

Referring as a Collaborative Process

Read: Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs 1990

Literary vs. Conversational Model of Definite Reference

- Literary model:
 - Reference is expressed linguistically with proper noun, definite description, or pronoun.
 - Speaker uses the NP intending addressee to be able to identify the referent uniquely against their common ground.
 - Speaker satisfies her intention simply by issuing that NP.
 - The course of the process is controlled by the speaker alone.
- Conversational model:
 - Speakers have limited time for planning and revision.
 - Listener has to attend to, hear, and try to understand an utterance at virtually the same time it is being issued.
 - Speakers may alter what they say midcourse based on what addressees say and do.

Problem NPs

- Self-corrected
 - She was giving me all the people that were gone this year I mean this quarter y'know.
- Other-corrected
 - A: ...Uh just till Monday.
 - B: Til- oh yih mean like a week from *tomorrow*.
 - A: Yah.
- Trial (*try marker*)
 - A: ..well I was the only one other than the uhm tch Fords? Uh Mrs. Holmes Ford? You know uh=
[= the the cellist?
 - B: [Oh yes. She's she's the cellist.
 - A: Yes. Well she and her husband were there.

- Expanded; Episodic

- S: take the spout--the little one that looks like the end of an oil can-- J: Okay.
S: --and put that on the opening in the other large tub. With the round top.

- Installment

- S: ...the hole on the side of that tube.
J: Yeah.
S: that is nearest to the top, or nearest to the red handle.

- Dummy

- If he puts it into the diplomatic bag, as um--what's his-name, Micky Cohn, did, then it's not so bad.

- Proxy

- A: That tree has, uh, uh ...
B: Tentworms.
A: Yeah.
B: Yeah.

Process of Mutual Acceptance

- A and B must mutually accept that B has understood A's references before they let the conversation go on.
 - 1. Presentation (A): *the dog that just barked* (e.g. standard NP)
 - 2. Acceptance (B):
 - Presuppose acceptance
 - Assert acceptance
 - Continuers: *yes, right, I see*, head nod.
 - Assert lack of acceptance
 - *What?, That's a toy not a dog, which one?*
 - 3. Pursuit of acceptance through exchange (A, B).
 - 4. Mutual recognition of acceptance (A)

Experiment

- Tangram figures (12 figures).
- Six trials; eight pairs of subjects.
- Director, matcher.
- Timed and recorded.
- Error rate: 2%
- 25 minutes.
- Transcription:
 - Speaker change, back-channel responses, parenthetical remarks, interruptions, hesitations, false starts, basic intonational features.

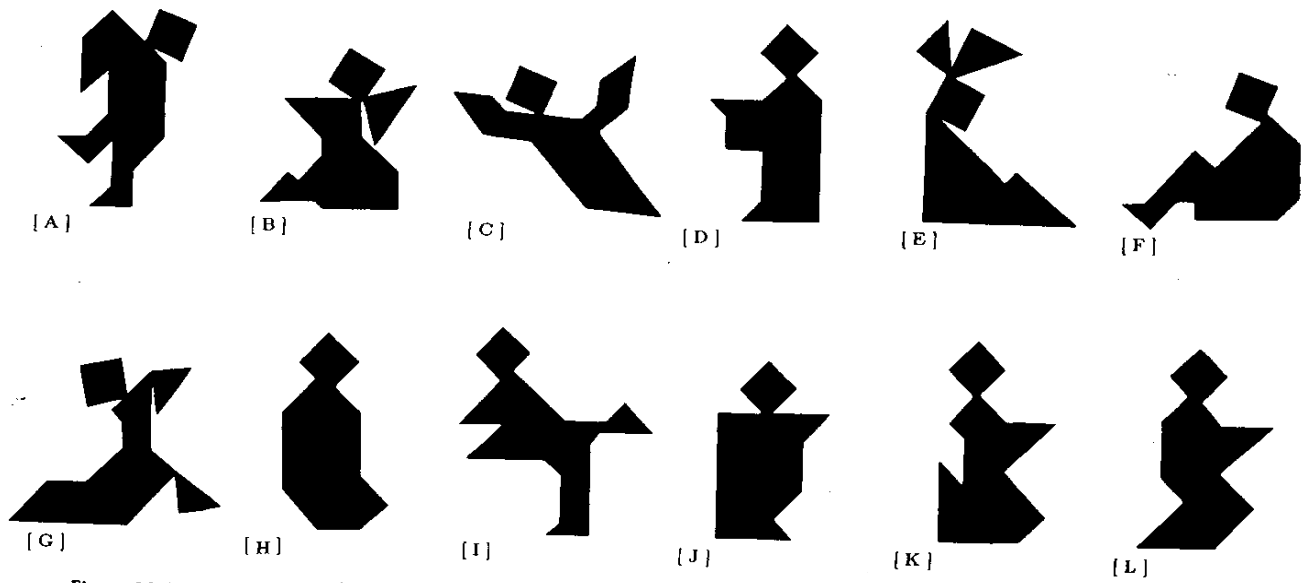


Figure 23.1
The 12 Tangram figures arranged by directors and matchers.

Results

1. All right, the next one looks like a person who's ice skating, except they're sticking two arms out in front
 2. Um, the next one's the person ice skating that has two arms?
 3. The fourth one is the person ice skating, with two arms.
 4. The next one's the ice skater.
 5. The fourth one's the ice skater.
 6. The ice skater.
- Director referred to location and then asserted something about figure.
 - On trial 1 directors described the figure with indefinite reference.
 - On trials 2-6, they referred to the figure with a definite description.
 - Directors tended to use nonstandard NPs in early trials and standard NPs later.

Results (cont.)

- Number of words per figure went down across trials. (Figure 23.2)
- Number of speaking turns per figure went down across trials. (Figure 23.3)
- The decline in number of words from position 1 to position 12 got smaller from trial 1 to trial 6. (Figure 23.4)

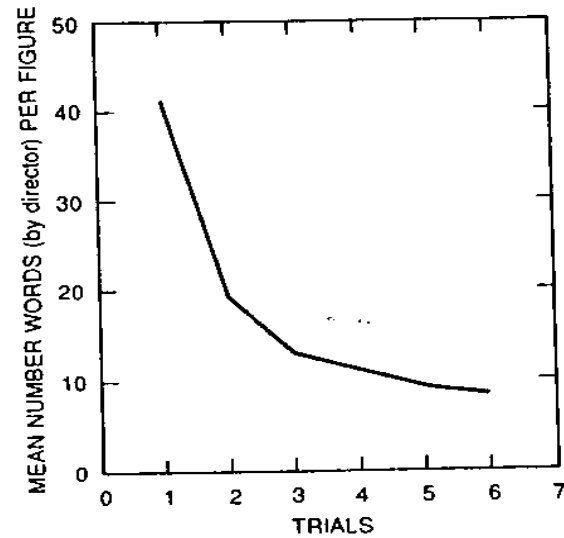


Figure 23.2
Average number of speaking turns per figure taken by directors on each trial.

Average number of words per figure taken by directors on each trial.

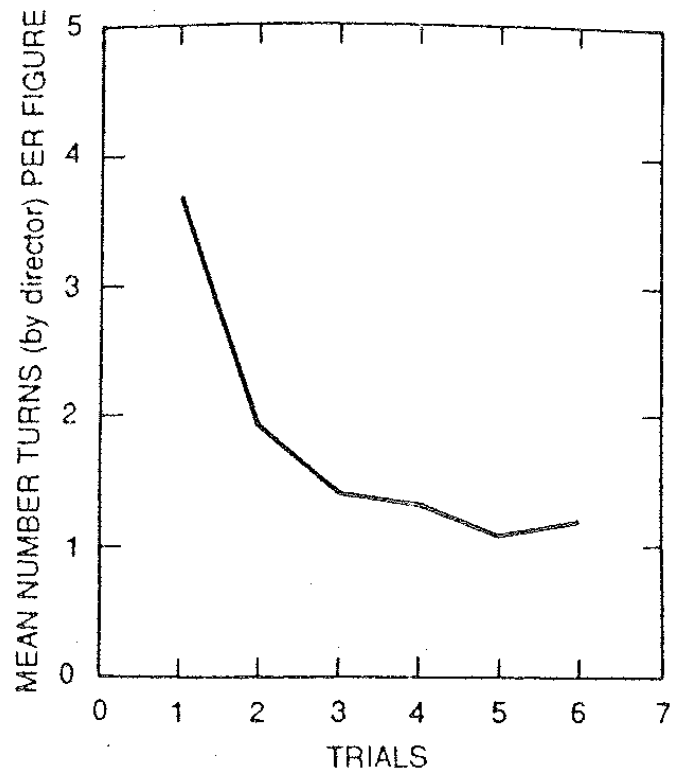


Figure 23.3
Average number of speaking turns per figure taken by directors on each trial.

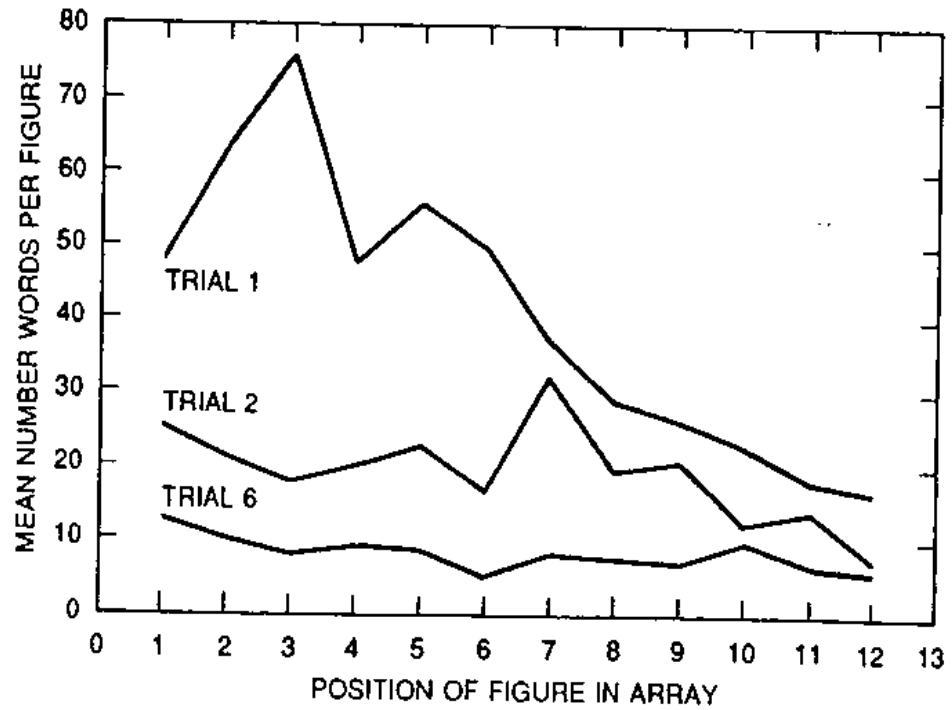


Figure 23.4
 Average number of words per figure used by directors on trials 1, 2, and 6 plotted by position of the figure in the array.

Basic Exchange

- A: Number 4's the guy leaning against the tree.
B: Okay.
 - The matcher uses her *okay* to assert:
 - (1) that she believes she has identified the figure correctly.
 - (2) that she has placed the figure in the right location
 - In doing so, she presupposes (3) that she accepts the director's presentation, including his perspective on the referent.
 - The director presents an NP and the matcher presupposes her acceptance.
 - Percentage of basic exchanges went up across trials:
18, 55, 75, 80, 88, 84.

1. Initiating a Reference

- Elementary:
 - the guy leaning against a tree.
- Episodic:
 - Number 7's the goofy guy that's falling over, with his leg kicked up.
- Installment
 - A: And the next one is the one with the triangle to the right ...
B: Okay.
A: With the square connected to it.
- Provisional
 - And the next is also the one that doesn't look like anything. It's kind of like the tree?
- Dummy
 - NONE.

- Proxy
 - A: And number 12 is, uh, ...
B: Chair.
A: With the chair, right.
B: Got it.
- Description
 - Okay, number 7 is like she's dancing. The head is tilted.
- Episodic and provisional NPs, which were used only when necessary, declined and by trial 6 had mostly disappeared. (Table 23.2)
- What remained were the preferred elementary NPs, which increased significantly over trials. (Table 23.2)

Table 23.2
 Percentages of six types of initial noun phrases for trials 2 through 6.

Type of noun phrase	Trial				
	2	3	4	5	6
Elementary	52	68	69	80	72
Episodic	11	10	8	6	5
Installment	0	0	0	0	1
Provisional	17	14	8	2	6
Dummy	0	0	0	0	0
Proxy	0	1	2	1	1
Description	17	7	12	9	14
Unclassified	3	0	1	2	1

N = 96 per column.

2. Refashioning an NP

- 1. Repair
 - Um, next one is the guy, the person with his head to the right but his legs are, his one leg is kicked up to the left.
 - 47, 14, 10, 4, 7, 1%
- 2. Expansion
 - A: Uh, person putting a shoe on.
B: Putting a shoe on?
A: Uh huh. Facing left. Looks like he's sitting down.
B: Okay.
 - 15, 3, 3, 2, 1, 1%
- 3. Replacement
 - A: Okay, and the next one is the person that looks like they're carrying something and it's sticking out to the left. I looks like a hat that's upside down.
B: The guy that's pointing to the left again?
A: Yeah, pointing to the left, that's it! (laughs)
B: Okay.
 - 10, 5, 0, 2, 2, 0%

3. Passing Judgment on Presentations

- 1. Acceptance.
 - Presupposed or asserted.
- 2. Rejection.
 - Asserted or implicated.
- 3. Postponement
 - E.g., tentatively voiced *okay*, indicating that she accepts the presentation so far but is awaiting expansion.

Minimizing Collaborative Effort

- Principle of Least Effort.
 - Predicts that every reference is made with (1) a standard NP that (2) is as short as possible and yet (3) specifies the referent uniquely in that context.
- Principle of Least Collaborative Effort.
 - References can be made with (1) nonstandard NPs, (2) with ones the speaker believes are not adequate in context, and (3) with devices that draw addressees into the process.
 - Predicts preferences for self-repair and self-initiated repair; expansions and replacements, informative requests for expansions; a preference for canonical references.

Speaking Generally

- Principle of Mutual Responsibility
 - The participants in a conversation try to establish, roughly by the initiation of each new contribution, the mutual belief that the listeners have understood what the speaker meant in the last utterance to a criterion sufficient for current purposes.
- Principle of Distant Responsibility
 - The speaker or writer tries to make sure, roughly by the initiation of each new contribution, that the addressee should have been able to understand his meaning in the last utterance to a criterion sufficient for current purposes.