

Angela Merkel – she – Merkel: Marked reference chains and argumentation in German press articles

Research area

The focus of this study is on reference chains which – although the reference is unambiguous – are characterized by the immediate repetition of a proper name in two or three consecutive sentences. Special attention is paid to the following two variants:

Sequence 1: *proper name* – PROPER NAME [– *pronoun/def. noun phrase*]

Sequence 2: *proper name* [– *pronoun/def. noun phrase*] – PROPER NAME

In the case of sequence 1, the proper name used as the subject in the first sentence (S_n) is then repeated in the sentence which follows immediately after (S_{n+1}), where it also functions as the subject. Both expressions have the same referent in the focus of attention. Evidence for this is provided by the following example from a corpus of 380 press articles (opinion journalism) taken from *faz.net* and *sueddeutsche.de* covering the period 2011–2016:

- (1) Die Fehler im Spiel haben die Spieler begangen, aber der Ur-Fehler stammt von *ihrem Trainer*. [S_n] Löw hat *sich* mit *seinen* Beschlüssen über die Turnier-Wirklichkeit erhoben, die *sein* Team bis dahin aufgebaut hatte. [S_{n+1}] Löw liebt es, das Unerwartete zu tun, unkonventionell zu handeln, sich über die klassischen, oft ja auch platten Weisheiten hinwegzusetzen. [...] (sueddeutsche.de, 29.6.2012)

The second sequence is characterized by the proper name being repeated in the immediate textual vicinity. In S_n the proper name functions as the subject while in S_{n+1} , the same referent is denoted by an anaphoric pronoun, also in subject position. In S_{n+2} , the proper name is used again (as the subject), for the same referent once again. This constellation is illustrated by the following extract from a press article:

- (2) [1 §] *Jeb Bush* ist in Würde gescheitert. [...] *Er* hat immer gewusst, dass es für einen Kopfmenschen wie *ihn* brutal würde in der Tea-Party-Ära. [S_n] *Bush* hat sich dieser Prüfung mit dem Ehrgeiz gestellt, *sich* treu zu bleiben. [S_{n+1}] *Er* blieb sachlich, positiv, optimistisch in einer Partei, die sich nach Zerstörung sehnt, womöglich einschließlich der eigenen. [S_{n+2}] *BUSH* hetzte nicht gegen Minderheiten. *Er* erinnerte daran, dass [...]. (sueddeutsche.de, 21.2.2016)

This use of a proper name of a referent already mentioned in the immediate left-context by the same proper name is called a *renominalization* (cf. Schecker 1996; Thurmair 2003; Weinrich 2007 [1993]) or *recurrence* (Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997) or *redénomination* (cf. especially Kleiber 1994; Schnedecker 1997, 2003). In contrast with English and French, renominalization in German has only been investigated on a general level so that there is a research gap for “*immediate renominalization*” in particular.

Research questions, objective, theoretical background

Based on these empirical observations, the following questions, which are to be answered within the Framework of descriptive-functional analysis, were raised:

Considering press comments as argumentative texts, what role can be assigned to the immediate repetition of the proper name in positions where pronominalization would not cause ambiguity? Why is the repeated proper name used instead of a pronoun as a *high accessibility marker* (Ariel 1990, 2001)? What is, thus, the added value of the immediately repeated proper name (in particular in relation to the “expectable” or “expected” anaphoric pronoun on the part of the recipient) in argumentative sequences?

The main goal of this study is to use empirical data to illustrate the by no means arbitrary nature of what is actually an optional immediate repetition of the proper name as well as the associated regularities. With the help of exemplary analyses and by taking account of the interplay between reference, salience and the structure of argumentation, the relevance of the immediately repeated proper name can be established in the case of naming a highly accessible referent (local or global discourse topic) in the argumentation. From a theoretical perspective, this study is guided by works on argumentation in related research into French (cf. especially Ducrot 1980 et al.; Anscombe/Ducrot 1988 and Roulet et al. 1991).

Results of the empirical analysis

The empirical analysis reveals that the immediately repeated proper name in the press articles under scrutiny appears at strategic, systematically identifiable points within argumentative sequences, highlighting its contribution to the structuring of (counter)argumentative sequences. The immediately repeated proper name – together with other typographic and/or lexical means where applicable (e. g. new paragraph, counter-argumentative connectors like *aber* [but] and *doch* [however]) – acts as a referential-rhetorical signal. In other words, in its function as an indicator of discontinuity, it marks a *change on the level of argumentation*. In this way the immediately repeated proper name can,

- in coordinated arguments, be a component of the sentence which opens the discourse segment of ‘argument(s)’ in the sequence ‘thesis – argument(s)’;
- in coordinated arguments, be a component of the sentence which opens the discourse segment of ‘conclusion’ in the sequence ‘argument(s) – conclusion’;
- in counter-argumentative sequences, be a component of the sentence with which the discourse segment ‘antithesis/conclusion’ begins.

In line with the discourse analysis model proposed by Roulet et al. (1985/1991), the immediate repetition of the proper name serves the hierarchization of certain relationships in the discourse, i. e. marking the transition to a subordinated or dominating speech act.

In sum, it shows that, although the reference is unambiguous, the immediate repetition of the proper name in German contemporary press comments can be considered an important resource for structuring the argumentation.

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