DEFINITENESS AND REFLEXIVITY: INDEXING SOCIALLY SHARED EXPERIENCE¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of definite and indefinite noun phrases in everyday conversations in Finnish and English to establish meaning and to alter and build context in interaction. The paper shows that participants in conversation use the formal contrast between definite and indefinite NPs not only to express identifiability and non-identifiability of the referent to their addressees, but that they also use it dynamically to make claims about socially shared reality, to create referents in discourse and to build a novel identity for existing referents, to actively construct frames and create roles within them, and to reorganize the participant structure of a speech event.

Keywords: Definiteness, Reference, Interaction, Presupposition, Frames, Roles, Participant structure

1. Introduction

It has long been recognized that language, in addition to its function of expressing our perception of external reality, also has performative elements which function to actively change reality (Austin 1962). More recently, scholars working on natural discourse have enriched this insight by showing that performativity is not just a property of certain elements of language, but that many, perhaps all, elements of language possess a duality of function, often termed **reflexivity**, so that they both describe and, simultaneously, shape or change the external world (Goffman 1981; Silverstein 1981; Fox 1987; Laury 1997; Okamoto 1999; Pekarek 1998; Seppänen 1998; and many others).

In this paper, I focus on the performative (pragmatic, or creative) potential of definiteness. I provide evidence from naturally occurring everyday talk which shows that definite noun phrases (both lexical noun phrases as well as pronouns) are used not only to

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speak of referents identifiable to the addressee, that is, not only to refer to directly or indirectly shared experience, but also to establish meaning and build context in dynamic ways in discourse through the cooperation of the participants in conversation.

In particular, I wish to stress that in natural conversation, reference is rooted in the interactional process that is underway and cannot be properly understood separately from the contextual framework that participants in interaction create and orient to. Further, I wish to promote the view that what speakers and addressees orient to when they use referential forms in interaction is not something that would necessarily or even most of the time exist prior to the interaction, but rather is created on-line through and within the interaction.

2. Data

The data for this paper come from ordinary conversations in Finnish and English. Most of the Finnish data were recorded and transcribed by the author (see Laury 1997, where the same data were used); some of them come from the conversational database developed at the Department of Finnish at the University of Helsinki. The English data come from the Corpus of Spoken American English developed at the University of California, Santa Barbara (Du Bois 2000). All the spoken data were transcribed using conventions described in Du Bois et al (1993).

3. The dynamic use of definite NPs in discourse

Early research on definiteness by philosophers (Frege 1892; Russell 1905; Strawson 1950) focused on definite descriptions, singular noun phrases equipped with the definite article. While the views of these scholars differed in significant ways (see Laury 2001 for an abbreviated account, Lyons 1999 for a more comprehensive discussion), a central insight in their work was that the use of definite descriptions in general presupposed a unique referent. This insight was later refined by Donnellan (1979) in important work concerning the relationship between presupposition, referentiality and speaker intentions.

Instead of presupposition, most contemporary, influential work on definiteness by linguists has focused on the main contextual condition for the use of definite noun phrases, the (unique) identifiability or familiarity of the referent to the addressee due to previous mention, presence in the environment, or directly or indirectly shared knowledge, such as culturally shared frames (Chafe 1976, 1994; Clark and Marshall 1981; Du Bois 1980; Gundel et al 1993; Hawkins 1978; Lambrecht 1994, and many others). The criterion of identifiability of the referent is what distinguishes most uses of definite noun phrases (of all types) from uses of indefinite noun phrases.^{2, 3} In other words, speakers normally use

² I will use the terms definite and indefinite to refer to the form of a noun phrase (see Du Bois 1980 and Chafe 1994 for a similar use and explication of the terms).

³ While it is clear that the conditions for the use of definite and indefinite noun phrases differ with respect to identifiability, it is not clear whether indefinite noun phrases in their referential uses also presuppose the existence of a referent (see, for example, Strawson 1950: 341-342). It is, however, also clear that definite

definite noun phrases when they can assume that the addressee(s) can identify the referent, that is, when they judge that the aforementioned contextual conditions are satisfied, and they use indefinite noun phrases when they assume the addressee(s) cannot identify the referent.

While I acknowledge that most of the use of definite and indefinite NPs can probably be accounted for by making appeal to the criterion of identifiability conceived of as discussed above, I propose in this paper that the expression of definiteness in language is not merely an automatic or inevitable consequence of the contextual factor of identifiability of the referent to the addressee(s), but that speakers also use definiteness in dynamic ways to alter context and build reference. The use of a definite noun phrase may involve a claim about a socially shared reality; it may create a new discourse referent; it may function to indicate the contrast between referential and nonreferential uses of the same noun; it may create a novel role in a novel frame; or it may reorganize the participant structure in a speech situation. In some situations, the dynamic use of definiteness may involve a mismatch between identifiability and noun phrase form so that speakers use definite forms for referents that are not identifiable to their addressees, and indefinite forms for referents which are identifiable.

Some of the phenomena focused on here have been discussed previously by other scholars, in particular those working in the cognitive linguistics paradigm. My aim in this paper is to enrich and add to these earlier findings, most of which have been based on isolated, often constructed, sentences, or invented discourses, through an examination of how speakers use definite and indefinite noun phrases in ordinary conversation to construct and modify as well as describe socially shared experience. Given that discourse-functional and interactional linguistics, the approaches my work is most closely associated with, share with cognitive linguistics an interest in language use and the insight that “meaning arises in on-going discourse interactively (Marmaridou 2000: 146),” it seems quite clear that examination of natural, interactive discourse can only increase our shared understanding of how language works and how people use it.

4. Definite NPs and shared social reality

A speaker who uses a definite noun phrase makes a claim that the addressees share knowledge of, and are therefore able to identify, a particular referent, even if they in fact do not. As noted by Du Bois, speakers “have facultative control over definiteness (1980: 219)”; that is, speakers may divert from the general pattern of marking identifiability, and they do this for their own purposes. Thus, a speaker may, for example, use a definite noun phrase for a referent which is not identifiable to the addressee(s) for purposes of

NPs differ from indefinite NPs when tests of presupposition such as negation are applied. From a discourse point of view, the more durable presuppositional quality of definite NPs could be the result of how they are ordinarily used. After all, language users always hear NPs in (con)text, embedded in discourses of various types. If frequency (Strawson’s ‘language habits’) has anything to do with how we interpret grammatical constructions, it may well be that the fact that definite NPs are frequently preceded by previous mentions of the referent either in the same conversation or in other kinds of prior text has conventionalized an implication that the referent pre-exists - but that is a topic for another paper.

argumentation. In other words, she may present a referent as identifiable, i.e., shared, even if she knows this is not the case, in order to persuade the addressee(s) to adopt his or her views on some topic or issue.

This is done in the following example, which comes from a conversation between secondary school teachers of Finnish. The teachers are discussing issues having to do with finding books that have interest for young readers. Speaker PY has been arguing that books containing violent materials are suitable for young boys, while KM strongly disagrees (line 312). PY then suggests that such reading materials may in fact have a beneficial effect.

(1)

- 312 KM:.. niin ei [väkivaltaa niille].
 so NEG violence-PRT 3PL-ALL
 So, no violence for them.
- 313 PY [Se on se,
 3SG be-PRES 3SG
 That's it,
- 314 ei kun se,]
 NEG as 3SG
 No but it,
- 315 joo,
 PTCL
 yeah,
- 316 toisaalta se on,
 on.the.other.hand 3SG be-PRES
 on the other hand it's
- 317 ^näinkin,
 thus-also
 like this too,
- 318 mutta siis sanotaan että,
 but so say-PASS-PRES that
 but let's say that,
- 319 ne .. menee niin ku yli sen,
 3PL go-PRES so as over it-ACC
 they like get over it,
- 320 et ne kasvaa **sen** **väkivaltansa** pois.
 that 3PL grow-PRES DET-ACC violence-3PLPOSS-ACC away
 that they grow out of their violence.

Here, PY argues that young boys can get over their violence; after the excerpt shown above, he goes on to amplify his point that this can be achieved by reading the type of literature he is proposing. In line 320, PY uses a formally definite NP, *sen väkivaltansa* 'the (their)

violence', a noun preceded by a definite determiner and followed by a possessive suffix⁴, to refer to the violence of young boys. By doing so, he makes the claim that the referent is identifiable to his addressees. Since the referent has not been mentioned previously and is not present in the environment, the basis of identifiability would presumably be shared cultural knowledge about the attributes of young boys; however, there is no indication or requirement that such knowledge is culturally shared by his addressees (i.e., the notion that young boys are violent is to my knowledge not generally accepted in Finnish culture or by Finnish teachers, nor does it have to be for PY to use this NP in this way). Instead, PY's NP functions as a claim that boys are violent.

The definite NP in line 320 can be seen as functioning here to persuade PY's addressees to accept his claim that boys are violent without giving them the opportunity to contest the claim. Such persuasive use of definite NPs (as well as other constructions thought to induce presuppositions) has been discussed by Sbisà (1999) based on Italian newspaper texts, where it is not always clear whether the triggered presuppositions were actually shared by the readers. She suggests that discourses that contain such presupposition inducers may have hidden didactic aims: Because presuppositions do not put a proposition at issue for debate, but rather simply presuppose it, they therefore, unlike simple assertions, avoid exposure to challenge, as also suggested by Burton-Roberts (1989), by implying that the proposition be taken for granted. In this way, presupposition may place an addressee at a disadvantage in narrowing down his or her options to respond (see also the discussion of this same point by Marmaridou 2000: 146-148). And in fact, in the conversation from which example (1) is excerpted, none of the other participants challenge PY's presupposed claim that boys are violent, although it is clear from the discussion that they do not share such a view. At the same time, both before and after PY's turn in (1), the other participants challenge his suggestion, which is overtly made, not presupposed, that violent literature in the schools might have therapeutic value.

This use of definite NPs for first mentions of previously unshared referents is especially common in political argumentation. Here, too, speakers and writers use them to give the impression that some referent is already shared by them and their addressees without explicit introduction of the referent. Consider the bolded NPs in the next example, taken from the Letters to the Editor section of a California newspaper.

- (2) Editor -- William M. Burke bemoans what would happen under a Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Scalia should George W. Bush be elected president (Letters, June 10). What is really horrifying is what would happen with a Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Ginsburg if Al Gore is elected. The abominably egregious havoc that would result from such an unthinkable occurrence defies description and **the execrable consequences** are vastly too numerous to list. But it doesn't require rocket scientist brains to see that this country's gradual slide into **the pernicious evils of socialism** would be greatly accelerated and our few remaining moral fibers and trustworthy principles that have sustained this great nation since its founding would be summarily obliterated (San Francisco Chronicle, Letters to the Editor, June 19, 2000).

The execrable consequences of the potential election of Al Gore as president and *the*

⁴ Note that in Finnish, possessed NPs (even with a preposed genitive) are not automatically definite. They can be preceded by indefinite determiners as well as definite determiners.

pernicious evils of socialism are, I believe, not identifiable to all the potential readers of this letter. The writer's use of the definite noun phrase serves here to make the claim that the readers share (and therefore can identify) the referents, even though this is not strictly true; in other words, the use of these NPs in effect function to create, or presuppose, the speaker's arguments that the consequences of the election of Gore would be execrable, and that socialism is associated with pernicious evils. The insight discussed above regarding the didactic aims of such practices and their consequences in forestalling argumentation make them especially suitable for political texts.

The identifiable NPs discussed above are in certain respects similar to those which have been discussed in terms of protagonist-oriented identifiability by Chafe (1994) and in terms of non-canonical viewpoint by Epstein (1999); see also Vilkuna 1992. Consider the following example from Chafe (1994: 250), taken from Hemingway's *Big-Hearted River*.

(3) **The train** went up the track out of sight, around one of **the hills** of burnt timber. Nick sat down..

The excerpt comes from the very beginning of the story, and thus the train and the hills are not identifiable to the reader; they are only identifiable to the protagonist of the story, Nick. Chafe suggests that such protagonist-oriented identifiability, where the identifiability of referents is determined from the point of view of a character in the story, and not the reader, is common in fiction; in contrast, according to Chafe, conversation operates instead in terms of listener-oriented identifiability (1994: 284). Epstein cites similar examples from non-literary written texts, and suggests that they also function to convey a specific viewpoint, presenting referents "through the filter of the writer's consciousness" (1999: 67). A similar point is made by Vilkuna (1992: 19).

The definite NPs in examples (1) and (2) are similar to those identified by Chafe, Epstein and Vilkuna and exemplified in example (3) in that they also invite the addressee to adopt the speaker's or writer's viewpoint by offering referents as already shared, or presupposing them. However, they are different in that they (the NPs in examples (1) and (2)) do not create a value-neutral scene which the addressee is invited to adopt; instead, they present as already shared, and therefore identifiable, aspects of a certain type of world view, or ideology, which the addressee may not previously share, in a grammatical structure that does not invite debate. This is why these types of examples appear to be at home in persuasive and argumentative discourse. Example (1) also shows that conversations do not operate exclusively on the basis of listener-oriented identifiability, as suggested by Chafe (1994).

5. Definiteness and creation of discourse referents

The definite noun phrases in examples (1-3) could also be analyzed as actively creating discourse referents which are claimed by the speaker to have shared, and thus identifiable, existence in the social world of the participants in the conversation. In part, the potential of definite noun phrases to create referents in discourse relies on the contrast between referential and non-referential noun phrases with respect to formal marking. Although both indefinite and definite noun phrases can be used referentially or non-referentially, the form of a referential noun phrase is sensitive to the identifiable/non-identifiable distinction, while

the form of a non-referential noun phrase is not (Du Bois 1980: 210; Chafe 1994: 105). This contrast exists because referential noun phrases function to introduce (create) and track referents in discourse, while non-referential noun phrases have other, different functions. Due to this difference in function, in continuous discourse, referential noun phrases are normally indefinite when they introduce previously unshared referents, and subsequent, anaphoric mentions will be done with definite noun phrases. In contrast, the form of non-referential noun phrases does not vary due to earlier mention or identifiability; this is so even in cases where the lexical content of the noun phrase is such that it could serve to stand for some salient referent physically present in the context. In this section, I will first discuss two functions of non-referential noun phrases, classifying and predicating (for an extended discussion of these functions, see Chafe 1994: 103-105; Thompson 1993). I will then show how this contrast between the two types of noun phrases is put to use by speakers in the creation of discourse referents which are entirely novel constructs, and thus differ from the referents in the last section, which are not entirely novel, just unshared.

Example (4) below contains a classifying NP. The speaker, an attorney preparing a witness for trial, is showing the witness a diagram.

- (4) R: This is **a diagram** of the interior of BART.

Although the diagram is physically present in the environment and clearly accessible and identifiable to the addressee, an indefinite NP is used. This is because the noun phrase serves to classify the referent, not to refer to it.

Predicating NPs serve to form part of a predication; like classifying NPs, they are non-referential, in that their function is not to refer, but rather to function together with a verbal element to characterize some action. The next example was said by my daughter in a car I was driving, and where she was the only passenger.

- (5) E: Mom ran **a red light**.

The red light I had just driven through was, at the moment of this utterance, quite identifiable and mentally accessible to me, the addressee, in addition to being physically present in the environment. The use of the indefinite noun phrase was motivated here by its function to characterize a type of action, not to refer to the light as such; the NP was predicating, and thus non-referential. Verb-object combinations such as the one in example (5) can become quite entrenched by frequent use, and there is evidence that such lexicalized combinations are processed as a unit (see Chafe 1994: 113-116 for discussion and references), further indicating that such uses are not referential but rather predicating. Such lexicalized expressions can, of course, also contain formally definite NPs which are not referential, as in *Leslie can play the guitar* where, depending on the context, *the guitar* may be (but does not have to be) non-referential. This shows that definite or indefinite form does not by itself specify a noun phrase as referential or non-referential; in fact, this can only be determined in discourse (a fact already discussed by Karttunen 1976; Heim 1982).

Although non-referential NPs often show up in the predicate, it is also possible for referential noun phrases to occur in this syntactic position (Du Bois 1980: 213ff; Sakahara 1996: 263). The following example comes from a fairytale, a Finnish version of the Cinderella story, where a princess had been masquerading as a beggar. In this part of the

story, Cinderella is fleeing the prince wearing her beggar costume, but part of the costume falls off, revealing her true identity.

- (6) Ja se näki että se oli **se prinsessa**
 and 3SG see-PST COMP 3SG be-PST DET princess
 And he saw that she was the princess.

Here, the NP *se prinsessa* ‘the princess’ is a referential mention although it is a predicate nominal. The clause serves to express identity between the person the prince is pursuing and the previously mentioned princess who is also identifiable to the prince; the noun phrase referring to the princess is explicitly marked for definiteness and is anaphoric with the earlier mentions of the same referent.

Examples (4) and (5) showed that it is possible to use an NP non-referentially in a context where the same lexical expression could be used to refer to an object which is concretely present in the environment and identifiable to the addressee. In other words, real-world existence of a referent has little to do with referentiality. In addition, we saw in example (6) that syntax, while adding to the interpretation of noun phrases as either referential or non-referential, does not supply the full information either. Instead, referentiality is a matter of the use of NPs in discourse. As shown in the next example, referential and non-referential NPs whose lexical form is chosen in such a way that they could be used to mention the ‘same’ real-world referent may alternate in discourse. This example comes from a conversation between two sisters, one of whom is telling about her recent car trouble.

- (7)
- 1 A: ... What’s wrong with the car.
 2 M: Oh, you didn’t hear about it?
 3 A: Hunh-unh.
 4 M: ... Oh,
 5 you did,
 6 about how the .. engine was on fire?
 7 A: ..Mhm,
 8 M: See there was **oil** spilling out,
 9 ... leaking out from the valve cover.
 10 A: ... Mhm
 11 M: The valve cover gasket apparently cracked or whatever,
 12 and there was **oil** coming out,
 13 (H) and **the oil** got hot,
 14 and you know how **it** gets hot and smokes?
 15 A: Mhm.
 16 M: ... Well,
 17 I guess enough came out,
 18 ... because we were losing **oil** bad,
 19 ... going from Billings to .. Crow,
 20 um,
 21 (...)
 22 and by the time we got to Hardin,
 23 we had to put like uh=,
 24 three or four quarts in.
 25 (...)
 26 M: It was some [part in there].

- 27A: [caused the fire]
 28 M: ... The engine being too hot,
 29 ... and **the oil** leaking,
 30 A: .. So he knew that **the oil** was leaking.
 31M: No,
 32 ... (TSK) we knew we were losing **oil**,
 33 but we didn't know where.

In this example, indefinite and definite uses of the noun *oil* alternate, although one might think that the oil under discussion should remain identifiable after the initial, indefinite introductory mentions in presentational *there*-clauses in lines 8 and 12. The alternation in form is not due to identifiability in such a way that the indefinite forms would serve to refer to some non-identifiable oil, while the definite forms would refer to some identifiable oil.⁵ The later uses of the noun *oil* in lines 18 and 32 for ostensibly the same substance that was introduced in lines 8 and 12, are indefinite, not because the oil would now have become unidentifiable, but because the nouns serve in a predicating role, contributing to the description of an event together with the verb, and do not serve as mentions as such of the particular oil that was leaking. Because the noun phrases are non-referential, their form is not responsive to earlier mention (in this case, neither the earlier, referential use of the same lexical noun nor the earlier, formally identical predications where the noun is used non-referentially). In contrast, the subsequent mentions in lines 13, 29 and 30 are referential, hence definite; they do serve as mentions of the oil which was being lost. Here, clausal syntax in addition to definiteness marking supports the referential/non-referential marking in that the referential, definite mentions of the oil are consistently in subject position while the non-referential noun phrases are in post-verbal position. But the referential-non-referential distinction is created through the alternation or lack of it of forms within the discourse.

The pronominal mention in line 14 is an interesting one. Although it follows a mention of specific oil in the engine of the car being discussed (line 13), and that mention serves as its antecedent, the pronominal mention, as can be seen from the shift to present tense, is a generic one, and the predication concerns the general, known behavior of oil. Although this is clearly a generic mention, and thus does not refer to any specific oil, although its antecedent does, the form of this mention and its anaphoric relation to the previous, referential mention indicate that this NP is referential. This shows that real-world status (the oil in the engine of the car M was driving vs. oil in general) does not necessarily match discourse status (in terms of anaphoric relation and referentiality), but rather, referents are discourse constructs, as already shown by Partee (1972) and Hintikka and Carlson (1977).

⁵ I thank Elizabeth Riddle for her interesting comments on this point. If she is right, and the NP in *the oil* contrasts with the NP *oil* in this example in such a way that the definite NPs refer to the oil contained in the engine, and the indefinite one to the part of it which leaked out, I would still consider the definiteness effect to be reflexive in that it creates this impression of boundedness. This would also still not explain why the indefinite mentions of the unbounded oil do not become definite on subsequent mentions even though they would be referential and thus anaphoric mentions.

We have seen how both noun phrase form and syntax are used by speakers in discourse to distinguish referential and non-referential noun phrases regardless of existence and status (generic vs. particular) of referents in the concrete, lived world. The ability of referential mentions to create referents through the manipulation of forms within a discourse is a significant resource for speakers, as shown in the next example.

Example (8) comes from the same conversation as example (4). The defendant in this case had been observed by several witnesses at various times carrying a bag. The attorney, R, is asking C, a witness, what she remembers about the type of bag on each occasion she had seen the defendant.

(8)

- 1 R: Now **the bag that he was carrying around this time**,
 2 what was **it**?
 3 C: ..M=,
 4 .. let me see,
 5 I think,
 6 .. **a duffel bag**?
 7 I [thi=nk].
 8 R: [Okay].
 9 C: (H)
 10 R: Okay.
 11 C: One time **it** was a duffel bag,
 12 and then one time **it** was like a,
 13 ... %uh,
 14 what do you call them,
 15 like **a sh=**,
 16 .. like **a ..** [old be-],
 17 R: [Shopp]ing bag?
 18 **a plastic**,
 19 C: Ye[ah].
 20 R: [Ye]ah.
 21 C: Mhm.

The mentions of the bag in lines 1 and 2 are referential and identifiable; R expects C to be able to identify what bag she is referring to. The indefinite NP *a duffel bag* in line 6 is non-referential; it is a classifying use, serving to classify the bag. The next mentions in line 11 and 12 are pronominal, hence definite, and anaphoric to the earlier mentions of *the bag*, which shows us that they are referential mentions. However, they do not have the same (real-world) referent as the noun phrases in lines 1 and 2. Instead, they function to create a new referent, (perhaps *the bag he (always) carries around*), a discourse construct which does not directly correspond to (or ‘refer to’) any particular bag existing in the ‘real world’⁶.

⁶ In terms of Fauconnier’s (1985) Mental Spaces approach, the use of *it* could be analyzed as creating a new role which can then be populated by various values such as *a duffel bag* or *a plastic shopping bag*. (I thank Rich Epstein for pointing this out to me). However, useful as this analysis is for accounting for differences between real-world existence and reference in discourse, it fails to explain why the second use of the NP *a duffel bag* is indefinite. Fauconnier suggests that the term *a N* introduces a new element (1985: 22), but *a duffel bag* in line 6 would presumably have introduced the element. I suggest instead that the reason why the second use of *a duffel bag* in line 10 is indefinite is because it is a classifying use of the NP,

Now this novel referent can be classified in various ways. That is, the referent, which has just been created through the use of a definite, referential noun phrase, can be *a duffel bag*, as in line 11, and *a (plastic) shopping bag*, in lines 15-18.

The referring and classification work accomplished here is done jointly by the participants whose mutual goal here is to arrive at an agreement about the details of the case prior to the trial where C will appear as a witness for the prosecution, represented by R. The classifying noun phrase in C's turn line 6 is classifying the referent introduced in R's turn in lines 1 and 2. It is a non-referential use of the noun phrase not merely because it is indefinite (since indefinites can also be referential, when they introduce new, unidentifiable referents), but because it is a response to C's question which explicitly asks for classification (*what was it*). Its function as a classifying noun phrase cannot be properly understood without taking into account both of the participants' turns and the activity they are engaged in. The classifying noun phrase in lines 15-18 is cooperatively constructed by C and R in that the article and some other material are provided by C, and R provides the compound noun followed by an additional article and what may be intended as the first part of the compound noun *plastic bag*. That the referring and classification are a joint achievement is shown also in the overlapping exchange in lines 19-20 which expresses agreement with the classification the participants have together achieved. It is not reasonable to say here that the introduction of referents or their classification are done by one participant for the benefit of the other; rather, the participants orient to (and agree with) the referents, such as the discourse-created *bag* which the defendant was observed carrying on several occasions, and which played a significant role in the commission of the crime; the referent itself is created and classified jointly by the participants in the conversation for their common purpose of coordinating their understanding of what happened.

In the next example, an indefinite noun phrase, followed by a definite noun phrase, is used in creating a novel identity for a referent already under discussion. This example comes from a conversation between two young men, D and G, regarding G's workplace, where D also used to work. The participants are in full agreement that it is not desirable to be employed there, and the conversation can be viewed as a joint accomplishment and expression of such an impression.

(9)

- 1 D: just .. being in **that place**,
 2 depresses me.
 3 G: ... Oh,
 4 man.
 5 ... (.9) Who wouldn't it depress,
 6 man,
 7 .. It's--
 8 .. [It's like],
 9 D: [Yeah],
 10 G: I feel like I'm walking into **a cave**,
 11 every time [I go in] there.
 12 D: [Yeah],
 13 .. [2 Definitely 2].

just like the use in line 6; in my view, non-referential uses do not introduce referents (elements) into discourse.

- 14 G: [2 Like I'm 2],
 15 (H) [3 I'm going into a **ca=vern**],
 16 D: [3 and you're stuck in **the cave** for 3] eight hours,

In line 1, D uses the definite NP *that place* to refer to G's workplace, identifiable due to both earlier mention in the same discussion and prior shared knowledge. In lines 10 and 11, G uses the indefinite NPs *a cave* and *a ca=vern* in predications which serve to point out the similarity of entering his workplace to entering a cave. These noun phrases are non-referential; G does not use them in order to establish new referents. They certainly, as clearly indicated by their indefinite form, are not coreferential with *that place* in line 1, and thus do not serve to refer to it. Neither do they refer to any real or imaginary cave; the noun is also used in an irrealis context, which Chafe (1994: 104) has identified as a locus for non-referential uses of noun phrases. Rather, they serve in a predicating function, to introduce a type of action similar to the action of entering G's workplace. In contrast, D's use of *the cave* in line 16 is referential; the use is based on the analogy G has evoked, and D uses the noun to refer to G's workplace. Thus the two participants have created a novel identity for it.

This example can be discussed as an example of what Fauconnier (1997) calls a conceptual blend. G's turns in 10-11 and 14-16 function to establish a new conceptual space (or cognitive domain) in the form of an explicit analogy. In the emerging discourse, the movement into G's work place, represented as *every time I go in there* is made analogous to movement into a cave, represented by *I feel like I'm walking into a cave* and *Like I'm, I'm going into a ca=vern*. The blend itself is achieved in D's turn; the analogy "develops into categorization of the target domain (Fauconnier 1997: 20)"; the vocabulary of the source domain now applies to the target domain and the blend is complete: The workplace is referred to as *the cave*. The resulting blend has features of both the new domain, in terms of vocabulary, and the base domain, in that one is *stuck in the cave* (from the source domain; one can become stuck in a cave in a very concrete sense) for *eight hours* (from the target domain, eight hours being the length of a normal workday).

The definiteness of the NP *the cave* is motivated by the identifiability of its referent, G's workplace, which, as a result of the conceptual blend, can be lexically referred to in a novel way, and not because of the earlier mentions of *a cave*, which were non-referential. What is noteworthy here is that the blend and the novel identity that is created for a referent already under discussion are achieved cooperatively through the interaction of the two participants. The blend emerges as a result of the exchange between D and G, not in a single consciousness, in that G's turns in lines 10-11 and 14-15 build the new domain, but the blend is achieved in D's turn in line 16. In this example, we can see in very concrete terms how meaning emerges as a result of interaction in the local context of the participants cooperating to create a negative impression of G's workplace.

6. Definite NPs and the creation of novel frames

An important source of identifiability is what has been called by various researchers 'bridging inference' (Clark 1977; Clark and Haviland 1977), 'associative anaphora' (Hawkins 1978), 'inferrability' (Prince 1981), 'indirect anaphora' (Erk and Gundel 1987) and 'indirect sharing' (Chafe 1994). What is involved in this type of identifiability is

stereotypical, culturally shared knowledge. Such knowledge allows speakers to use a definite noun phrase at first mention of a referent when that referent is stereotypically associated with something else that has already been mentioned. Thus, if *a car* has already been mentioned, as in example (6) above, the speaker can go on to use definite NPs to refer to *the engine* and *the valve cover gasket* even if these particular parts were not previously mentioned or familiar to the addressee, because they are stereotypically associated with a car as part of the culturally shared assumption that cars have engines and valve cover gaskets. In other words, the mention of a car could be said to activate a cognitive frame (Fillmore 1982) within which the parts have a stereotypical role.

However, in an innovative paper concerning the use of definiteness to express inferability, Epstein (1999) has shown that definite noun phrases can also be used in the construction of entirely novel roles within a frame. In the examples discussed by Epstein, the definiteness of the NP itself creates the novel association within a frame. Epstein's examples and his discussion imply that shared knowledge within a community is not static or monolithic, but constantly transforming and emergent in interaction, and exploitable for speakers' local purposes. Taking this argument further, it is also possible to conceive of frames dynamically, as structures of varying generality that emerge during interaction. Consider the following example, which comes from the same conversation as example (9). Here, D is describing the type of people that buy cars at the business where he works; he is doing this for the purpose of portraying his car lot as a classy place. Recall that D used to work at the same place where G still works. D's interest in this conversation is to contrast his new workplace with his previous one, characterized in example (9), in order to show that his change of jobs has been a step up for him, and G is fully cooperating in creating such an impression.

(10)

- D: ^We're talking --
 .. people that are making th ---
 maybe over thirty thousand a year.
- G: [Yeah],
- D: [In the] thirty,
 .. thirty-five thousan=d,
- G: Yups,
 .. and <% u=h %>,
 [uh%],
- D: [Exactly].
- G: and <% u=h %>,
 older well-to-do [people].
- D: [Exactly].
 Two --
 Two --
 .. you 'know,
 [working .. people that make] .. pretty good money.
- G: [<P Yea=h.
 Su=re P>].
 ... Sure.
 .. **The kids** are in college and shit.

How is it that G can make definite reference in the last line of this example to *the kids* although the referents have not been previously mentioned and are clearly not previously

familiar to his addressee? I suggest that in this excerpt, D and G are cooperatively constructing a novel frame to characterize the type of people who shop at the car lot where D works, and in G's contribution, the noun phrase *the kids* represents a novel role in the frame being jointly constructed by these two speakers. In other words, a culturally shared frame involving *older, well-to-do people making over thirty thousand a year with the kids in college* does not have to previously exist for D and G in order for G to make a definite reference to *the kids*. G's definite mention does, however, actively create such an association for his local purposes within this conversation; the definiteness functions to create the implication that *the kids* are the kids of the previously mentioned (non-specific) *working people that make pretty good money*, that is, a novel role in a novel frame just being created.

The role of definite expressions in the creation of novel roles within novel frames is thus another example of the creative potential of definiteness. In addition, this example also shows that frames and roles within them can be constructed 'on the fly'. Obviously, frames do not just come into existence out of nothing, but must originate in communication and then become more or less generally shared through language use. Further, this particular frame and the roles which populate it are not the work of either D or G alone, but cooperatively constructed by them for the purposes of their current interaction. The speakers' ability to use definiteness to link novel roles to novel frames is surely based on the general pattern of the use of definite noun phrases for inferable referents⁷. Although the definiteness of the noun phrase is not here motivated by a shared frame which would pre-exist this conversation, it is the existence of the pattern which makes possible creative uses of it such as the one illustrated above.

7. Definiteness and the reorganization of participant structure in conversation

The distinction between definite and indefinite NPs is also used by speakers to reorganize the participant structure in conversation. Speakers can manipulate the definiteness of noun phrases in order to select and even create addressees, thus significantly altering the speech situation and the roles of participants within it.

In example (11) below, Eija and Anneli are telling their mutual friend, Riitta, about a recent evening they had spent together at a restaurant. They have just told Riitta that a number of men had joined them at the table where they were sitting, and in this part of the conversation they are in the process of describing the men to her.

(11)

1 Anneli: *Oli Alaaskast ja,*
 be-PST A.-ELA and
 There were [some men] from Alaska and,

⁷ A more dynamic, emergent conception of frames such as the one proposed in this section would allow one to account for definites such as the one in example (1) in terms of frames. The difference between the use of definites in (1) and (10) would then be the purpose for which the referent was created (in this case, persuasion/argumentation vs. cooperation).

- 2 Kroatiast ja,
C.-ELA and
and Croatia,
- 3 Riitta: *Ai Kroatiast.*
PTCL C-ELA
Oh, from Croatia.
- 4 Eija: *Se oli hyvä ku ne puhus keskenäsa mä meinasin,*
3SG be-PST good when 3PL speak-PST with.each.other 1SG 1SG mean-PST
It was funny when they spoke with each other I almost,
- 5 *tukehtuu nauruu [välil.*
asphyxiate-1INF laugh-ILL at.times
died of laughing.
- 6 Anneli: [((LAUGHS))]
- 7 Riitta: *Mitä ne puhus sit.*
what-PRT 3PL speak-PST then
What were they speaking.
- 8 Eija: *Suomee huono suome molemmat selitti niin perhanasti.*
finnish-PRT bad finnish both explain-PST so damn-ADV
Finnish, bad Finnish, both of them were talking away.
- 9 Riitta: *Joo vai.*
PTCL PTCL
Is that right.
- 10 *Kuka semmone alaskalaine sit oli.*
who such A.-ADJ then be-PST
Who was the one from Alaska.
- 11 Anneli: *Mike Varnes.*
- 12 Riitta: *Ai jaa.*
PTCL PTCL
I see.
- 13 Anneli: *Pave,*
Pave (proper name),
- 14 Eija: *Se oli hyvä ku ne vanhat äijät meinas tukehtuu niihi Pave [juttuihi yhe--*
3SG be-PST good when DET old-PL man-PL mean-PST asphyxiate-1INF DET P.-GEN story-PL-
ILL
It was funny when the old guys almost died laughing at Pave's stories
- 15 Anneli: [Jaa joo.
PTCL PTCL
Oh, I remember.
- 16 Eija: *Yhelt pääsi varman kymmene lusikallist.*
one-ABL let-PST surely ten spoonful-PRT
One of them let out ten spoonfuls, I'm sure.

17 Anneli: ((GIGGLES))

18 Eija: *Ne oli kyl nii.*
3PL be-PST yes so
They were something all right.

19 Anneli: ((GIGGLES))

20 Eija: *Paveli selitti,*
P. explain-PST
Paveli was carrying on,

21 Anneli: *Niinku Paveli viäres istu ja,*
PTCL P. -GEN next.to sit-PST and
Yeah, because next to Paveli there were,

22 *istus [jottai semmosi,*
sit-PST some such
were sitting some like,

23 Eija: *[semmosi vanhoi] äijii ne oli,*
such old-PL man-PL 3SG be-PST
They were these old men,

24 *va-- enmä o ikinä semmosi ennen siäl nähny.*
NEG-1SG be ever such before there see-P.PPLE
I've never seen people like them there before.

Eija's NP *ne vanhat äijät* 'the old guys' in line 14 is addressed to Anneli, who responds by saying she remembers them. Note that although Riitta, the unknowing recipient, has been actively participating in the discussion prior to Eija's turn in line 14, she takes no more turns after Eija designs her reference in such a way that only Anneli is the addressee for her turn. In other words, the referential form can be seen as having altered the participation structure (Goffman 1981); the conversation has become dyadic in structure in spite of the fact that there are three participants. Then, although the referent has already been mentioned with a definite noun phrase, in line 21-22 Anneli begins to introduce the old men to Riitta, beginning a formally indefinite NP, which Eija then cooperatively completes in line 23. The formal structure of the utterance, both the presentative construction and the indefinite NP in Anneli's turn in line 22, direct the turn to Riitta; thus the form itself functions to alter the participant structure, in including Riitta in the conversation; since the introduction is done jointly with Anneli and Eija, there are now three participants. To summarize, while the recipient of Eija's turn in line 14 is Anneli, who can identify what old men are meant, in lines 21-23, the recipient of Anneli and Eija's turns is Riitta⁸. The shifts in reciprocity and resulting changes in the participation framework are accomplished through the manipulation of definiteness.

⁸ Interestingly, the NP in line 23, which is cooperatively constructed by Eija as a continuation of the NP begun by Anneli in line 22, is not referential but rather classifying. Its indefiniteness is motivated by its classifying function.

The manipulation of definite and indefinite NPs can also serve to create imaginary or potential recipients in conversation. Example (12) comes from a conversation between two farmers. Speaker B has been discussing his futile attempts to kill a field of peas with herbicide sold to him by a person called Larry Meyer.

(12)

- B: It made them sick.
 .. But that's it.
 .. they still --
 ... (1.0) podded and,
 .. peas are in 'em so,
 ... killed the wild oats,
 .. some of the wild oats,
 .. I went o%- .. over twice,
 A: .. Oh?
 B: Shit they're just as yellow as can be.
 A: .. @@
 ... (1.5) I @think,
 .. I'd take Meyer out there,
 .. <Q Hey Larry.
 .. Come here.
 ... (1.0) I want to show you **something** Q>.
 .. 'Take him out there,
 .. and let him feast his eyes on that.

The referent coded as *something* is previously coded as *they*, *them*, *'em*; it refers to the peas B has been attempting to kill; the referent is eminently identifiable at this point. Together with the other deictics, the later indefinite coding *something* serves to reorganize the participant structure in such a way that the addressee of the utterance enclosed within <Q Q> is (ostensibly) Larry Meyer (coded here as *you*) to whom the referent is presented as non-identifiable by A (coded here as *I*), although the utterance is objectively/actually spoken by A to B. It should also be noted that since the field of peas and the attempts by A to kill them are presumably already familiar to Larry Meyer as well (since farmers are required to notify sellers of herbicide of the intended use), the indefinite reference to the field of peas serves to create a situation where the field of peas, or its condition, is nevertheless a surprise to the discourse-created addressee.

8. Conclusion

Definiteness is reflexive. Speakers commonly use the formal contrast between definite and indefinite noun phrases to display their understanding that the addressee(s) can or cannot identify the referent of the NP. On the other hand, however, definite and indefinite NPs are also used dynamically by participants in interaction to build context and establish meaning in order to make claims about socially shared reality, to create referents in discourse and to build a novel identity for existing referents, to actively build frames and create roles within them, and to reorganize the participant structure of a speech event.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions followed are from Du Bois (2000); symbols used in the transcripts include the following:

carriage return	new intonation contour
[2 2]	overlap; numbers inside brackets index overlaps with one another
(H)	audible inbreath
@	laughter syllable ('ha')
.. (1.0)	pause; number within parentheses indicates time measured in seconds
=	lengthening
%	creaky voice
<P P>	talk within brackets is more quiet than surrounding talk
<Q Q>	change in vocal quality indicating direct quote

Abbreviations in glosses

1INF	first infinitive
ADJ	adjective
ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
ALL	allative
DET	determiner
ELA	elative
GEN	genitive
ILL	illative
NEG	negative
PASS	passive
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRES	present tense
PST	past tense
PRT	partitive
P.PPLE	past participle
PTCL	particle
SG	singular