

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Theoretical Background and Motivation

In both face-to-face and written communication, listeners and readers rely heavily on the use of referential forms in order to make appropriate connection between a referential form and the referent it refers to (Bates & MacWhinney, 1979; Gundel, 1985; Haviland & Clark, 1974). If the referential forms are not appropriately used, the referee-referent connection becomes obscure or even collapses, to make matters worse. In written language, for example, without an appropriate use of referential forms, readers will have difficulty in identifying the referents that the writer intends to refer to.

Due to its importance, referential form has been a heated topic of research, since an accurate use of referential form implies reference appropriateness, which is believed to be an effective cohesive tie that contributes to the coherence of a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Traditionally, the study on referential forms (referring expressions) derives from the copious investigations on pragmatic anaphora over the last three decades (Chen, 1986; Fox, 1987, 1996; Givon, 1983; Li & Thompson, 1979; Li, 1985; Reinhart, 1983; Tomlin & Pu, 1991). Not until more recent studies has the term referential form been widely used as well (Clancy, 1980, 1992; Gundel et al,

1983; Lambrecht, 1995; Sanford & Garrod, 1981). As a matter of fact, referential form, anaphoric expression, and definiteness share the same linguistic and philosophical background (Donnellan, 1966; Strawson, 1950). Researchers with different approaches such as syntactic or psychological perspective in studying referential behavior have chosen either term in their studies.

Grammatically speaking, the anaphoric form is a repetition of its antecedent (from Latin words which means to go before), and therefore refers backwards, whereas referential forms refer not only backwards (anaphoric), but also forwards (cataphoric), or even outwards (exophoric) (McCarthy, 1991). The use of referential form, as it appears, displays more flexibility in its multi-directionality. In the present study, therefore, referential form will be consistently used.

There are several reasons for the present study to concentrate on advanced EFL learner's referential forms in written form. Firstly, in previous studies, referential forms in spoken language have been extensively discussed. But in written form, little attempt has been made to investigate EFL learners' referential behavior. In written form, the production of referential forms is more challenging than in spoken language, because unlike face-to-face communication, written form lacks the physical clues such as gestures or pointing for the receiver's identification of the intended referent. Secondly, the productive skill of writing is a primary goal to be achieved in learning a

language. And referential appropriateness is one of the crucial factors which contribute to textual coherence in writing. In other words, an effective management of reference is crucial to the overall writing ability. In order to compose a coherent essay, the referential forms have to be carefully produced, because a coherent passage depends much on referential coherence (Chafe, 1979; Givon, 1995; Huang, 1992). Due to the importance of referential forms in written form, the present study will focus on EFL learner's reference management in their written form.

1.2 The purpose of the present study

The purpose of the present study is to examine advanced EFL learner's referential forms in written form. We will inspect the discourse functions that the referential forms fulfill in the context, and how discourse function may affect the distribution of referential forms. Moreover, we will investigate the referential distance value of subject topics by the standard measurement of look-back. Meanwhile, we make an attempt to compare the distance value of referential forms manifested in EFL learners' data and genuine English texts.

It is hoped that the findings of the present study will provide answers for the following research questions.

1. After several years of L2 learning, how would advanced EFL learners use referential forms in written narratives?

2. Are advanced EFL learners capable of referring to objects by using appropriate nominal forms? If they are, what will be the referring patterns like? If not, what causes the imperfection of their management of reference?

1.3 Organization of the present study

Some background knowledge on referential forms has already been introduced in the first part of Chapter One. This preface shall pave the way for the forthcoming chapters. Chapter Two will introduce previous studies on referential forms, English and Mandarin included. The related analytical models in different studies will also be examined. The major models of English referential forms to be presented will be Topic Continuity Scale and Accessibility Scale. The categories on these frameworks will then be discussed and reappraised. In addition, in Chapter Two, we also probe the issue of the correlation between discourse functions and referential forms, because for each referential form, the discourse functions that they perform will affect receiver's mental processing and comprehension. After learning about the correlation, prior studies on English referential forms based on hierarchical perspective will also be reviewed. Besides the English referential forms, the reference management in Mandarin Chinese will be examined as well. The last part of Chapter Two will be a review of preschoolers' problems of referential behavior in both languages.

In Chapter Three, the methodological procedures will be explained, the analytic

framework will be developed, and the collected written data will be presented. We also define the discourse function of referential forms in this chapter. In addition, we will check the appropriateness of each referential form produced by learners. Both appropriate and inappropriate referential forms will be presented and discussed.

In Chapter Four, the results derived from the collected data will be displayed, analyzed, and explained. Each referential category will be discussed in terms of how they are used in the context, whether they are appropriately used, and what causes the problematic use of them. And the discourse function that each referential form serves will be presented and discussed. Furthermore, the distance values of each referential category in learners' data will be worked out.

Finally, the last chapter will summarize the discussion and findings derived from the previous chapter. In Chapter Five, we will also provide some suggestion over the use and acquisition of English referential forms in written communication.