(Re)orientation strategies in academic discourse[1]

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The primary goal of the paper is to discuss attention relocation in academic texts through interaction of two conflicting processes: that of expansion and that of reduction of form. The focus is on deictic (re-)orientation procedures in Polish academic texts. It is argued that inefficient or excessive orientation signals can raise uncertainty in discourse. This is what happens when there are frequent changes in focus allocation, when deictic procedures lead to vague referents, or when there are swift rotations between anadeictic and catadeictic orientation signposts. Uncertainty through focus dilution adds to the syndrome of a difficult text.

1   Introduction

Recent studies in academic writing have shown considerable variation in argumentation patterns and discoursal expectations across speech and academic communities. Among the most prominent, though also controversial, proposals is the distinction between "linear" and "non-linear" academic texts associated primarily with the name of Clyne and his associates (Clyne 1981, 1987a and b; Clyne/Hoeks/Kreutz 1988). Following up on some observations by Kaplan (1972) and Galtung (1985), Clyne (e. g. 1987a, 80) argues that in contrast to English, German academic writing can be seen as an example of a "non-linear discourse". To drive his point home Clyne develops a framework for a cross-cultural analysis of academic texts. Its central element is the dynamics of the text: how the text is developed in terms of the main argument and subsidiary arguments. On the basis of some empirical data Clyne observes that English academic writing prefers a direct line of argumentation, where connections are made between immediately relevant meanings, topical asides are disfavoured and new topics are not introduced before the previous one is completed. In contrast, German academic writing is apparently "non-linear" for it easily sanctions, if not encourages, the introduction of digressive meanings into the main line of argumentation.

Largely under the influence of Clyne, digressiveness began to be seen as a potential style marker in academic environments that show linguistic and historical compatibilities with German. This concerns above all the Czech, the Russian and the Polish styles of scientific exposition (e. g. Čmejrková 1994; Duszak 1994). The development of a scholarly argument in Polish can indeed be shown to accommodate a whole variety of peripheral meanings that expand background and increase the level of redundancy in discourse. Such meanings include not only swerves-off the

main course (digressions proper), but also reformulations, explicitizations, amplifications or elaborations on the contents already in focus (Duszak forthcoming).

A separate, though not unrelated, aspect of the Teutonic intellectual tradition is the phenomenon of the difficult text. For a long time difficulty has been seen as an attribute of "scientificness": hence effort was admitted as a natural element in the production and the reception of scientific discourse. As a result, structural complexities were sanctioned, which led to an ample use of nominalizations, hypotactic constructions, and informationally overloaded sentences. Today, Polish academic writings are still discussed in terms of "intellectualization" of style (Gajda 1982 and 1990; Mikołajczak 1990).

The purpose of this paper is to point out another aspect of Polish academic writings in the Teutonic tradition. It is argued that the complexity of this style largely follows from the interaction of two opposite tendencies in form and content management: that of compression and that of expansion. The tendency to produce compact forms is boosted by the typological propensities of the system. Namely, as an inflectional language, Polish makes it easy to reduce, combine and relocate forms. On the other hand, however, the same mechanisms allow for an expansion of form and an increase in the capacity of the sentence. The paper discusses the interaction of the two processes in terms of attention relocation and levels of uncertainty in discourse. The focus is on the problems of deictic orientation and reorientation in digressive environments.

2   Deixis and focussing in discourse

Deictic pointing can be interpreted in terms of orientation signals that assist the reader in selecting, managing and shifting points of reference in texts. By externalizing such strategic places of orientation, deictic signalling eases the processes of comprehension and the integration of meanings in discourse. The efficiency of this strategy follows from cognitive constraints on information processing in communication. Attention allocation and scope are limited and unstable. Deictic orientation allows the writer to restrict the reader's attention, direct it or relocate it to another focus. Critical here is the assumption that mental operations are best made on sets of stabilized mental addresses. This is also the assumption that drove the search for thematic grids in texts as a source of connexity in discourse (esp. thematic progressions in the sense of Daneš 1978).

Deictic orientation is a *referential* problem in the sense that the efficiency, the ease and the result of the process depend largely on the ontological status of the entity that is focussed on. Clearly, it is easier to locate somebody's attention on observables, and on physical objects in particular, than on entities that are inaccessible to direct inspection. One way of coping with ontological constraints on deictic procedures is to adopt the distinction that Lyons (1977, 441ff.) made between first-, second- and third-order entities. If we leave aside physical objects (first-order entities)

as a relatively simple reference and orientation problem, we are faced with two categories of potentially problematic references. On the one hand, there are the events, processes and states of affairs that can be located in time and place (second-order entities). On the other, there is a variety of abstract entities and propositions that are outside time and space (third-order entities). These are the entities which, as Lyons (1977, 445) notes, are better assessed in terms of "true" rather then "real", and which may function as objects of propositional attitudes, beliefs, judgements and expectations. In texts, however, deictic orientation often involves references to non-observables of the second and the third category, that is to objects for which referential matchings are likely to be inexact, vague or merely intuitive. The growing complexity of the referring process weakens the clarity as to whether agreement has been reached on what is actually in focus. Arguably, therefore, the efficiency of the deictic system drops with an increase in the abstract nature of the entity to be focussed on.

The referential aspect of focussing interacts with the type of space in which orientation is performed. A central case of deixis takes place when pointing is done in a physical context that is shared by the communicants. In language, however, the immediacy of the immediate speech situation is transcended, and displacement becomes a characteristic feature of communicating through texts (e. g. Chafe 1992). The visual space is replaced by a discourse space or even a space of imagination: cf. Bühler's (1934) concept of "Deixis am Phantasma", and Ehlich's (1992, 210) "deixis in the space of imagination". Deixis in displaced environments is mediated through interpretation of what is, or rather of what seems to be, the intended referent. With a growing displacement of the speech situation, and a growing abstractness of the referent, the efficiency of deictic procedures becomes not only more problematic, but also less verifiable.

The deictic signalling in texts has not only a strong cognitive, but also a pragmatic-functional motivation. Therefore, like reference (see, e. g. Searle 1969), deictic orientation is also a *pragmatic* problem. Focusing procedures are interpreted in terms of what the writer intends to refer to, and how right he/she ultimately is in expecting the reader to successfully arrive at his/her intentions. This entails the assumption of intersubjectivity: people can "share" states of knowledge, consciousness, or maxims of rational behaviour. Thus, for instance, a deictic signal can be disambiguated by the processor's perception of relevance relations in a given context and at a given stage of discourse.

Finally, deictic orientation is a *textual* problem in that the amount and the type of form that is used is a strategic decision on the part of the writer. It is a cognitive-semantic as well as a practical-functional requirement that highly presupposed material tends to be expressed in an attenuated manner. The establishment of a referent through textual encoding provides information that allows for subsequent references to be much less explicit or even entirely implicit. Givón (e. g. 1983 and 1985) proposes a scale of decreasing explicitness in the coding of topics, according

to which the amount of form depends on ease of access to the referent. At the one end are located full noun phrases that refer to entities to which the reader had previously little access or no access whatsover, and at the other there are pronouns (zero-pronouns or verb endings only) that invoke highly accessible, thematized or presupposed referents. In this way, the more continuous (predictable, mentally accessible) the referent, the less material is needed for its coding. This means that there is symmetry between the amount of form and the amount of effort that is expended in the processing of that form.

Efficient orientation may be a problem when deictic signalling is done across complex referential domains. The risk grows with the use of less explicit pointers (e. g. pronouns), which can lead to vagueness as to what the potential referents are. Normally such referential uncertainty in discourse coincides with doubts as to what part of the text should be sectioned off for inclusion in focus. McCarthy (1994, 269) gives an example of this kind of problematic reference in which, he argues, it is not at all obvious whether the italicized words adequately retrieve the referent of the pointer (*that*):

(1)   So there will be a one-day conference in London some five or six weeks before a full conference begins, at which *final 'composite' motions are prepared.*
        If *that* is done, say party managers, it will be possible to allocate more time to debates, and therefore to lengthen the time limit for speeches from the rostrum.

Vague deictic signalling leads to the loss of savings that deictic procedures should effect. In extreme situations, deictic focussing can be counterproductive as it may cause disorientation or demand extra effort in processing the text. In such cases orientation cues at best signal places when the attention of the processor is reverted from its current course.

Poor orientation may, however, be intentional. It functions then as a strategic move on the part of the writer whose purpose is to avoid commitment to a particular referential act, to leave space for opting out or even to confuse the reader. Tolerance of vagueness depends first of all on genre, and on the general value orientation in a given culture. Institutionalized public discourses are prone to strive for accuracy in the use of orienting devices and in the identity of the referents they retrieve. In casual communication such adequacy may be less essential, while in contexts to deceive it may be intentionally violated. Cultural expectations too have a say in how efficient orientation must be in order to pass for a socially acceptable act of focussing in discourse. As is well known, vagueness is a valued communication quality in societies that stress collectivism, group harmony and non-confrontative modes of social interaction. Here the most notable examples come from the territory of Oriental culture and concern in particular the Japanese or the Korean verbal styles (e. g. Gudykunst/Ting-Toomey 1988). This, as Galtung (1985) argues, has its implications for the intellectual style and patterns of academic communication that characterize that cultural tradition. For its own part, much of the discourse in former socialist countries was notorious for its tactical inexplicitness as to what was said. For a long time reading between the lines was an act of social conspiracy,

which may actually have left its imprint on the general modes of communication today, academic communication including.

3 Deictic orientation in academic discourse

It is in the nature of academic communication that it is highly displaced and abstract. As a rule, deictic focussing operates on complex and fuzzy referential domains that are hard to establish through reference to text knowledge alone. Referent identification depends very much on the processor's expertise in a given academic field, as well as on his/her global understanding of the writer's global plan in discourse.

Clearly, decontextualized and abstract meanings increase and complicate the mental activities that are necessary on the part of the processor. It is equally natural that they should increase the risk of vagueness as to what text segments remain within the sphere of operation of the deictic procedure. This may hold even for apparently simple pronominal references, whose identification may require recourse to vast and fuzzy spans of context and text knowledge. Cf. *it* in (2):

(2)   Viewing referential processes as pragmatic is important not just for the general reasons sketched above, but also because it may help us account for distributional differences between *definite* and *indefinite* forms and *explicit* and *inexplicit* forms (Schiffrin 1994, 198 – italics in the original).

A proper integration of the *it*-referent with the rest of the clause requires access to and exploitation of the previous text and the general material knowledge in the area in focus: what is meant by referential processes; how to understand the fact that they are accountable for in pragmatic terms; where in the previous text reasons were given to validate the pragmatic interpretation of referential processes and what was their nature; to what extent, if at all, the discussion of those reasons was in the reader's judgement compatible with his/her own understanding of what it means to view referential processes in a pragmatic manner. Obviously enough, while focusing on a deictic expression and integrating it within the preceding and the incoming texts, readers do not consciously check on the availability of all such knowledge. The reading of that element takes place on the presumption of its plausibility in context, and is confirmed by its coherence with the succeeding stretch of discourse.

Efficiency of deixis is vulnerable in particular when it signals major shifts in the flow of argumentation. It seems that such macro-deictic procedures serve first of all to direct the reader's attention towards a new cluster of meanings (mental spaces in discourse), and thus function primarily as automated signposts. Much less do they identify the entity to which reference is actually made. Thus, for instance, "this" or "that" as global orientation markers may actually fail to refer to a clearly delimited or identifiable segment of discourse. Such a referring mechanism shows an affinity with what Francis (1994, 88) describes as labelling stages in discourse. According to Francis, writers use labels, such as "this problem", "another difficulty", etc., in

order to provide a frame of reference within which a given part of the text is to be interpreted:

(3)   … the patients' immune system recognized the mouse antibodies and rejected them. This meant they did not remain in the system long enough to be fully effective.
           The second generation antibody now under development is an attempt to get around this problem by 'humanising' the mouse antibodies, using a technique developed by… (Francis 1994, 85 – italics in the original – AD).

Labelling can be a more explicit tool for reader orientation than pro-form substitution by pronominal deictic means such as "this" or "that". This is what happens when labelling provides some hints as to "how" a particular stretch of discourse is to be interpreted. Thus, for instance, the writer may refer to something as "this problem" or as "this issue". Each strategy entails different consequences. If the writer chooses the "problem" option, he/she must validate his/her judgement by pointing out to the difficulties that make that something into a problem. No such commitments derive from the "issue" choice. Plain deictic orientation, "this", makes the author still less responsible for how the reader conceptualizes the intended domain of reference.

Vagueness of deictic procedures in academic discourse can also be discussed in terms of spatial metaphors, to invoke here the term used by Halliday (1985, 308) in his coverage of cohesion established by reference to "the matter". This type of cohesion Halliday discusses in terms of conjunctive meanings, and more specifically in terms of the category "respective". He argues that cohesion can be established by reference to the "matter" that has gone before. According to Halliday many expressions of the matter are spatial metaphors involving words like "point", "ground", or "field" that can become conjunctive when coupled with reference items. Among such typical expressions are "here", "there", "as to that". Halliday also argues that:

> the whole phenomenon of conjunction shades into that of reference. Many conjunctives have reference items embedded in them, typically *that* or *this*, *in that case*, *despite this*, *from there on*, etc. In such cases the conjunctive relation can be taken as the predominant one, because it embodies more meaning – more semantic features; any instance which can be assigned to a conjunctive category can be interpreted as such and the reference item ignored (Halliday 1985, 308).

This, it would seem, could support the assumption that deictic orientation, especially in more complex discourses, is used to manage focus rather than to retrieve a specific entity. Instead of referential cohesion, we are dealing here with functional cohesion. Such "referential conjunctives" trigger semantic macrostrategies that operate across functional segments in discourse. Their job is to give cues that a given (macro)proposition performs a certain function in relation to another proposition (e. g. cause, specification, contrast). In this way deictic signals of this kind also arouse expectations about the presence of more global coherence patterns in discourse.

4 Deixis, defocussing and digressive argumentation patterns in Polish academic writing

It is assumed here that deictic signalling and, in particular, the type and the density of deictic orientation procedures, could be another parameter differentiating between the various styles of scholarly argumentation. Ehlich (1992, 225), for instance, notes in passing that in contrast to German, English academic writing seems to be "poor in deixis" as it resorts to other orientation mechanisms. Ehlich focusses on deictic precedures in German scientific texts, and argues that responses of text users seem to suggest that:

> the application of deixis is avoided according to a permanent calculation of the costs and benefits in the use of alternative procedures, such as symbolic procedures or semiotic (e. g. graphic) procedures (Ehlich 1992, 225).

Elsewhere, however, Ehlich (1992, 220) maintains that the application of deictic procedures "is a major resource for the reader to overcome the difficulties which lay at the basis of the (negative) evaluation of German Scientific Texts". I shall take no stand here on such attributions of value to one style that are made in terms of values typical of another. My focus of interest is the type and scope of deictic signalling that Ehlich finds typical of the German academic register.

Ehlich's pronouncements on German could in principle hold for the evaluation of deictic procedures in Polish academic discourse. First, Polish scientific writings abound in deictic signalling. Second, in structurally complex texts, deixis can be said to assist orientation. Third, excessive deictic signalling is however prone to increase the level of uncertainty in texts and thus lead to an opposite effect; focus dilution and inefficient orientation.

The main objective of the rest of this discussion is to show how deictic signals conspire with other parameters of style in Polish academic texts. The focus is on their interaction with the apparent "non-linearity", or digressiveness, in Polish argumentation patterns. It is argued that extensive (re)orientation procedures through deictic means interfere with (re)orientation procedures through changes in salience relations (defocussing through the import of digressive material).

Below I discuss two examples that I consider representative of the problem at hand. The first example, (4), comes from a text in which the author discusses the metaphor from the point of view of text cohesion. The first sentence (in square brackets) sets the scene for the interpretation of the second example, which features two uses of deictic "to" ("this") that are of interest to us:

(4)   [Zadajmy sobie od razu pytanie, co sprawia, że takie zakłócające koherencję wyrażenia (czasem bardzo trudne, wręcz karkołomnie trudne do sensownej interpretacji) podlegają jednak procedurze przywrócenia ich sensowności, a co za tym idzie – odtworzenia koherencji tekstu.] Odpowiedzi na *to* pytanie szukać trzeba – jak na to wskazują chybione poszukiwania formalnych wyznaczników metafory – poza sferą formalną, wynika zaś ona z samej istoty tekstu, z jego przedmiotowego istnienia. (Dobrzyńska 1983, 285-286: italics added – AD)

/Let us right away ask the question about how it is possible that such coherence-disrupting expressions (sometimes very difficult, outright impossible for a sensible interpretation) respond nonetheless to the procedure of sense restoration, and accordingly – also to the reconstruction of the text's coherence.] An answer to *this* question should be looked for – as *this* is indicated by unsuccessful search for formal exponents of the metaphor – beyond the formal sphere, for it follows from the immanent nature of the text, from its objective existence./ (my translation – AD).

Our attention goes to the second sentence, which features two uses of "to" ("this"). The first of these ("this question") is anadeictic (the term is from Ehlich 1992) in that it functions as a retrospective label that reinstates what was said before. The second "this" is catadeictic as it changes the direction of orientation from the earlier anaphoric path onto a forward route towards the anticipated answer. It signals the solution to the question that was asked: it is not on "the plane of form" that the answer to "this question" can be found.

At the same time, the two deictic orientation procedures are set in a context in which relocation of attention is also produced through changes in salience relations. Such changes result from strategies of background extension that bring digressions from and elaborations on the contents in focus. That is, the first sentence – which serves as a frame of reference for "this question" – accommodates two functional perspectives on metaphoricity. On the one hand, it refers to metaphors as "coherence-disrupting expressions", and thus approaches them through a standardized condition on textuality: coherence. On the other hand, the same segment brackets a digression that relocates the reader's attention towards the difficulty with the interpretation of such metaphorical expressions. What is more, this digression contains an embedded elaboration – "outright impossible" – that comments on the possible degree of this difficulty. The part of the sentence that formulates the heart of the question (how is it possible that the metaphor should nonetheless respond to "the procedure of sense restoration") features another functional reorientation. That is, metaphor interpretability ("sense restoration") is reformulated in terms of reconstructibility of the coherence of the entire text.

Similarly, the second deictic ("this") coincides with signals of a change in relevance relations in discourse. A relocation of the reader's attention comes with a formally marked (hyphens) digressive segment: " – as this was indicated by unsuccessful search for formal exponents of the metaphor – ". At this stage the author's tactic is to signal her ability to supply an answer to the question asked, yet to provide it only after potential criticisms are fended off. An advance reference to the failure of other explanations of the problem at hand is a form of self-defence while performing a face-threatening act of making an academic claim.

Throughout the segment, deictic focussing is inexplicit due to undercoding of the signals and the complexity of the referential domain. Changes in the relevance status of the incoming contents slow down the interpretation process and dilute the focus on the problem-solution task in question. Ultimately, therefore, while searching for an answer to "this question", the reader must not only keep active the ana-

deictic and the catadeictic orientation cues, but he/she must also cope with changes in relevance relations on the salience hierarchy in the text. It is arguable that the complexity of the orientation process should grow when shifts in deictic focussing occur together with changes in salience relations in texts. Extensive deictic procedures coupled with extensive procedures of foreground-background manipulation increase uncertainty in discourse and require more processing effort on the part of the reader.

Numerous deictic procedures can also be observed in texts that feature relatively short sentences. In such cases it is not the actual level of redundancy (digressiveness) that is responsible for the proverbial difficulty of the Teutonic style of academic writing. What is important here is the number of attention relocations that the reader must perform while processing the discourse. An example of a text with a high density of such relocation signals is given in (5), where we witness various uses of the deictic pronoun "to" ("this" singular, neuter):

(5)   Rzeczą zasadniczą jest fakt, że tekst referencjalny jest przede wszystkim tekstem według określenia (IV). Oznacza to_1, że nie może obejmować podciągów, które by nie były przedtekstami. Po to_2, by orzec, że pytanie lub odpowiedź na nie (w normalnym dialogu) jest przedtekstem, trzeba by przyjąć, że to_3 pytanie lub ta_4 odpowiedź jest wyłącznie cząstkową realizacją czyjejś intencji utworzenia danego ciągu "pytanie-odpowiedź". Otóż nie da się wskazać takiej intencji. W istocie pytania informacyjnego leży to_5, że zadający je nie ma przed sobą odpowiedzi. Podobnie rola informatora nie obejmuje z natury rzeczy roli poszukującego informacji. Wynika $stąd_6$, że pytanie i odpowiedź nie są przedtekstami w stosunku do całości złożonej z nich. Wobec $tego_7$ całość ta_8 obejmuje elementy, które nie są przedtekstami. To_9 przeczy założeniu definicyjnemu na temat tekstu. (Bogusławski 1983, 27).

    /The essential thing is the fact that the referential text is a text first of all according to the definition in (IV). *This*$_1$ means that it may not contain subsequences that would not be pre-texts. In order *that*$_2$ we could say whether a question or an answer to it (in a normal dialogue) is a pre-text, we would have to assume that *this*$_3$ question or *this*$_4$ answer is only a partial realization of somebody's intention to create a given sequence "question-answer". Such an intention, however, cannot be indicated. It is in the nature of an information query *that*$_5$ the inquirer has no answer. Similarly, the informer's role does not as a rule cover the role of an information seeker. It follows *therefrom*$_6$ that a question and an answer are not pre-texts in relation to the whole they create. Due to *this*$_7$, *this*$_8$ whole covers elements that are not pre-texts. *This*$_9$ contradicts the definitional assumption underlying textness./ (my translation – AD).

A note is in order on the interpretation of the elements underlined. Some of those deictic procedures are unquestionable (e. g. "to" with subscripts 1, 3, 4, 8 and 9, all of which represent various types of anadeictic reference). Some are more complicated: e. g. "to" with subscripts 6 and 7, where we have instances of what Ehlich (1992, 219) describes as formularized or automated deixis in German, and what he exemplifies with "dadurch" ("by the fact"). Thus, *stąd* ("therefrom", "from this fact") is primarily conjunctive and only secondarily referential: it assists the reader's orientation in the text space rather than providing him/her with sufficient

indication as to the identity of this "ground" ("fact" etc.) that creates the frame of reference for the conclusion to follow.

Finally, the segment under analysis features orientation signals that may seem controversial. This holds for the "to" expressions with subscripts 2 and 5 as the English translation questions their deictic foundation. In Polish both uses of "to" can be seen as borderline cases between pronouns and particles. However, in discourse analytic terms they have a catadeictic character as they make a point-reference to a complex entity to be introduced. The catadeictic disposition of "to" with subscript 5 may perhaps become more obvious when the English version of the sentence is kept closer to its Polish original. The Polish sentence with to_5 reads as follows:

(6)   In the nature of an information query lies this (=the fact) that the inquirer....

On the other hand, to_2 is in fact an emphatic way of ushering in a discourse topic. That is, "to" is immediately defined as: "the problem whether a question or an answer to it (in a normal dialogue) can be interpreted as a pre-text". It is also important that the entire expression "Po to" can be omitted. The sentence could start with "By orzec" or "Aby orzec", which would make it fully equivalent to its English translation ("In order to.../that ..."). "To" functions here as catadeictic exponent of a macro-referent. It signals an important reorientation point in the text space as well as cueing a functional division in the organization of the segment.

5   Concluding remarks

This paper has addressed the apparent complexity of "digressive" argumentation patterns via (re)orientation signals in Polish academic texts. The focus was on frequent relocations of attention through, on the one hand, deictic focussing, and, on the other, shifts in relevance (salience) relations in discourse. It was argued that a simultaneous and frequent exploitation of the two strategies may lead to uncertainty in discourse. On the level of the text the mechanisms produce conflicts between excessive reduction and excessive expansion of form.

Discussing regulatory conditions on texts, de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, 34) point to a problematic interplay of efficiency and effectiveness in evaluating texts. A text can be efficient yet at the same time dull due to its simplicity, clarity and transparency. On the other hand, an apparently non-efficient text may be appealing, for difficulty can make it into an interesting, creative or intriguing piece of writing. It is an open question to what extent, if at all, academic texts can be measured by any universal coefficients of rationality or effectiveness. Such parameters are indeed regulated in part by the nature of scientific exposition per se. To a considerable extent however, the image of an academic text derives from the rhetorical expectations that the various academic communities have of texts, topics and writers. The appeal of an academic text is a matter of human judgement and of little concern for the computer.

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