are no clear boundaries between mutual knowledge and other categories. According to Yus (2000), mutual information tends to overlap with other contextual sources (factual knowledge, biographical data...), but we will keep it as an independent contextual source (p. 40). Despite so, mutual knowledge is still largely committed to identifying the interlocutor's attitude—creating ironic effect.

Example four:

A: I have bought *Outlaws of the Marsh*.

B: Oh, *the Story of One Hundred and Five men and Three Women*?

In this conversation, the anaphoric expression *the Story of One Hundred and Five Men and Three Women* substitutes for the antecedent *Outlaws of the Marsh* that is one of the four Chinese literature classics. That irony is produced is largely due to the involvement of anaphora and mutual knowledge. The premise for this on-going communication is that A has knowledge of the book *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and so does B, and A knows that B knows this book and vice versa. This can be categorized as mutual knowledge shared by both parties involved in the conversation. Anaphora retrieves the old information contained in antecedent that *the Story of One Hundred and Five Men and Three Women* is the book *Outlaws of the Marsh*, but the anaphoric expression implies that the book is an ordinary and vulgar one, which, however, is opposite to the fact that this book is one of classics, so on the basis of mutual knowledge, A infers that B aims to convey an irony for humor.

Role of Previous Utterances in the Conversation

S & W (1986, pp. 139-140) claim that the assumptions derived in the course of interpreting previous utterances are part of the initial context that is available for interlocutors in the interpretation of subsequent utterances (cited in Yus, 2000, p. 41). In the process of interpreting irony, previous utterances may serve as a useful guide for comprehending the supplementary information and weighing the following words. Without previous utterances as a solid foundation, there will be a barrier to effective communication and proper understanding of subsequent utterances, and rhetorical effects are unlikely to be achieved, such as irony,

hyperbole, and other common ones.

Example five:

(Mother has asked her son to correct spelling errors, but he is seemingly not dealing with those mistakes.)

Mother: I see you are doing a good job.

In this example, previous utterance is the request from mother that the son should correct spelling errors. The anaphoric expression "a good job" stands for the antecedent "dealing with those mistakes". The mutual manifest evidence is that the boy is not correcting spelling errors, which cannot be viewed as a good job in our common cognitive environment, while mother uses an anaphoric expression to take it as a good job, which is to show her ironic attitude. If there is no previous utterance as a basis, mother's words will be beyond comprehension, and ironic effect is unlikely to be created. Therefore, previous utterances are fundamental to understanding the subsequent expressions and creating a certain communicative effect.

Linguistic Cues

According to Yus (2000), linguistic cues refer to certain syntactic structures and vocabulary choices carefully selected by interlocutors in order to achieve certain effects. Linguistic cues are also considered as contextual sources helpful to create irony in that the addresser may intentionally choose some syntactic structures like inversion, elliptical sentence, and so on, or some expressions and idioms with implications so that certain communicative goals can be attained with the help of other contextual information, such as previous utterances, mutual knowledge, and mutually manifest physical environment.

Example six:

A: Jenny shared your story (an embarrassing moment) with others at the party.

B: What a confidant!

It can be seen that the word "confidant" is used to take the place of "Jenny" and anaphora firstly fulfills the task of substitution. Judging from what A said, it can be concluded that Jenny has done something improper and should not let the cat out of bag. Therefore, it can be noted that the anaphoric expression "confidant" is well chosen to achieve a certain communicative effect. The mutual knowledge in this conversation is that the story concerning B is a secret and an embarrassing one which should not be shared with others, but Jenny, who revealed B's secret to others, consequently cannot be seen as a friend, not to mention a confidant. Accordingly, B chose on purpose the word "confidant" to show his/her ironic attitude towards Jenny. And the generation of irony is largely due to the well-chosen anaphora "confidant" as well as mutual knowledge to both of them.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the major function of anaphora is to stand for a certain linguistic element in texts or conversations, but anaphora also has other tasks which deserve due attention. Some anaphoric expressions place more emphases on creating certain rhetorical effects than substituting linguistic parts in communication. However, anaphora alone cannot contribute to some rhetorical effects in communication, so other factors have to be involved in, like context that is of great significance in daily communication. This paper focuses on anaphora's creating irony with the help of context in that irony is a commonly-used figure of speech and contextual information accounts for a lion's share among factors leading to irony.

But owing to a host of definitions and classifications of context, a proper division of context has been

carefully selected and adopted that is made by Yus. In light of Yus's theory, there are seven groups of contextual sources helpful to create irony. Anaphora can generate irony with the help of all these sources except speaker's nonverbal behavior in that there is no anaphora present in nonverbal signals that usually cover gestures, facial expressions, and other natural cues irrelevant to language application. Hence, it is discussed respectively that how anaphora produces irony as a result of participation of other six contextual sources. After analysis, it can be concluded that anaphora is capable of creating irony as a linguistic element with contextual information participating in the interpretation of utterances, occasionally several kinds of contextual sources interact jointly with anaphora so as to produce irony, and anaphora and context play sharply distinct roles in the generation of ironic effect. But anaphora, which also can produce other rhetorical effects in contextual background in addition to irony, is a complicated language phenomenon, so an extensive analysis of its rhetorical functions needs to be conducted in future research.

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