
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Use of Referentiality in Examining Selected Stage Directions in Sophocles' "Oedipus the King"

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ABSTRACT

'Oedipus the King' is an ancient tragic play that tells the story of King Oedipus of Thebes, who lived about a period before the proceedings of the Trojan War. Gradually, this King came to the realization that he had accidentally slaughtered Laius, his father, and married Jocasta, his biological mother. Fate, conflict, and free will (i.e. the inexorableness of oracular prophecies) are the main themes of the text. This paper examines selected stage directions in Oedipus the King, a text written by Sophocles. A purposive sample technique was used in selecting these stage directions. In linguistics, language, and literary criticism, 'referentiality' is usually deployed to describe the connotational and denotational sense of an entity to explicate the association between language and extralinguistic object. So, content analysis design, through referentiality, was deployed in critiquing and exhuming the hidden meanings of the selected stage directions. Thus, the use of the referentiality model coupled with definiteness and indefiniteness facilitated the unearthing of familiarity, identifiability, and uniqueness from the selected extracts. The paper is structured in four thematic areas: the introduction, methods, analysis and discussion, and conclusion.

KEYWORDS

Referentiality, Oedipus the King, Definiteness, familiarity, Exophora, Endophora

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 15 November 2022

PUBLISHED: 14 December 2022

DOI: 10.32996/ijts.2022.2.2.11

1. Introduction

In a classical work, Halliday and Hasan (1976) studied cohesion in English and identified different factors that contribute to textual issues. Among their many claims was the idea that pointless ambiguity might make it harder to analyse a document. They also claimed that the reader's attitude and level of self-assurance play a role, along with the text's graphic structure, rhetorical techniques, language, syntax, grammar, and the reader's involvement in the rhetorical process (Halliday and Hassan, 1976). According to the results, authors have to pay as much attention to the quality of their published works (particularly for linguists) as a road constructor does to the quality of the road's safety features. This suggests that the construction of literary texts should be deliberate to avoid introducing ambiguities and other problems with reading comprehension that are not intended by the author. Within this context, we employed some preselected models to analyse a subset of archival documents.

It is possible to analyse texts using a wide variety of concepts. Each of these is dependent on the purpose of the analysis to varying degrees. One way to examine language is via the prism of its referentiality. For Saussure (1916), referentiality is the process through which indicators (including language) are used to indicate the existence of a certain thing. He maintains that the connection

between a signified and a signifier is what a sign is. One need not look no further than Saussure (1916) to find a writer who has addressed this topic. Hill (1988, p.65) claims that "the reader is not supplemented with all components of a picture to secure its understanding" when they fail to recognize referents. Hill's (1988) claim implies that knowing the context in which a piece of text is written is crucial to understanding it fully. It is also important to note that a reader's comprehension of a piece of literature improves when referents are presented correctly. The failure to make the connection "between linguistic forms and what they mean for the universe of discourse," as argued by Martin (2000), is what leads to a distorted understanding of texts. Martin (2000) maintains that reference facilitates comprehension because it establishes a direct connection between linguistic forms and their meanings.

Referencing anything that exists outside of the current linguistic context is an example of an exophoric reference. So, the notions of exophora and endophora are also assessed in this study. According to Awwad (2017), exophoric references are made in language to things that are not explicitly mentioned in the text but are clear from the context. Awwad (2017) thinks that the reader's in-depth understanding could suffer if those details were not included in the text. Endophoric referentiality, on the other hand, employs indicators that point to something in the context of the relevant language. According to Awwad (2017), endophoric reference describes the text's vocal expressions. Awwad (2017) also refers to endophoric reference as the inner reference because of the context in which the endophoric remark is made.

According to Dell, McKoon, and Ratcliff (1983), cataphoric devices are envisioned as complements of anaphoric ones. When an idea is referred to in an anaphoric manner, it means that it has been discussed before. It is also true that anaphoric gadgets facilitate the mental representation of the aforementioned ideas. The anaphoric noun phrase "the criminal" makes the previously given idea of "a burglar" easier to understand. Through the analysis of the selected stage directions in the play, this paper aims to demonstrate that referentiality is the meeting place of the assuming and the assumed. Consequently, the main objective of the study was to assess how referentiality is used in issuing stage directions in the text.

2. Methods

2.1 Data and Sampling Technique

The data for this research are five extracts from Oedipus the King by Sophocles. This text was translated by Ian Johnson. It was published by Richer Resources Publications, Virginia. We selected the text, which is also called Oedipus Tyrannos or Oedipus Rex, which dates back to the period between 495 BC and 405 BC for a reason. Though the text has received several analyses from several authors, analyses of the stage directions in the texts are not countless. Oedipus the King has long been regarded not only as a great play but also as the purest and most powerful expression of Greek tragic drama.

2.2 Design and Data Analysis

The content analysis design was used for this work. This design does not involve soliciting data from human subjects. The objective of this design is to study documented information through intervention. Consequently, the analysis of the selected text was done by exhuming the hidden meanings or themes in the selected stage directions of the text. The aim of this kind of content analysis (conceptual analysis) is to scrutinize the occurrence of selected terms in the data (Owusu et al., 2019).

3. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the work is based on five extracts which are stage directions from different pages of the play. These pages are 2, 7, 13, 17, and 53. The first extract for analysis is from page 2 of the text:

Extract 1

*The action takes place in **Thebes** in front of **the** royal palace. The main doors are directly facing the audience. There are **alters** beside the doors.....*

(Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, p.2)

From the extract above, the first item under consideration is the noun phrase, *the action*. The use of the word *the* is an expression of definiteness. Though the noun phrase *the action* has not been mentioned earlier in the text, its use is an indication that it is familiar. This is because, as in every other instance, a play is all about actions. It is, therefore, worth mentioning that *this* can be found in the experience of the hearer. It also points to a referent in the same linguistic environment, which makes it an endophoric reference. It further points to a referent that is syntactically in front of it, which makes it a cataphoric reference. The use of *the* the noun phrase and *the action* also makes the noun phrase identifiable. The use of endophoric reference is also called the *Inner Reference* due to the linguistic environment in which the endophoric reference is engaged (Awwad, 2017).

From the extract above, *Thebes* is the name of a community. The use of *Thebes* in the context of the extract above is an expression of definiteness. The entity being spoken about can be found in the listener's experience. This is because it has been used in a previous text in the same linguistic environment. Therefore, its use in the Extract 1 makes it identifiable since no other entity bears

that name in the same linguistic environment. Its use further points to its familiarity with the environment within which it is situated, and the word *Therbes* is an expression of uniqueness.

The next item under consideration in the Extract 1 is the noun phrase, **the royal palace**. The instance of the use of the article in the noun phrase above expresses a clear message of definiteness. The referent being indicated in Extract 1 can be found in the hearer's experience; in this case, the *royal palace* has been spoken about in previous texts. It is also a place that is known by all. Therefore, it signifies both familiarity and identifiability. This agrees with Nazari's (2003) assertion that linguists and psycholinguistics need to pay particular attention to the construction of utterances and make conscious efforts to rid all utterances of possible misapplications that may result from the misapplication of a linguistic element. It also points to a referent that can be located within the same linguistic environment. It, thus, happens to be an endophoric reference. Besides, the entity indicated by the use of the definite article points to a referent, which is syntactically located in front of it, that is, a *royal palace*. It is, therefore, a clear use of cataphora.

The next item for consideration in Extract 1 is the word *alters*. This is an indication of indefiniteness. It cannot be found in the experience of the hearer. It is also exophoric in the sense that the entity being spoken about is out of the linguistic environment of the hearer. The hearer, consequently, may be hearing it for the first time in the context presented in Extract 1. This means that the use of the word *alters* does not conform to familiarity in the context of Extract 1. It can also be concluded that the use of *alters* in the same Extract does not conform to the case of identifiability.

The next extract for consideration is taken from page 13 of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*; it thus reads:

Extract 2

Enter **OEDIPUS** from **the palace**

(Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, p.13)

The first item for consideration in Extract 2 is the use of the word *Oedipus*. On the issue of semantic referentiality, (Chen, 2009) asserts that the semantics of expressions of certain grammatical categories is defined in terms of *pointing* to some existent entity. The use of *Oedipus* in the context of Extract 2 is an expression of definiteness. The entity being spoken about can be found in the listener's experience because it has been used before in the text in the same linguistic environment. So, its use in Extract 2 makes it familiar. Because no other entity bears that name in the same linguistic environment, its use further points to its identifiability in the environment within which it is situated, and the noun *Oedipus* is an expression of uniqueness in the text environment within which it is found.

The next item for consideration in Extract 2 is the use of the noun phrase *the palace*. The instance of the use of the article in the noun phrase is an expression of definiteness. The referent being indicated in Extract 2 can be found in the hearer's experience; in this case, the *palace* has been spoken about in previous texts. It is also a place that is known by all. So, it signifies both familiarity and identifiability. It points to a referent that can be located within the same linguistic environment. It then happens to be an endophoric reference. Besides, the entity that is indicated by the use of the definite article points to a referent, which is syntactically located in front of it, that is, a *palace*. It is also a clear use of cataphora.

The next extract for analysis is a stage direction in the book under study. It thus reads:

Extract 3

Enter **THEIRESIAS**, led by **a small boy**.

(Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, p.17)

The first item of note is the use of the word *Theiresias*. This is the name of a person (character). The name *Theiresias* in the Extract 3 is an expression of definiteness because it is a name. It can be found in the listener's experience since it has been used before in the text in the same linguistic environment. Its use in the Extract 3 makes it familiar. Because no other entity bears that name in the linguistic environment, its use also denotes identifiability in its environment. The noun *Theiresias* is an expression of uniqueness in the text environment within which it is found.

The next item in the extract is the use of the noun phrase *a small boy*.

The presence of the indefinite article in the noun phrase is an indication of indefiniteness. Its use can be described as exophoric. This is because its referent cannot be found in the experience of the hearer. This means that the use of the noun phrase *a small boy* does not conform to familiarity in the context of the extract above. The audience hears it for the first time in the context presented in Extract 3. It can also be concluded that the use of the noun phrase in the extract above does not conform to the case of identifiability, given the context in which it is used.

The next extract for consideration is an utterance made by a character in the text under study. It reads:

Extract 4

CREON

*Before you came, my lord, to steer **our** ship of state, **Laius** ruled **this** land.*

(Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, p.7)

The first item for consideration in the Extract 4 is the phrase *our ship*. The use of the possessive adjective, *our*, in Extract 4 is also another expression of definiteness. Its referent is identifiable and familiar, though it does not indicate the gender of the referent. It can be found in the experience of the audience too.

The second item for consideration in Extract 4 is the use of the noun.

The name *Laius* denotes an expression of definiteness. It can also be said to be found in the listener's experience since it has been used before in the text in the linguistic environment. Its use in Extract 4 makes it familiar. Since no other entity bears that name in the linguistic environment, its use also denotes identifiability in the linguistic environment. The noun *Theiresias* is an expression of uniqueness in the text environment within which it is found.

The final item from Extract 4 is the phrase *this land*. The word *this* in the phrase is an indication of definiteness. It also indicates that the referent is close to the speaker. Also, it is an indication of familiarity. It is also imperative that the referent can be found in the experience of the hearer.

The next extract for analysis is a stage direction on page 53:

Extract 5

*JOCASTER enters from the palace and moves to **an alter** to **Apollo**, who stands outside the palace doors. **She** is accompanied by **one or two SERVANTS**.*

(Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, p.53)

The first item of note in Extract 5 is a noun phrase, *an alter*. In it, the use of the indefinite article is but an indication of indefiniteness. Its use can be described as exophoric, and this is because its referent cannot be found in the experience of the hearer. It also means that the use of the noun phrase, *an alter*, does not conform to familiarity in the context in Extract 5. The audience may be hearing it for the first time in the context presented in Extract 5. It can also be concluded that the use of the noun phrase in Extract 5 does not conform to the case of identifiability, given the context in which it is used. This could be so since many of such *alters* exist in the environment under consideration.

The next item for consideration is the noun *Apollo*, which is the name of a god in the text. This name *Apollo* expresses definiteness since it is the sole mark of the identity of a god. It can also be found in the listener's experience since it has been used before in the text in the linguistic environment. Its use in the Extract 5 makes it familiar since no other entity bears that name apart from the one to whom it is attributed in the linguistic environment. Its use also denotes identifiability in the linguistic environment. The name *Apollo* is also an expression of uniqueness in the text environment within which it is used.

The next item for consideration is the pronoun *she*. This, in Extract 5, is another expression of definiteness. It is an indication of gender and furthers as an identifiable entity.

The final item for analysis in the Extract 5 is the noun phrase *one or two servants*. The use of the words *one or two* is also an indication of indefiniteness. Their use can be described as exophoric since their referent cannot be found in the experience of the hearer. Thus, the use of the noun phrase *one or two servants* does not conform to familiarity in the context of Extract 5. Because the audience is being introduced to the referent for the first time in this context, it can be inferred that the use of *one or two servants* in extract 5 does not conform to the case of identifiability.

4. Conclusion

This study has focused on the use of referentiality (which is an important aspect of linguistic analysis) in examining some stage directions in *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles. It is worthy of acceptance that though different models could have been deployed in analysing the extracts, we chose to analyze the selected extracts from the perspective of the models of referentiality, definiteness, and indefiniteness since, under these models, we were able to consider the use of familiarity, identifiability, and uniqueness. Studies of this nature (for example, Adade-Yeboah et al., 2022; Opoku et al., 2022) have the propensity of projecting some hidden meanings to readers.

In a classical proposal stated earlier by Saussure (1916), a sign is a link or bond between a signified and the signifier, and referentiality is the use of signs (including language) to point to some entity. This claim aligns with McGeown's (2013) investigation of primary school students' reading motivation and engagement, which established that readability is measured by the extent to which a reader may take an author's ideas and recast them in their terms. The research, thus, concludes that a reference is an important tool for bridging the gap between comprehension and production. Based on research by McGeown (2013).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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