

Reference words: <http://www.rit.edu/ntid/rate/sea/referencewords/>

Introduction

"Reference words" are one of the rhetorical devices that allow a writer to create cohesion throughout a text. They constitute a large group of mostly "pronouns" and "noun phrases," less frequently other parts of speech. Reference words represent other elements in a text and allow the writer to manipulate these elements in different ways.

An examination of reference words will reveal **two notable features** about them:

1. They cannot stand alone; rather, they need to connect with other words to complete their meanings.
2. They are used when new information is added about the things that they refer to, hence, the name "reference words."

1. Parts of Speech of Reference Words

As stated in the introduction, "reference words" are mostly pronouns and noun phrases, less often other parts of speech. Below is a repeat of the paragraph about Germany. Look carefully at the highlighted reference words again and note their parts of speech. Then, read the explanations in the sections below it.

Germany After World War 2

In 1939, Germany started World War 2; ¹**she** was confident that ¹**she** could conquer and control all of Europe. ¹**She** spread death and destruction over much of ²**the continent**. But after several years of war, Germany ³**herself** began to suffer severe ⁴**losses**: Allied bombing raids destroyed German cities, farms, industries, and transportation systems. Food, water, and fuel began to disappear; and without ⁵**these essentials**, people could not care for ⁶**themselves** and their families. Berlin, the capital city, incurred even worse ⁷**damage**: bombing raids destroyed seventy percent of ⁸**its** buildings, leaving ⁹**the city** in ruins. People ¹⁰**there** lived in squalor. ¹¹**Vermin** spread, bringing diseases: Rats and fleas infested people's homes; roaches contaminated ¹²**their** food. ¹³**Conditions** worsened daily.

Pronouns as Reference Words

The classical example of a reference word is the simple **pronoun**, as in example 1 above, where the pronoun **she** refers to Germany three times. Pronouns are limited in that they may refer only to items within the same paragraph in which they appear. Moreover, they contain only a bare minimum of information and, if writers are not careful to place them close enough to their antecedents, their reference will not be clear to readers.

A second kind of pronoun reference word, which appears twice in the paragraph above, is the "reflexive," which ends in **-self** or **-selves**. Reflexives are even more limited in that they refer to a word within the same sentence.

In example 3, the reflexive **herself** shows focusing of attention on the word **Germany**, meaning that now Germany (and not the other countries) was suffering severe losses.

A more frequent use of reflexive pronouns is to show that the subject of a sentence performs an action on itself, as in example 6, where the reflexive pronoun **themselves** refers to the word **people**.

Noun Phrases as Reference Words

A "noun phrase" is simply a noun including any modifier such as an "adjective" or an "article." For example, **people**, **the people**, and **the friendly people** are all noun phrases. Unlike pronouns, noun phrase reference words can carry more precise information, making it easier for the reader to follow them. As such, they may jump one or two paragraph boundaries to find their antecedents.

The most frequent noun phrase reference words are general words that refer to more specific items in the text, as in the examples below:

Example 2: **the continent** refers to Europe.

Example 4: **losses** refers to Allied bombing raids and the destruction of German cities, farms, industries...

Example 5: **these essentials** refers to food, water, and fuel.

Example 7: **damage** refers to bombing raids destroying 70% of Berlin and leaving it in ruins.

Example 9: **the city** refers to Berlin.

Example 11: **vermin** refers to rats, fleas, and roaches.

Example 12: **conditions** refers to the information in the whole bottom half of the paragraph.

Other Parts of Speech as Reference Words

The remaining reference words in the example paragraph above are the following:

Example 8: The "possessive adjective" **its** refers to the word **Berlin** (or more accurately, its possessive form **Berlin's**).

Example 10: The short "locational adverb" **there** stands for in **Berlin**.

Example 12: The possessive adjective **their** stands for the possessive form of the word **people** (**people's**).

2. Direction of Reference

Reference words can refer in three directions: **upwards**, **downwards**, and **outwards**.

Upward Reference

The most common direction of reference is **upwards** to a previous portion of a text. This is called "anaphoric reference" because **ana** means "upwards" and **phor** means "to carry." And reference words that refer back upwards to a previous text are called "anaphoric words." Anaphoric words offer a writer streamlined ways of repeating, manipulating, and expanding previous information in a paragraph.

Note that anaphoric words frequently have the definite article **the** attached to them because a primary function of the definite article is to inform the reader that an item has been mentioned previously in the text.

Downward Reference

The second most common direction for reference is **downward** to a subsequent text. This is called "cataphoric reference" because **cata** means "downward." Reference words that refer downward in a text are called "cataphoric words." Cataphoric words help a reader to predict what is going to happen in a text. They are a favorite stylistic device of novelists because their function is to arouse curiosity of a reader by giving only partial information about something that will be revealed later.

Outward Reference

The third direction of reference is **outside** the text, that is, to items that are not described explicitly in the text. This is called "exophoric reference" because **exo** means "outward." Reference words that refer outside a text are called "exophoric words." Exophoric words indicate assumed shared knowledge between the writer and the reader. Since the writer assumes that the reader knows what the exophoric words refer to, the writer does not bother to explain them in the text.

Note that an exophoric reference word may also have the definite article **the** attached to it because a secondary function of the definite article **the** is to convey that

- (a) only one example of this item exists in the time and place being focused on;
- (b) the reader most likely knows of its existence already.

The following paragraph is a continuation of the paragraph about Germany. Read through it and examine the reference words. Determine whether they are *anaphoric*, *cataphoric*, or *exophoric*. Then read the explanations below it.

Finally on 7 May 1945, Germany surrendered to ¹**the Allied Forces** and ²**the war in Europe** was over. By June of 1945, Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union had occupied ³**the whole country**. Immediately, ⁴**they** devised ⁵**a system** for controlling Germany: They divided Germany into four sectors-⁶**three** in the west and ⁶**one** in the east. They also divided ⁷**the capital city** into four sectors with Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union each administering one sector of ⁸**the city**. ⁹**All four countries** agreed to help rebuild German cities, farms, industries, and transportation systems. ¹⁰**They** also promised to promote the establishment of a democratic form of government in Germany.

1. The noun phrase **the Allied Forces** is *exophoric*; this word refers loosely to certain members of the fifty nations that opposed the Axis countries during World War 2. Note the use of the definite article **the**, indicating that only one example of this item exists in the time and place being focused on and that the reader most likely knows about it.
2. The noun phrase **the war in Europe** is *anaphoric*, referring to World War 2, mentioned in the first paragraph.
3. The noun phrase **the whole country** is *anaphoric*, referring upward to the word **Germany**. Note the anaphoric use of the definite article **the**, informing the reader that this item has been mentioned previously in the text.
4. The pronoun **they** is *anaphoric*, referring upward to the four countries of Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union.
5. The noun phrase **a system** is *cataphoric*, referring downward to the description of the division of Germany and Berlin into sectors with Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union each administering one sector of Germany and one sector of Berlin.
6. The words **three** and **one** are *anaphoric*, referring back upward to the word **sectors**.
7. The noun phrase **the capital city** is *anaphoric*, referring all the way up to the word **Berlin** in the previous paragraph.
8. The noun phrase **the city** is *anaphoric*, referring back up to **the capital city**, which in turn refers to **Berlin** in the previous paragraph.
9. The noun phrase **All four countries** is *anaphoric*, referring upward to the four countries of Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union.
10. The pronoun **They** is *anaphoric*, referring back up to **All four countries**

3. Identifying Antecedents of Reference Words

In the two paragraphs below, some of the reference words are numbered and highlighted. They are also listed below their respective paragraphs. After reading the first paragraph, go to the list of reference words below it.

Paragraph 1

After the Soviet Union established communism in East Germany, ¹they took over banks, farms, and industries and forced people to work for low wages. In response to ²these difficult conditions, hundreds of thousands of East German citizens fled to ³the West to live. Soon, fewer people were working in East German factories, banks, farms, and industries. Then, on 26 May 1952, in order to stop ⁴this exodus, East Germany established a tight ⁵security system along its frontier with West Germany: Starting at the Baltic Sea in the north and extending all the way to Czechoslovakia in the south, ⁶they constructed minefields, barbed wire, and watchtowers with guards. ⁷These effectively kept East Germans from escaping to West Germany across the frontier.

Paragraph 2

However, within the city of Berlin, there was no ⁸such security system. People were still able to pass freely from ⁹East to West and they ¹⁰did. Many East Germans made their way to Berlin; then, they crossed over to the West, and never returned. Finally, on 13 August 1961, the East German Government built a huge 27-mile wall of concrete and barbed wire right through the middle of ¹¹the city, dividing the Soviet sector from ¹²the other three. Now nobody could escape to the West; East Germans were truly prisoners of ¹³their own country. ¹⁴The Berlin Wall separated families and ruined ¹⁵people's lives.

4. Identifying Reference Words

In the paragraphs below, certain single words and groups of words are underlined. Read through the paragraphs and find words that you think are actual "reference words."

Paragraph 1

Because of the untenable situation in their country, East Germans became increasingly frustrated. Suddenly in 1989, East Germans who took vacations in Hungary and Czechoslovakia discovered that these countries would allow them to go into West Germany. But then, the East German government tried to prevent people from going into those countries. East Germans became even more frustrated and angry. People in many East German cities began to mount massive demonstrations. They insisted on an end to their communist government. Most of all, they demanded freedom to travel. The demonstrations became intense.

Paragraph 2

Before long, both the East German Government and the Soviet Union realized that they could no longer contain a whole country full of angry, frustrated people. And on 9 November 1989, the borders in the city of Berlin were opened. Hundreds of thousands of excited East Germans poured through checkpoints causing massive traffic jams. West Germans rushed into the streets to welcome them with hugs and champagne. Television cameras rushed to the scene to broadcast their joy to the world. Soon, every checkpoint in East Germany was opened, and people flooded into West Germany. The East German people were finally free. One year later, on 3 October 1990, the German Democratic Republic ceased to exist, and it was officially reunited with the Federal Republic of Germany into a single country called Germany.

5. Identifying Anaphoric, Cataphoric, and Exophoric Words

The underlined reference words in the two paragraphs below are either "anaphoric" (referring upward to previously mentioned words), "cataphoric" (referring downward to subsequent words), or "exophoric" (referring to something outside the text).

Identify whether the reference words are anaphoric, cataphoric, or exophoric by selecting your choice in the pull-down menu next to each item. After you make your selection, you will receive feedback at the bottom of the page.

Paragraph 1

For many years, East German people devised ¹creative ways to sneak out of East Germany. Some people dug tunnels; ²others tried crashing through checkpoints with cars, trucks, or busses; ³still others flew out in small airplanes or balloons. One woman tied herself to the bottom of a car and passed through a checkpoint unnoticed. And one family sewed fake Russian uniforms for ⁴themselves; then, they pretended to be Russian soldiers and simply drove through a checkpoint. Some desperate people tried scrambling over a barbed-wire fence or a wall. ⁵These people were often shot.

Paragraph 2

On 21 December 1972, ⁶the Basic Treaty was signed by East and West Germany, and relations between ⁷the two countries started to improve. During the next two decades, they began to cooperate with ⁸each other by sharing cultural and commercial ⁹activities such as arts exchange programs and joint business ventures. However, East Germans were still dissatisfied, for ¹⁰their living standard was lower than ¹¹that of West Germany. ¹²Their industries produced inferior goods, and ¹³their country was polluted from inferior mining methods and careless industrial waste.

6. Action Steps

The best action step is to develop your ability to scan a text and recognize reference words and their antecedents. Some frequently encountered reference words are included below, as well.

Common pronoun reference words:

- A. The "personal pronouns" **I, me, you, he, him, she, her, we, us, they, them, mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs**
- B. The "demonstrative pronouns" **this, that, these, those**
- C. The "relative pronouns" **that, which, whose**
- D. The "reciprocal pronouns" **each other, one another**
- E. The "reflexive pronouns" **myself, yourself, yourselves, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, themselves**

General noun reference words that could refer to large portions of text:

assumption, belief, concept, effect, event, hypotheses, idea, interpretation, matter, notion, opinion, problem, process, result, rule, situation, specialization, theory, this task, viewpoint

Words that would refer not directly to an antecedent but to a variant or some kind of restatement of the antecedent:

such a, likewise, similarly, just the opposite, so do I, the same kind, a similar one

Commonly used exophoric words:

this country, this nation, this year, next year, our government, our president, today

7. Summary of the Overview of Reference Words

Reference Words

Reference words are a type of rhetorical device that allows a writer to create cohesion throughout a text by reintroducing, manipulating, or anticipating information continually and in interesting ways.

Reference words can be almost any part of speech, but most of them are pronouns and noun phrases.

Reference words can refer in three directions: upward to a previously mentioned portion of text, downward to a subsequent portion of text, or outward to an entity that is not mentioned in the text.

- A. Reference words that refer upward in a text are called "anaphoric."
- B. Reference words that refer downward in a text are called "cataphoric."
- C. Reference words that refer outward from a text are called "exophoric."

Antecedents

Antecedents are the words that reference words represent. They can consist of various-sized portions of text:

- A. Noun phrases
- B. Sentences or parts of sentences
- C. One or more complete paragraphs