Aspects of referentiality

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Abstract

Semantic referentiality, pertaining to the semantics of expressions of certain grammatical categories, is defined in terms of pointing to some existent entity in a model of discourse, whereas pragmatic referentiality pertains to language use, and is defined crucially in terms of context-dependency and speaker’s intention and cognitive status over and above semantics. A discourse thematic referential expression is regarded to be one high in thematic importance, which pertains to the purpose of performance of the referring function in discourse. While some expressions are generally taken, based on their semantics, as inherently referential or nonreferential semantically, there are no specific linguistic devices, other than preferred encoding types, in English or Chinese to mark the pragmatic referentiality of an expression. On the other hand, English and Chinese are found to be more sensitive to distinction in discourse thematic referentiality. Chinese strongly favors the same grammatical encoding for pragmatic and thematic nonreferentials and referents of low thematic referentiality, irrespective of their semantic referentiality, which provides further empirical evidence for the conceptual link between pragmatic referentiality and discourse thematic referentiality.

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1. Introduction

Logicians and philosophers initiated research into referentiality in natural languages, which has had significant influence on linguists. Linguists, however, differ from logicians and philosophers in that they focus more on the cognitive status of referentiality in the discourse model established between interlocutors, and linguistic encoding of referentiality in languages. As one of the most basic concepts in linguistic studies, referentiality has been given a variety of definitions in the literature, and is also used in the characterization of a broad and diverse range of linguistic phenomena in grammar and discourse. The main aims of this paper are:

1. to explicate three aspects of the concept of referentiality – semantic, pragmatic, and discourse thematic, with particular reference to their defining features, linguistic phenomena involved, and their encoding in English and Chinese;
2. to examine whether, and if so, how a broad range of linguistic phenomena characterized in the current literature as illustrative of NPs in nonreferential use relate to, and differ from, each other in a way that justifies the grouping of the broad and otherwise diverse range of linguistic phenomena into one category.
3. to discuss how the three aspects of referentiality are conceptually distinct from, and also related to, each other;

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2. Semantic referentiality

2.1. Definition

Linguistic expressions in certain formal categories, as noted in Lyons (2002:297), “may be factorized, semantically if not syntactically and lexically, into two components. One of these is descriptive (e.g. the word ‘man’ in ‘the man’); the other is purely referential (e.g. the definite article ‘the’ in English)”. Semantic referentiality, which essentially serves the function of pointing to some existent entity in a model of discourse, defines the referential part of the expression. Whereas pragmatic referentiality to be discussed later relates mainly to the use of linguistic expressions in a given context, semantic referentiality is a property that is encoded in the semantics of linguistic expressions. Some linguistic expressions, most notably proper names, pronouns and demonstratives, are formally encoded in such a way that they are regarded as “inherently” semantically referential with little or no descriptive content. And there are also some linguistic expressions which are characterized by nonreferentiality of the referential component of their semantics. Let us have a closer examination of these expressions below.

2.2. Encoding of semantic referentiality in English and Chinese

As noted above, two semantic components can be identified in some types of linguistic expressions, a referential component and a descriptive component. Three grammatical categories which are generally taken as semantically referential, namely proper names, pronouns and demonstratives, are characterized by relative paucity of descriptive content, and prominence of the other referential component of their semantics. Their essential semantic value or function is taken to be that of directly referring, or pointing to an entity in the context of use, rather than describing any of its context-independent properties. In contrast, there are some inherently nonreferential expressions, like quantifiers ‘none’, ‘no’, and ‘neither’, which serve to negate the referential existence of the relevant denotations. On the other hand, what are known as partitive quantifiers, such as ‘each’, ‘every’, ‘all’, ‘both’ and ‘most’, while entailing the existence of a background set, are also inherently nonreferential in that they refer to a sub-set of the background set, rather than a specific individual entity in the set.1 All of these quantifiers are taken to be semantically nonreferential. Table 1 presents a summary of the characterization of the semantic referentiality of expressions in major grammatical categories in English based on discussions by Fodor and Sag (1982).

What Fodor and Sag (1982), as well as many other linguists such as Partee (1970) and Lyons (1977), maintain here is that definite and indefinite NPs introduced by such determiners as ‘the’ and ‘a’ are semantically ambiguous in referentiality, susceptible to both a referential and a nonreferential reading. Not all linguists agree with Fodor and Sag (1982) on the characterization in Table 1. Ostertag, 1998; Kripke (1979), Ludlow and Neale (1991) and other neo-Russellians, basically holding on to Russell, 1905, 1911, 1919; Russell’s position in (1905, 1911, 1918) that only proper names, pronouns and demonstratives are semantically referential, maintain that NPs in the other grammatical categories are semantically nonreferential. On the other hand, they do accept that semantic nonreferential expressions may have referential uses, through a pragmatic process captured in terms of Gricean conversational implicature. Notwithstanding the differences in opinion, it has been generally acknowledged since Strawson (1950, 1964) that, in addition to the semantic features characterized by the lexical and grammatical encoding of expressions, no account of linguistic referentiality is complete without a pragmatic component, and both semantic and pragmatic factors need to be involved in the comprehensive characterization of linguistic referentiality. I will come back to this point later.

It is also worth noting at this point that expressions that are generally taken to be semantically referential, such as demonstratives and personal pronouns, may have nonreferential uses, as in the following examples:

(1) He who has a thousand friends has not a friend to spare, and he who has one enemy will meet him everywhere.
(2) Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.

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1 The partitive quantifiers in Table 1 also differ in that some of them, for example ‘most’ and ‘few’, refer to a proper sub-set of the background set, and the others to a sub-set that is equal to the whole background set.
Studies on referentiality have so far been based mainly on data in major Indo-European languages, and findings similar to those in English have been reported for languages such as German and French with regard to the grammatical encoding of referential and nonreferential expressions. As Chinese is a language genetically and typologically quite different from English, an examination of the related phenomena in this language would enrich our knowledge of the linguistic encoding of referentiality in its cross-linguistic variety and complexity.

While English, like other major Germanic and Romance languages, has grammaticalized the distinction of NPs in identifiability in terms of definiteness, it does not provide systematically for the distinction in referentiality, as discussed above. Chinese differs from English with regard to the extent of grammaticalization of identifiability, as elaborated in Chen (2004). So far as formal marking of identifiability is concerned, NPs in Chinese fall into three major categories, definite, indefinite, and indeterminate. Indeterminate NPs differ from definite and indefinite NPs in that while the latter are interpreted as being of identifiable and nonidentifiable reference respectively regardless of what syntactic roles the NPs play in sentences, the former depend mainly on their positioning in sentence for their interpretation with regard to identifiability.

Referentiality is even less distinctively marked in Chinese than identifiability. Table 2 summarizes the semantic referential properties of NPs in major formal categories in Chinese, basically on the same theoretical assumptions as in Fodor and Sag (1982).

Similar to the case with English, other than some “inherently” referential or nonreferential categories, most Chinese NPs in other formal encodings can have both pragmatically referential and nonreferential uses, as will be exemplified in the next section.

3. Pragmatic referentiality

3.1. Definition

Linguistic referentiality is both a semantic concept, and more substantially, a pragmatic concept. Semantics, on the strict interpretation of the term, is mainly concerned with user-independent, decontextualized meanings of expressions. A pragmatically referential NP, in contrast, is one which is used by the speaker to refer to an entity, or a set of entities, in the universe of discourse that is of specific reference to the speaker. As linguistic referentiality relates mainly to the use of an expression by the speaker to perform an act of referring in a particular context, it pertains...
fundamentally to utterance meaning rather than sentence meaning. It is defined crucially in terms of context-dependency, speaker’s intention and cognitive status over and above semantics of expressions, thus making it primarily a subject of pragmatic enquiries in linguistic studies.

Pragmatic referentiality, instead of being a single unitary concept, comprises three components:

1. The existence of an individual entity is presupposed in the model of discourse that has been established or is being negotiated between the interlocutors of the speech act – an individual entity which the speaker assumes is identifiable to the addressee by means of the linguistic description of the expression.

2. The entity in question is one of specific reference, characterized by unique individuation, and differentiation from other entities by the same linguistic description.

3. The speaker has the intention to use the expression to refer to the specific entity in question.

With regard to the existential presupposition in the first component, two points need to be emphasized. First, the existence of the entity is presupposed first and foremost in the discourse model, and only indirectly and through the mediation of the beliefs and assumptions of interlocutors, in the real world. Related to this is the second point that whether the existential presupposition holds does not hinge upon the truth and falsity of the descriptive content of the referent in the ontological sense. The description may not fit the entity in question as a matter of fact in the actual world, or may only be employed in a sarcastic or joking manner, as when an actual usurper is referred to as ‘the king’, or the term ‘boss’ is used by a husband to refer to his wife. So long as the speaker knows that, by means of the linguistic expression, the addressee is able to assign reference in the way he intends him to, that expression is used referentially and the existential presupposition of a referent identifiable by the description of the expression is held by both the speaker and the addressee in the particular context of utterance.

Underlying the concept of specificity in this definition is speaker’s familiarity with the referent in question, which is by nature a matter of degree. The speaker may know the exact identity of the referent so that he/she can use other linguistic expressions to refer to the same entity. Or it may be the case that all the speaker knows about the entity in question is that it is a particular individual that has been singled out from the set of all individuals that are denoted by the descriptive content of the linguistic expression in the context of use. He/she is unable to provide any additional information about it beyond the present description. As amply discussed in the literature, the specificity of an entity is often a function of accompanying modifiers, increasing in degree with the elaboration of the details of its identifying attributes (Fodor and Sag, 1982; Givón, 1982, 2001; inter alia).

Table 2
Semantic referentiality of grammatical categories of Chinese NPs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic referential</th>
<th>Semantic nonreferential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definite</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proper NP</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal pronoun</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrative 'this/that'</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'this/that' + NP</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indefinite</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi ‘one’ + (CL) + NP</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL + NP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indeterminate</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>numeral ji ‘several’ + CL + NP</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bare NP</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partitive quantifier</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mei ‘each’, ‘every’</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>souyou ‘all’</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi ‘all’</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dadaoshu ‘majority’, ‘most’</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duoshu ‘most’</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shaoshu ‘few’</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pragmatic referentiality, on this definition, is essentially a context-dependent and speaker-oriented concept. Whether the entity in question is one of specific reference to the speaker depends on the familiarity of the speaker about the referent in the context, with little regard for the cognitive status of the referent in the mind of addressees beyond the presupposed existence. More importantly, it depends crucially on the intention of the speaker to use the expression to refer in the particular context. Linguistic referentiality under discussion here is thus both a semantic and a pragmatic notion—semantic in that some aspects of the meaning are marked by the grammatical and lexical encoding of expressions, as presented in Tables 1 and 2, and pragmatic because of its user- and context-dependent features. For an expression to be pragmatically referential, it has to fulfill all the three conditions in (3), whereas a nonreferential expression is one that fails to fulfill one or more of them.

3.2. Pragmatic aspect of non-referentiality

Such a wide range of linguistic phenomena has been characterized, without much discussion by way of justification, as nonreferential in current linguistics literature that it is not always clear whether, and if so, what features they have in common to warrant the same characterization. There is furthermore a tendency in the literature, as noted by Lyons (1977:189), to use different terminology for different types of nonreferential NPs, “but the distinction may well be the same and require the same explanation”. In view of the controversy and lack of consensus among linguists as to the way in which terms such as ‘nonreferential’, ‘nonspecific’, ‘attributive’, ‘quantificational’, ‘narrow-scope’, ‘generic’ and so on are defined, and the relevant phenomena are explicated, the best approach, in my view, is to present, as much as possible, the original examples and their characterizing terms as they were put forward by their authors to illustrate the range and diversity of what are regarded as nonreferential uses of NPs in the literature. I will first list the major types of NPs in nonreferential use, as discussed by some of the most representative authors on this issue and, in many cases, referred to in various terms. I will then explore what these nonreferential uses of NPs have in common and how they differ in terms of the definition of linguistic referentiality as formulated in (3).

What are generally characterized in the current literature as nonreferential uses of NPs, I propose, fall into five major groups. They differ, among other features, with regard to which of the three components of the definition of referentiality in (3) they fail to satisfy. Expressions in the first three groups are nonreferential in that they do not presuppose the existence of an entity as described by the linguistic encoding of the expression, and those in the last two groups may also fail to satisfy the other one or two components of the definition.

1. **Generic**
   
   (4) A/THE TIGER is a large, fierce animal.
   (5) TIGERS are large, fierce animals.

2. **Qualitative**
   
   (6) John is A MATH TEACHER.
   (7) He was promoted CAPTAIN.
   (8) Laura is THE CLASS REPRESENTATIVE this year.

3. **Idiomatic**
   
   (9) John went to COLLEGE at the age of sixteen.
   (10) She is ON THE PHONE right now.

4. **Nonspecific**
   
   (11) (specific vs.) nonspecific in opaque contexts (Partee, 1970:359)  
   John would like to marry A GIRL HIS PARENTS DON’T APPROVE OF.
   (12) (wide-scope specific vs.) wide-scope and narrow-scope nonspecific  
   (Ioup, 1977:243)  
   Everyone believes that A WITCH blighted their mares
   a. If they ever find out who she is they’ll try to catch her.
   (wide-scope non-specific)
   b. If they ever find out who they are, they’ll try to catch them.
   (narrow-scope non-specific)
The NPs in nonspecific use in (13) and (14), unlike the NPs in (11) and (12), presuppose the existence of an entity by the description of the NP, which, however, does not stand for an entity that is of specific reference to the speaker:

(13) (Specific vs.) nonspecific (Lyons, 1977:189)
A FRIEND has just sent me a lovely Valentine card.

(14) (Referential vs.) quantificational (Fodor and Sag, 1982:355)
A STUDENT IN THE SYNTAX CLASS cheated on the final exam.

5. Non-ostensive

(15) (referential vs.) attributive (Donnellan, 1966:297)
The MURDERER OF SMITH is insane.

(16) (Referential vs.) nonreferential or attributive (Partee, 1970:364)
I heard that from A DOCTOR.

Even if a speaker is acquainted with the specific reference of an expression, he/she can still use it in a non-referential manner if he/she does not have the intention to draw the attention of the addressee to that particular referent. It is this feature of non-ostensivity that characterizes the second member of the dichotomies of Donnellan (1966)’s referential vs. attributive, and Partee (1970)’s referential vs. nonreferential or attributive, as exemplified in (15) and (16).

Other than some inherently referential and nonreferential grammatical categories, as presented in Table 1, there are no special grammatical markings in English that formally encode the distinction between pragmatically referential and nonreferential uses of NPs. Expressions in nonreferential uses may assume any grammatical form ranging from definite to indefinite as illustrated in the above examples and also amply discussed in the literature.

Similar to the case of English, there is no lexical or grammatical device in Chinese which marks NPs in nonreferential use in a specific and unambiguous way. NPs in nonreferential use in the five groups illustrated above may assume a form in any of the three grammatical categories – definite, indefinite, and indeterminate. Consider the following examples:

**Generic**

(17) a. ZHE REN na, dei you liangxin.
   this person TM must have consciousness
   “One has to have a clear consciousness”.

   b. YI GE REN dei you liangxin.
   one CL person must have consciousness
   “One has to have a clear consciousness”.

   c. REN dei you liangxin.
   person must have consciousness
   “One has to have a clear consciousness”.

Chinese NPs in generic use may assume the formal encoding of a definite NP as in (17a), an indefinite NP as in (17b), or an indeterminate bare NP as in (17c). Bare NP, it is to be pointed out here, is the most common encoding for all nonreferential uses in Chinese. Following are more illustrative examples:

**Qualitative**

(18) Ta shi (yi) (ge) REN, bu shi jiqi.
   he be one CL person not be machine
   “He is a human being, not a machine”.

**Idiomatic**

(19) Ta kanshangqu XIANG WAI GOREN.
   he look like foreigner
   “He looks like a foreigner”.

You (YI)(GE) XIAOTOU lai guo.

There has been a thief here.

The above examples illustrate the range and diversity of NPs in nonreferential use that have been discussed in current literature on referentiality. We can now explore what these nonreferential uses of NPs have in common and how they differ in terms of the definition of pragmatic referentiality in (3). Table 3 presents a summary of what features all of them have in common to justify them being characterized as nonreferential as defined in (3), and how the various nonreferential uses differ from each other.

As Table 3 demonstrates, all the examples which have been proposed in the literature as illustrative of expressions in nonreferential use fail to fulfill one or more of the conditions of pragmatic referentiality as formulated in (3). Most NPs in nonreferential use discussed above do not carry a presupposition of the existence of a referent that meets the linguistic description of the expression, as is the case with (4–11; 12b) and (17–19). Some of the expressions that do or may carry such a presupposition, as exemplified in (12a), (13–14) and (20), denote an entity that is of no specific reference to the speaker. Some denote referents which may be of specific reference to the speaker, but are taken to be in nonreferential use as a result of lack of intention on the part of the speaker to use them to refer, as in (15–16) and (20).

It follows from the above discussion that the concept of pragmatic referentiality, as defined in (3) and illustrated by those examples, is a matter of degree. All the NPs in nonreferential use presented above share the feature that they do not fulfill all of the three conditions in the definition. Some meet none of the conditions; some meet one, but not the other two, and some meet the first two, but fail to meet the third. Those that fail to carry a presupposition of existence are most nonreferential of all. Those that do carry an existential presupposition, but fail to fulfill the second condition of specificity are more nonreferential than those that meet the first two, but not the last condition of referentiality. The difference in the degree of nonreferentiality is reflected, up to a point, in whether, and if so, how they are susceptible to anaphoric reference in ensuing discourse. The most nonreferential NPs do not allow any anaphoric reference. Consider the following example:

He does not have any/a friend/has no friend.

No anaphoric reference can be made to ‘a friend’ in (21). The same is normally true of NPs in predicative or attributive use as in (6–8). Some nonreferential NPs which do not carry an existential presupposition, however, may be followed by a short-term anaphoric pronoun or NP, as observed by Karttunen (1976:383), provided the discourse continues “in the proper mode”, as illustrated by the following example from (1976:377):

Every time Bill comes here, he picks up a book and wants to borrow it. I never let him take the book.
A generic NP can be followed by a pronoun, or a definite NP referring to the same genus rather than a specific member of the genus, in apparently the same way as in the case of a referential NP:

(23) The dinosaur is now extinct. It is no longer found live anywhere in the world.

An NP in generic reference, however, differs from an ordinary referential NP in that a following indefinite NP with the same denotation normally refers to the same genus as the initial generic NP, as illustrated by the following example:

(24) A teaching machine is an automatic device for implementing a teaching method known as “programmed instruction.”... A teaching machine is not intended to be a substitute for a teacher... It is their claim that the speed of learning with the aid of a teaching machine will revolutionize education (from Collier’s Encyclopedia).

It is also to be noted that the generic ‘a teaching machine’ in the first clause of (24) may be followed by a plural ‘they’ referring to many tokens of the same type, as in:

(25) A teaching machine is an automatic device for implementing a teaching method known as “programmed instruction.”... Today a variety of them are on sale, ranging in price from $20 to $6,500.

Whereas it is justified to maintain that the first, the second, and the third indefinite NP ‘a teaching machine’ in (24) have the same reference, referring to one and the same genus, an NP in referential use as the first ‘a young prisoner’ in (26), as observed by Chastain (1975:206), must normally be in disjoint reference with following indefinite NPs in the same form:

(26) At eleven o’clock that morning, an ARVN officer stood a young prisoner1, bound and blindfolded, up against a wall. He asked a young prisoner2 several questions, and, when a young prisoner3 failed to answer, beat him repeatedly.

It is evident from the above discussion that nonreferential NPs which fail to fulfill the first condition of existential presupposition either do not allow anaphoric reference at all, or are subject to severe restrictions in this regard, or display different features from those of NPs in referential use. Nonreferential NPs that fulfill the existential presupposition, but fail to satisfy the specificity condition may behave in much the same way as referential NPs in that they are amenable to anaphoric reference like regular referential NPs, except that the speakers sometimes may need to make an arbitrary decision on the gender of the anaphoric pronoun. The NP ‘a friend’ in (13) ‘A friend has just sent me a lovely Valentine card’, as observed earlier, is open to a specific and a nonspecific interpretation. As pointed out by Lyons (1977:189), no matter whether the speaker has a particular person in mind or not when he utters the sentence, ‘a friend’ can be subsequently referred to by means of an expression like ‘my friend’ or ‘your friend’ (cf. Neale, 1990; Rouchota, 1994:447 for similar observations). The logical conclusion to be drawn from the differences between NPs in nonreferential use in behaviors with regard to anaphoric reference is that pragmatic (non)referentiality is a matter of degree, and ‘a friend’ in (13) under nonspecific interpretation is less nonreferential than ‘a book’ in (22), which in turn is less nonreferential than ‘a friend’ in (21).

3.3. Encoding of pragmatic referentiality in English and Chinese

How the distinction between referential vs. nonreferential uses of NPs is encoded in languages has become an important subject of empirical investigation starting from the 1960s, largely in the context of a debate on the demarcation of syntax, semantic and pragmatics in the construction of grammatical models for language. It is assumed by many researchers that if the referential vs. nonreferential readings of NPs are distinctively and consistently marked in grammatical terms, the distinction is to be represented in the semantic or syntactic component of the model. In cases where no formal differentiation is attested, it may be assigned to pragmatics and considered to be outside the proper
realm of the theory of grammar per se. Different readings of NPs, from the latter perspective, are treated as instances of pragmatic indeterminacy, which may be resolved in the use of the expressions in specific context of discourse.

It has been established that some languages, like Russian, Spanish, and Turkish, are sensitive to the distinction in terms of pragmatic referentiality of NPs (cf. Dahl, 1970; Rivero, 1975; Enq, 1991). However, no language so far has been found that systematically and consistently encodes all the distinctions between the referential versus nonreferential uses of NPs as presented in Table 3. Furthermore, the grammatical distinction, when there is one, tends to apply to uses that differ in terms of existential presupposition rather than being of particular reference. What is marked grammatically is first and foremost the presence vs. absence of the existential presupposition, and derivatively the specificity vs. nonspecificity, of the entity in question. It accords well with the observation made above that linguistic referentiality, on the definition in (3), is a matter of degree, and expressions that do not carry an existential presupposition in the context of use are more nonreferential than those who do carry an existential presupposition but are of no particular reference to the speaker. It is only to be expected that when the distinction in reference is grammatically marked at all in a language, it is more likely to be made in exemplar situations than in other less prototypical cases.

Leaving aside what are generally regarded as inherently referential proper names, pronouns and demonstratives, as well as inherently nonreferential partitive quantifiers, the conclusion we draw from the discussions in the above section is that there is no special linguistic device that systematically and consistently marks an expression as pragmatically referential or nonreferential in English or in Chinese. As is the situation with English, the interpretation of Chinese expressions in terms of referentiality depends mainly on the relevant features of the containing sentence and on the context of utterance. Of the Chinese expressions in various encodings illustrated in the examples in section 3.2, it must be pointed out, the most common form used for nonreferential entities is bare NP. As elaborated in Lü (1944) and Chen (2003), the more nonreferential a NP is, the more likely is it to drop the indefinite marker yi ‘one’ and the classifier, and assume the form of bare NP. The preference for bare NP for nonreferential uses is not difficult to explain. Bare NP and non-bare NP in Chinese differ most prominently in that nouns in the latter group are typically preceded by a classifier. The major function of classifiers in languages characterized by this grammatical feature, as extensively discussed in the literature, is to individuate entities. As the most prototypical nonreferential expressions do not presuppose the existence of an entity denoted by the expression, they have no need for an encoding device that marks the individuation of an entity, or other markers that characterize features accompanying individuated entities such as numeration. The fit in form and function between bare NPs and nonreferentiality makes the former the encoding type par excellence for the latter in Chinese.

Fundamentally speaking, linguistic referentiality, and also identifiability, are context-dependent notions, involving intentions and assumptions of language users in the context of discourse. Identifiability, as detailed in Chen (2004), relates to the speaker’s assumptions about the nature of the information on the part of addressee about the identity of the entity involved. Referentiality, as discussed in this paper, is mainly a speaker-oriented concept. It relates crucially to whether he/she has a specific referent in his/her own mind, with little regard for the cognitive status of the entity in the mind of the addressee, and to whether the speaker has the intention to draw the addressee’s attention to the entity by means of the linguistic expression. In some cases, as Lyons (1977:188) remarks with regard to (27):

(27) Every evening at six o’clock A HERON flies over the chalet.

‘we cannot tell whether an indefinite noun-phrase is being used with specific reference or not; the speaker himself might be hard put to decide’. From the point of view of facilitating effective communication, whether an NP is used by the speaker to introduce a referent of importance in the development of discourse is of greater relevance to the addressee than whether or not the speaker has a specific referent in his or her mind. Grammar, as has been amply attested in languages of the world, tends to encode most distinctively those differences in meaning that are of high importance in communication. It is thus only to be expected that, in terms of linguistic encoding, Chinese is more sensitive to what many researchers regard as another aspect of referentiality, which is called discourse thematic referentiality in this paper, than to semantic and pragmatic referentiality. This leads us to the subject of the next section.

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2 This view is far from being shared by all researchers in the field. Some regard referentiality as a concept that involves both the speaker and addressee (cf. Enq, 1991; Ladlow and Neale, 1991; Kennedy, 1999).
4. Discourse thematic referentiality

4.1. Definition

There is another important dimension to the speaker-dependency and context-dependency of referentiality that has become an interesting subject of theoretical and empirical exploration since the 1980s. As emphasized above, whether or not the speaker has the intention to use a linguistic expression to refer is one of the defining factors in the pragmatic referentiality of the expression. Closely related to the intention (or lack thereof) to refer, and to some extent underlying this intention, is the function that each NP is meant to play in the development of discourse in the context of utterance. In this regard, NPs in referential use from the semantic and the pragmatic perspective as elaborated in the above section may differ significantly in terms of the importance of the referents they stand for to the thematic progression of the discourse in which they are used. The feature is commonly characterized in the current literature as thematicity of referents, and it is this feature that lies at the core of what is presented here as discourse thematic referentiality – referentiality in terms of thematic importance of objects in discourse.

Most linguists, particularly those inclined to discourse-functional approaches to studies of language, hold the view that the conceptual and functional bases underlying the grammatical categories of noun, adjective and verb serve as the key to a proper understanding of the nature of these categories. Prototypical nouns, adjectives and verbs denote objects, properties and actions, and perform the function of reference, modification and predication respectively. These and other grammatical categories, it is further maintained, have evolved primarily as grammaticalization of the prominent underlying conceptual and functional features. It is on the grounds of these theoretical assumptions that we regard thematicity as characterizing another essential aspect of the nominal function of reference which pertains to the purpose of performance of the referring function in discourse. In addition to the theoretical considerations, the assumed close connection between thematicity and the other aspects of referentiality, as will be discussed in more detail below, also finds support from empirical evidence reported in several languages that semantically and pragmatically nonreferential objects or objects of low pragmatic referentiality are typically encoded in the same way as objects of low thematicity, which would otherwise appear to be a mere coincidence.

Some referents play an important role in the development of the discourse, some only play a secondary role in the process, and some may be just mentioned in passing by the speaker, serving as the prop for the scene, or providing background information to the referents in the foreground. From the perspective of thematic progression in discourse, an NP in referential use is first and foremost one that indicates a clearly delineated, bound entity with continuous identity over time, which, due to this continuous identity over time, is available for further tracking after it is introduced into the universe of discourse (Thompson, 1997:69; Du Bois, 1980:208). Referentiality, from this perspective, “is not so much of a speaker having a referent in mind at the time of the utterance, as of a speaker assessing the relative discourse significance of an entity and presenting to hearers in such a way as to successfully foreground it” (Hopper and Thompson, 1993:360).

Thematic referentiality, thus, relates to the importance of the entity in the thematic organization of the discourse. A thematically nonreferential NP, in this sense, stands for an entity which is taken by the speaker as of no or little importance in discourse, and a thematically referential NP is one that stands for an entity of relatively higher importance. It is, by nature, a matter of degree how thematically referential an entity is in the context of use.

Instead of activating or referring back to an independent mental file, a discourse nonreferential NP, according to Du Bois (1980) and Thompson (1997), typically plays a non-tracking role in discourse, serving one of the following three major functions: classifying, predicating, and orienting or backgrounding. They are exemplified respectively by ‘a carpenter’, ‘ornaments’ and ‘Christmas Day’ in (28–30):

(28) John is a carpenter.
(29) You put up ornaments.
(30) G: Well, . . two years ago, I was in bed.
K: You have nothing to complain about.
G: On Christmas Day.

Semantic/pragmatic referentiality and discourse thematic referentiality, as defined here, are closely related, yet distinct and orthogonal concepts. As expected, many semantically and pragmatically nonreferential NPs are also
discourse thematically nonreferential, as is the case with ‘a carpenter’ in (28) and ‘ornaments’ in (29). Semantically and pragmatically referential NPs, however, can be discourse nonreferential, as exemplified by expressions such as ‘Christmas Day’ in (30). On the other hand, pragmatically nonreferential NPs can be discourse thematically referential. Consider (31):

(31) The tiger is a carnivorous animal . . .

Its subject ‘the tiger’ is a generic NP, which is by definition nonreferential. However, it may well be followed by a long paragraph that elaborates on various aspects of the species, as is customarily found in descriptions of entries in an encyclopedia. Similarly, as Lyons (1977:189) observes, regardless of whether ‘a friend’ in (10) is pragmatically referential or nonreferential, “the speaker can go on to say something more about the referent”, with the possibility that the pragmatically nonreferential ‘a friend’ may turn out to be an NP high in discourse referentiality.

4.2. Encoding of discourse thematic referentiality in English and Chinese

Languages, it is extensively reported, may be sensitive to distinction in discourse thematicity, and both English and Chinese fall into this category. There are morpho-syntactic devices the primary function of which is to mark degrees of thematic importance registered by discourse entities in the context of use. A well-known example is this in English in its relatively recent use as an indefinite determiner. An entity of indefinite reference may be introduced for the first time into discourse by means of the indefinite article a(n), or what is called indefinite this, as in the following examples:

(32) a. I walked out of the café, and bumped into A BOY ON BIKE.
   b. I walked out of the café, and bumped into THIS BOY ON BIKE.

It is more likely for the speaker to elaborate on ‘this boy’ in the discourse following (32b) than on ‘a boy’ after (32a) (cf. Prince, 1981; Wright and Givón, 1987; inter alia). Similar linguistic devices have been attested in other languages, including Chinese. Sun (1988), for instance, reports that 80% of the major participants in Chinese are introduced by means of numeral-classified constructions in spoken narratives. Wright and Givón (1987:15) also find that the grammatical contrast between the yi ‘one’ + CL + NP construction and bare NP in introducing indefinite nouns for the first time into discourse in Chinese codes the pragmatics of importance, with the former marking entities of pragmatic importance, and the latter entities of minor or no importance in discourse. Similar findings have been reported in Li (2000) and Wang (2001). Their conclusions, as will be discussed below, receive qualified support from findings in this study.

In addition to the contrast between encoding devices such as numeral-classified NPs and bare NPs in Chinese, other grammatical constructions have also been found to differ significantly in terms of the discourse thematicity of the NPs that occur in them. Hopper and Thompson (1993:363–364), for instance, report that in a study based on text counts, 97% of English subject NPs in their data are discourse-manipulable, whereas 65% of object NPs are discourse nonreferential, serving a predicating role as ‘ornaments’ in (29). Below, I will report on the results of my examination of the discourse thematic referentiality of two groups of NPs in Chinese, one in the form of an indefinite NP in the yi + CL + NP construction and the other in the form of bare NP, in connection with some other important grammatical constructions in order to establish whether, and if so, how discourse thematicity is systematically encoded in Chinese.

The corpus of data is composed of 80 narrative stories of similar length, with approximately 850 characters in each story, in the collection entitled Zhongguo Yuyan Gushi ‘Chinese Fable Stories’ edited by Jia Bu (Yuanfang Press, 1999). Intended to serve as readings for children and adolescents, the stories are of a vernacular style, but polished to some extent, as is normally the practice with printed materials.

Text frequency is generally regarded as one of the simplest and also the most reliable indicators of the thematic importance of discourse entities. Thematically important entities are usually those which maintain continuity of identity over an extended stretch of discourse, and consequently receive most anaphoric mentions in the following context. In other words, they display strong persistence in discourse. Entities of little or no thematic importance, on the other hand, most likely receive few or no subsequent mentions after they appear in the context for the first time. The correlation between thematic importance and text frequency is supported by other collaborative evidence based on speakers’ judgement or other psychometric measures which independently assess the importance of the discourse participants (cf. Sun, 1988; Wright and Givón, 1987; Redeker, 1987; Givón, 1992; Downing, 1993; Cumming, 1995; inter alia).
Entities high in frequency of mention in discourse are normally those which stand high in thematic importance as measured by other independent methods. Frequency of mention after being introduced for the first time into discourse is thus taken in this study as the indicator of the degree of discourse thematic referentiality of entities. At one extreme are entities with not a single anaphoric mention in the story, and at the other extreme are those with mention of 20 times and more, which are taken as indicators of discourse thematic nonreferentiality and very high thematicity respectively. Three ranks of thematic importance are set up in this paper – low, medium, and high, depending on whether the referent is followed by 0–3, 4–9, and 10 or more anaphoric mentions respectively in ensuing discourse.

My data shows that the two most common types of form assumed by entities on their first occurrence in discourse are yi + CL + NP and bare NP. Table 4 gives the text counts of NPs in each encoding type and their rankings in thematic importance, with numbers in parentheses under low, medium and high referring to numbers of ensuing mention in the stories.

Table 4 shows that bare NP, which is the typical encoding device for semantically and pragmatically nonreferential NPs, is clearly also a preferred marker of low thematicity, or more accurately, a preferred maker of thematic nonreferentiality, with 85% (204 out of 239) instances of nonreferential NP encoded in this form. Referents encoded as bare NP on first mention are seldom ones that stand high in thematicity. On the other hand, 97% of the referents high in thematicity assume the form of yi + CL + NP on their first mention, with those highest in thematicity (with 20 or more anaphoric mentions) categorically encoded as yi + CL + NP. The difference in preference for encoding form between the three groups of Low, Medium and High thematicity is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 146$, d.f. = 2, $p < 0.001$). It is also evident from Table 4 that the indefinite NP in the form of yi + CL + NP is not necessarily associated with high thematicity, as has been claimed in the literature (cf. Sun, 1988; Li, 2000; inter alia). NPs in this form are dispersed along the scale of thematicity measured in terms of the frequency of anaphoric mention.

The overwhelming majority of the 453 instances of yi + CL + NP and bare NP in Table 4 are found to be in one of four grammatical positions in sentences – as subject or object, and as the main argument in the Chinese you ‘have’ construction or the locative construction. As the distinction in encoding between numerically classified and bare NP alone does not always appear to be a reliable indicator of the thematic importance of the referent, let us examine whether the grammatical position of these NPs in sentence also plays a role in marking thematicity of the referents.

Table 5 examines thematicity of subject NPs in the two types of grammatical encoding.

Here are two examples from my corpus:

(33) **yi pi ma zhengtuo le shuan ma shengzi, one CL horse break PFV tie horse reins pao dao le fujin de di li. run to PFV nearby field in “A horse got off its reins, and escaped to the nearby fields”**.
Table 5
Thematicity and two types of encoding for initial-mention NPs in subject position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>yi + CL + NP (%)</th>
<th>Bare NP (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thematicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (0)</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
<td>37 (82%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1–3)</td>
<td>7 (28%)</td>
<td>7 (82%)</td>
<td>(61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (4–9)</td>
<td>6 (46%)</td>
<td>7 (54%)</td>
<td>13 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (10–19)</td>
<td>15 (94%)</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20+)</td>
<td>6 (35%)</td>
<td>1 (65%)</td>
<td>(17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>29 (39%)</td>
<td>45 (61%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(34) puren song shang yi pan lingjiao.

"The/A servant presented a plateful of water chestnuts"

It has been much discussed in the literature that, all other things being equal, referents of relatively high thematic importance, are more likely to occur in the syntactic position of subject than elsewhere in the sentence (cf. Downing, 1993; Shimojo, 2004 for related findings in Japanese). Table 5, however, suggests that the grammatical encoding as bare NP is a better indicator of the thematicity of referents than positioning in the subject slot: of the 45 bare NPs in the subject position, 82% stand low in thematicity, and 30 instances out of 37 are thematically nonreferential. Meanwhile, Table 5 also shows that of the 21 instances of yi + CL + NP in subject position, 72% are in the groups of medium or high thematicity with at least four anaphoric mentions in the ensuing discourse, in comparison with the figure of 55% for all instances of NP in this encoding as given in Table 4. However, an examination of all the instances of yi + CL + NP in subject position in contrast with those in other sentential positions with regard to their thematic importance, as presented in Table 6, indicates that whether they are in subject position or not is not related to their thematicity in a statistically significant manner ($\chi^2 = 4.892$, d.f. = 2, $p = 0.087$).

Next, let us consider NPs in object position in Table 7.

Following are two examples from my corpus:

(35) lieren waichu dalie, budao yi zhi xiao lu.

"the hunter went hunting, and caught a fawn"

Table 6
Thematicity and yi + CL + NP in subject versus non-subject positions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subject %</th>
<th>Non-subject (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thematicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (0)</td>
<td>8 (11%)</td>
<td>66 (89%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27%)</td>
<td>(50%)</td>
<td>(46%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (21%)</td>
<td>6 (27%)</td>
<td>16 (73%)</td>
<td>22 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12%)</td>
<td>(13%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (52%)</td>
<td>15 (23%)</td>
<td>51 (77%)</td>
<td>66 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38%)</td>
<td>(41%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>29 (18%)</td>
<td>133 (82%)</td>
<td>162 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 demonstrates that the object NPs in Chinese in both types of encoding are generally low in thematic importance, which concords with similar findings reported in Hopper and Thompson (1993) with regard to object NPs in English. 71% (111 instances out of 157) of bare NPs in the object position are thematically nonreferential, and 20% (32 out 157) are in the other sub-group of low thematicity. On the other hand, 61% of the $yi + CL + NP$s in the object position are entities of low thematicity.

Finally, let us examine two other grammatical constructions in Chinese which are regarded as characteristically marking the relevant NPs in the constructions as being very high or low in thematicity respectively. One is the canonical presentative construction in Chinese beginning with you ‘have’, and the other is the so-called $fangwei jiegou$ ‘locative construction’ composed of a localizer such as $li$ ‘in’, $wai$ ‘out’, $shang$ ‘up’, and $xia$ ‘down’ after the NP and an optional preposition before the NP. Let us first examine the thematicity of NPs in the two types of grammatical encoding in the Chinese you-presentative construction presented in Table 8.
Here are two illustrating examples from my corpus:

(37) **YOU YI GE SHANGREN, zai waimian zuo shengyi**

**have one CL business:man, in outside do business**

**zhuan le bushao qian**

**earn PFV much money**

“There was a business man who had made lots of money in his outside business”

(38) **YOU REN zhuanmen baifang ta, xiang ta qiujiao.**

**have person special visit he, toward he seek:advice**

“there was someone who paid him a special visit to seek his advice”

The *you*-presentative construction in Chinese is generally taken as a device that is commonly used to introduce noteworthy referents, or referents of high discourse referentiality into discourse. Table 8, however, shows that, similar to the situation with bare NPs in the subject position, the grammatical encoding of bare NP as a marker of low thematicity overrides the effect of the *you*-construction as a canonical construction to introduce entities of thematic importance. 79% (11 instances out of 14) of the referents in the form of bare NP introduced by the construction are thematically nonreferential. On the other hand, Table 8 demonstrates that, although either the *you*-presentative construction or the form of *yi* + CL + NP itself may not necessarily encode entities of high thematicity, their combination, namely *you* + *yi* + CL + NP, is clearly the most preferred form to introduce entities of thematic importance. In fact, of the 45 referents of the strongest persistence which are mentioned for 20 times or more in the ensuing discourse, 28 are introduced into discourse on their initial mention in the form of *yi* + CL + NP in the *you*-presentative construction.

A comparison of the thematicity of *yi* + CL + NP in *you* construction and elsewhere also indicates that, so far as the form of *yi* + CL + NP is concerned, the correlation between thematicity and the *you* construction, as shown in Table 9, is significant ($\chi^2 = 20.43$, d.f. = 2, $p < 0.001$). The results in Tables 4–8 suggest that, whereas bare NP can be characterized as a marker of thematic nonreferentiality or low thematicity in Chinese, the indefinite NP in the form of *yi* + CL + NP, in and of itself, is a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematicity</th>
<th><em>You</em> construction (%)</th>
<th>Elsewhere (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>14 (19%)</td>
<td>60 (81%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25%)</td>
<td>(54%)</td>
<td>(46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td>5 (23%)</td>
<td>19 (77%)</td>
<td>22 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9%)</td>
<td>(17%)</td>
<td>(13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>36 (55%)</td>
<td>32 (45%)</td>
<td>66 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(66%)</td>
<td>(29%)</td>
<td>(41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>55 (18%)</td>
<td>111 (82%)</td>
<td>162 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematicity</th>
<th><em>yi</em> + CL + NP (%)</th>
<th>Bare NP (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>11 (15%)</td>
<td>63 (85%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1–3)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11 (15%)</td>
<td>63 (85%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
much less consistent marker of thematicity. It may encode an entity of low thematic importance just as likely as an entity of high thematic importance. In this respect, it displays some similarity to the English indefinite article *a*, which, although originally a marker of thematic importance, has gradually expanded its scope to entities of various degrees of discourse thematic referentiality (cf. Hopper and Martin, 1987; Wright and Givón, 1987; Heine, 1997; Chen, 2003).

Finally, let us examine the thematic importance of NPs in the Chinese locative construction.

It is evident from Table 10 that the locative construction is a most consistent and strongest marker of discourse thematic nonreferentiality or low thematicity in Chinese. Irrespective of whether they appear as a numerically classified NP or bare NP, NPs in the locative construction are either discourse thematically nonreferential or of low thematicity. Note that most of the NPs in the locative construction are of specific reference, referring to identifiable referents in the context of discourse. Some stand for existent, but nonidentifiable and nonspecific entities. Consider the following two examples from my corpus:

(39) Zhuren jiang keren yin dao YUANZI li sanbu
    host take guest lead to courtyard in stroll
    “The host took the guest to the courtyard for a stroll”.

(40) Xiangshu shang zhu zhe yi zhi chan,
    oak tree up live DUR one CL cicada
    chan zhan zai SHUZHI shang, butingde jiao.
    cicada stand on branch up, incessantly chirp
    “There was a cicada on the oak tree, clinging onto a branch and chirping incessantly”.

Yuanzi ‘courtyard’ in (39) is of specific and identifiable reference in the context of utterance, referring to the courtyard that is a part of the house of the host in the typical cognitive scheme or scenario of a house, as the head is to a person, and the wheel to a car. Shuzi ‘branch’ in (40) is of unidentifiable reference in the sentence, as there are normally many branches to a tree, and the speaker cannot reasonably assume the addressee knows which uniquely identifiable branch is involved. As a matter of fact, we are in no position to know if the speaker him-/herself had a specific branch in his or her mind, which means that the pragmatic referentiality of the NP in this case is a matter of indeterminacy. The distinction in identifiability and pragmatic referentiality, however, is neutralized in the circumstances in question, where the entities are obviously discourse thematically nonreferential, or are of low thematicity, serving a mere circumstantial role in the development of the major theme of the discourse. Irrespective of whether or not they are of specific and identifiable reference, the NPs in the locative construction are predominantly encoded as bare NP, the form par excellence for both semantically/pragmatically nonreferential entities and thematically nonreferential entities. The fact that pragmatically specific NPs like yuanzi in a locative construction as in (39) are typically encoded in the same way as pragmatically nonreferential entities suggests that when semantic/pragmatic and discourse/thematic features conflict, as in the Chinese locative construction, more often than not the semantic/pragmatic distinction is neutralized, and the distinction in thematic importance prevails. Irrespective of their semantic and pragmatic features in referentiality, they usually assume the typical encoding for semantic/pragmatic nonreferentiality if they stand very low in discourse thematicity.

5. Conclusion

Three aspects of linguistic referentiality are discussed in this paper. A semantically referential expression, thus, is one whose semantics contains a component the essential function of which is to point to an existent entity in a model of discourse. A pragmatically referential expression is one that carries an existential presupposition, is of specific reference to the speaker, and is used by the speaker with the intention to refer the entity in the context of utterance. A nonreferential expression is one that fails to fulfill one or more of the conditions. An examination of a broad range of diverse linguistic phenomena that have been characterized in the literature in various terms including nonreferential, nonspecific, attributive, quantificational, narrow-scope nonspecific and distributive, generic, and qualitative has established that all of them fail to fulfill one or more of the conditions in the definition of pragmatic referentiality formulated in this paper. It is by virtue of this fact that it is justified to put this broad, and otherwise diverse range of linguistic phenomena into one category, and characterize them as pragmatically nonreferential. A discourse
thematically referential expression is taken to be one high in thematic importance, as measured in terms of high frequency of anaphoric mention in ensuing discourse. Both pragmatic referentiality and discourse thematic referentiality are strongly speaker-oriented and context-dependent concepts, pertaining primarily to the cognitive status of the entity involved in speaker’s mind and to the intention of the speaker in the utterance of the relevant expression.

Other than what are generally taken, in semantic terms, as inherently referential or nonreferential forms, there are no specific linguistic devices in English or Chinese which are used primarily or mainly to mark the pragmatic referentiality of an expression, although it is found in Chinese that encoding as bare NP strongly favors a nonreferential reading in situations where a nominal expression is susceptible to a referential and a nonreferential interpretation. On the other hand, both English and Chinese are found to be more sensitive to distinction in discourse thematicity referentiality, with encoding devices which characteristically serve to indicate the thematic importance of referents in the discourse of utterance. Furthermore, the fact that Chinese strongly favors the same grammatical encoding of bare NP for pragmatic and thematic nonreferentials and referents of low thematic referentiality, irrespective of their semantic referentiality, provide further empirical evidence for the conceptual link between pragmatic referentiality and discourse thematic referentiality.

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Appendix A

Following are the abbreviations used in this article. For a detailed explanation of the terms, cf. Li and Thompson (1981).

CL Classifier
CRS Currently relevant state
DUR Durative aspect
EXP Experiential aspect
PFV Perfective aspect
TM Topic marker

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