Key concepts in ELT
Anaphora

Anaphora (from the Greek for 'a carrying back') is used in linguistics[1] to describe the process of referring to information already given in an earlier clause or sentence. In the example below, the writer exploits anaphoric reference for comic effect:

> The English *country gentleman* galloping after a fox—*the unspeakable* in full pursuit of *the uneatable.* (Oscar Wilde)

Anaphora is in contrast with cataphora, which refers forward:

There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is *not being talked about.* (Oscar Wilde)

Both are instances of deixis, the more general term for language used to point to something in context, whether that context is linguistic or situational.[2]

Anaphora is one of the means by which speakers or writers achieve variety of expression and, when it operates across sentence boundaries, is a cohesive or linking device. It is important in language teaching because of the role it plays in cross-reference in spoken or written texts. Many learners reach a stage when they can cope with individual words yet find that the overall meaning of a passage has escaped them because they cannot see how these patterns of cross-reference are operating. From such difficulties with comprehension follow problems with production.

Teachers can help learners to understand and then master these features by introducing the simpler patterns of reference, the use of pro-forms, at an early stage, and then progressing to the more complex forms such as ellipsis and types of repetition. Table 1 gives an outline of the main pro-forms to be covered.[3]

As well as being characterized by the use of pro-forms, anaphora as a more general linking device is present in many aspects of text. The definite article is often used anaphorically to identify an item already introduced:

> A mysterious animal has been savaging sheep over recent weeks. *The* beast seems to be about the size of a large dog, and some people fear it may be a wolf.

An anaphoric reference may be achieved through ellipsis in order to avoid repeating information that is easily recoverable from the linguistic context:

> I am very proud of your achievements and so is your father (very proud of your achievements).

Table 1

Personal pronouns as subjects and objects (*he/him, they/them*, etc.)	*The Beatles* were probably the most famous British pop group. They first came to public attention in the 1960s.
Possessive pronouns (*his/her/their,* etc.)	*Their* songs are still popular.
Demonstrative pronouns (*this, that, these, those*)	*This* group from Liverpool...
Adverbs of time and place (*then, there*)	It was unusual *then* for groups based outside London to achieve recognition.
Indefinite pronouns (*one[s], some, any,* etc.)	People still argue over which of the group was the most talented *one.*
The verb *do* as a substitute for a predicate	John Lennon wrote songs and Paul McCartney *did* too.
So as a substitute for an adjective, adjective phrase, or noun phrase	They were both very talented and it is very difficult to say which of them was more *so.*

The past tense, once established, is anaphoric in its subsequent uses in that it refers to a time frame already indicated:

He came. He *saw*. He *conquered.*

(See Quirk *et al.* 1985, Chs. 4.13 and 5.30 for anaphoric uses of the past tense and the definite article.)

Various repetitive devices, as seen in the opening examples—synonyms, metonyms, synecdoche, even antonyms, often used for rhetorical effect—are cataphoric and anaphoric:

O blithe new-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O cuckoo! Shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice?

Wordsworth's 'blithe new-comer' is cataphoric, since we do not yet know the subject of the poem; his use of 'bird' is an anaphoric synonym, and 'wandering voice' an anaphoric metonym. (See Cook 1994, Ch. 2 for a discussion of referring expressions in literature.)

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Notes

1 In literary criticism, anaphora is seen as a repetitive device, particularly the repetition of the first word or words of each line of a poem.
2 Sometimes the deictic use of a demonstrative pronoun can be understood only from the situational context, e.g. 'Don't do that, Sidney'.
3 Anaphoric reference is characterized by patterns of substitution and co-reference, by ellipsis and repetition through various forms of synonymy. A detailed analysis of these features is found in Quirk *et al.* Ch. 12: 185. Many course materials include exercises to help learners recognize and produce the basic patterns for anaphoric reference: see, for example, Newbold (1991), and Glendinning and Mantell (1983).

References

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