

Colors as Anaphoric Antecedents

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October 18, 2009

Abstract

While most theories of anaphora deal with pronominal reference to nominal antecedents, certain contexts allow color adjectives to introduce anaphoric reference. The semantic well-formedness of such cases is restricted to specific syntactic contexts of the adjectives being referenced. Anaphoric reference is almost always possible when the color is expressed in subject position or by a predicative adjective but never in the attributive position or immediately under the scope of negation. Compare, for example,

These shoes are black. It is my favorite color.

These are black shoes. #It is my favorite color.

The felicity of anaphoric reference is more difficult to determine when colors are expressed inside relative clauses. Felicity and well-formedness of adjectival antecedents are also sensitive to how deeply the color phrase is embedded in the clause. Interestingly, certain other attribute-denoting adjectives also seem to allow anaphora with similar constraints.

Kamp's (1985) Discourse Representation Theory accounts for discourse anaphora by utilizing a system of co-referencing pronouns and their antecedents to the same discourse referent. In this system, and other accounts of anaphora, the pronoun must choose an NP antecedent. The phenomenon of adjectival anaphora raises a question for discourse reference. Either pronouns can reference not only nouns, but also adjectives in some cases, or pronouns are actually referencing nominalized forms of color adjectives that occur in specific environments. Given evidence of adjectives behaving like nouns elsewhere and that there is a restricted set of syntactic contexts where color antecedents may occur felicitously, the latter hypothesis may be more plausible. Data from Japanese may also provide support for a nominalized color phrase hypothesis.

When examining the phenomenon of nominalized adjectives as discourse referents, two theories may be of use, one of type-shifting and one of nominalization. Partee (1986), introduces type-shifting operators that act on NPs of various types, shifting them to an NP of a different type. Chierchia (1982, 1985) introduces nominalization functions which apply to certain semantic categories resulting in denotations of type e . While each of these tools may be useful for the present problem, neither clearly provides a straightforward solution on its own.