

Routledge Reissue: *Anaphoric Relations in English and French. A discourse perspective* by Francis Cornish (London & Canberra: Croom Helm, 1986)

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by Francis Cornish (London & Canberra: Croom Helm, 1986)**

This book was written at a time when the mainstream of published works on anaphora tended to adopt a syntactically-oriented position, reflecting the then predominance of Chomskyan Generative Grammar within linguistics. Although the book's title announced a discourse-oriented take on the subject matter, the presence in it of the term "Relations", together with the concern to specify a comprehensive typology of such relations in the two languages under study (in terms not only of morpho-syntax, but also of semantics and of discourse-pragmatics: see chapters 2-4) lent a structural emphasis to the work —the prime objective being to highlight the key contribution to these relations made by a range of contextual, referential and discourse factors.

Since that time, of course, structural approaches to language, and in particular the Chomskyan one, have been eclipsed to a large extent by what we might call (using its terminology, though not its characterisation) a "performance", or language-use, orientation toward language phenomena. These accounts were and are conceived not solely in terms of their purely structural properties, but primarily rather in terms of aspects of their use in context by real speakers and addressees. The rise of corpus linguistics, of Cognitive approaches to language and of course of Pragmatics as an independent field of enquiry, all reflect this new focus.

Subsequently, my later book entitled *Anaphora, Discourse and Understanding. Evidence from English and French* published by Clarendon Press, Oxford (Cornish 1999) contained a chapter (Ch. 6) devoted to questions of memory organisation and to possible psycholinguistic applications of the conception of discourse anaphora developed in these terms. This use-oriented dimension, however, was already present in my 1986 book —see Ch. 5 "Reference and Anaphora", in particular. Since then, a pair of experiments in both English and French (described in Cornish et al., 2005) were carried out by two teams of psycholinguists under my guidance, in order to determine whether, in language users' processing, non-subject pronouns in particular may be equally straightforwardly resolved in conceptual and in purely linguistic terms (i.e. via a canonical textual antecedent). A second distinction was drawn between "antecedentless" pronouns referring to conceptually central entities, and those targeting peripheral ones (e.g. instruments) within the state of affairs evoked via the antecedent-trigger predication. The results, both of the English and the French versions of the experiments, confirmed our hypothesis that there is no essential difference (in terms of processing latencies) in the interpretation of object pronouns whose referent is conceptually central within the state of affairs evoked via the host predication, whether accompanied or not by a canonical textual antecedent, under the traditional conception. The question of the status of so-called "antecedentless" pronouns (which are by no means rare in language corpora, whether spoken or written) is discussed in Cornish 1996 and in Ch. 4 of Cornish 1999, while indirect anaphora more generally is dealt with in Cornish 2005 as well as Cornish et al. 2005.

Further themes adumbrated in both my 1986 and 1999 books and developed in later work were first, the foundational distinction between the dimensions of *text* and *discourse*. This is crucial to my conception of anaphora, since, together with the dimension of *context*, it provides the ground on which anaphoric reference is rooted. The *textual* dimension (i.e. the perceptual trace of a sequence of acts of utterance) provides both the antecedent trigger and the potential anaphor within its host predication; while that of *discourse* (the mental representation of the communication as it unfolds, in the minds of speaker and addressee) makes available an evolving representation of the anaphor's referent as it exists at the point of

retrieval (what I call the “antecedent”). See Cornish 2008, 2010 and 2011, all of which present for analysis a number of attested, sometimes extended, textual examples of various styles and registers. Another major theme adumbrated in the 1986 book (pp. 153-159) and developed in subsequent work is the distinction between anaphora *stricto sensu* and “anadeixis” (a term introduced by Ehlich 1982, a work already cited in the Croom Helm book). See Cornish 2011 in particular for this distinction, and its relevance to reference-maintenance and -shifting in discourse, as well as to discourse structuring itself. Cornish 2012 and 2014a provide in-depth investigations of the various ways in which indexical reference functions within discursively central as well as subsidiary units within a discourse.

One final topic discussed in the 1986 book was agreement (Ch. 6), which figures prominently in French, though much less so of course in English. This phenomenon was argued to be closely connected with the functioning of pronominal anaphora, and to exhibit various degrees as well as subtypes, parallel to those evident in the domain of anaphora proper. In the case of French, these degrees and subtypes of agreement were subsequently developed in Cornish 2014b within the framework of the recent structural-functional model of language *Functional Discourse Grammar*, in terms of the various layers of functional structure made available by this theory. But see Cornish 2013 for a critical overview of this model as a whole, insofar as it purports to characterise the means made available by the language system for indexical reference within discourse.

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