Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique

ISSN 2790-6108 | E-ISSN 2790-6116

AVIS DE LICENCE / LICENCE NOTICE

Version accompagnée de cet avis : 3 octobre 2026

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Attribution - Pas d'utilisation commerciale - Pas de modification

Avec l'autorisation déclarée par la revue au nom des titulaires des droits, cette version est proposée sous la licence Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International.

Vous pouvez partager le document, sans usage commercial, en citant les auteurs et la revue, en indiquant la source et en fournissant un lien vers la licence. Cette licence ne permet pas de diffuser une version modifiée du document.

Les autorisations valablement accordées lors des diffusions antérieures, notamment sous CC BY-NC 4.0, restent applicables et ne sont pas retirées par cet avis. Les mentions antérieures figurant dans les pages originales ci-après sont conservées à titre historique.

Les auteurs conservent leurs droits. Le contenu scientifique et la pagination des pages originales sont intégralement préservés.

ENGLISH

With the journal's stated authorization from the rights holders, this version is offered under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. You may share it for noncommercial purposes, crediting the authors and journal and linking to the licence. Distribution of modified versions is not permitted under this licence.

Permissions already validly granted for earlier distributions, including under CC BY-NC 4.0, remain in force. This notice does not revoke them. Earlier licence statements in the following original pages are retained as historical information. The original scientific content and printed pagination are preserved.

Texte de la licence / Licence terms

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique(fr), African Rhetoric Notebooks(An)
ISSN : 2790 -6108, EISSN : 2790-6116

Vol. 2, N°01, pp.69-75, juillet 2023

Anaphoric and exophoric uses of the pronoun “il(s)” in Congolese schoolchildren’s essays[1]

Solange Nkoula-Moulongo
Marien Ngouabi University, Republic of Congo
solangenm1@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.55595/NKMS2023
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0675-8319

Date de réception : 28/05/2023 **Date d’acceptation :** 30/06/2023 **Date de publication :** 30/07/2023

Abstract: In this article, we discuss the construction of discursive cohesion by examining the pronoun il(s) as anaphoric or exophoric in schoolchildren’s essays. The written productions examined are those of college students aged between 13 and 16, students for whom fluency in the French language is assumed to be acquired. The analysis focused on referential indeterminations in writings of an argumentative nature. The results indicate that anaphoric practices give rise to gender and number breaks in the link between the pronoun and the antecedent. Exophoric practices give rise to non-text referents, a phenomenon that is visibly little perceived by the learner. However, the misuse of anaphorics does not break the textual coherence. And it ultimately seems that these deviations in the use of the pronoun il(s) do not have a strong bearing on the construction of co-reference and of textual progression and coherence.
Keywords: pronoun, il, anaphoric, exophoric, school writing

Usages anaphoriques et exophoriques du pronom « il(s) » dans les rédactions des apprenants congolais

Résumé :
Dans cet article, nous discutons de la construction de la cohésion discursive en examinant le pronom il(s) comme anaphorique ou exophorique dans les rédactions des apprenants. Les productions écrites examinées sont celles de collégiens âgés de 13 à 16 ans, élèves pour qui la maîtrise de la langue française est supposée acquise. L'analyse a porté sur les indéterminations référentielles dans les écrits à caractère argumentatif. Les résultats indiquent que les pratiques anaphoriques engendrent des ruptures de genre et de nombre dans le lien entre le pronom et l'antécédent. Les pratiques exophoriques donnent lieu à des référents non textuels, phénomène visiblement peu perçu par l'apprenant. Cependant, l'abus d'anaphoriques ne rompt pas la cohérence textuelle. Et, il apparaît finalement que ces déviations dans l'usage du pronom il(s) n'ont pas une forte incidence sur la construction de la co-référence et de la progression et de la cohérence textuelles.
Mots-clés : pronom, il, anaphorique, exophorique, écriture scolaire

[1] **Comment citer cet article :** Nkoula-Moulongo. S, (2023). Anaphoric and exophoric uses of the pronoun “il(s)” in Congolese schoolchildren’s essays. *Revue Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique, 2* (3), pp-pp. 69-75.

0. Introduction

In the Republic of Congo, learners practice exclusively the French language from the beginning of schooling. Several learners practice French in a family environment or have significant exposure to the French language. Thus, for these children, French is neither a foreign language, nor really a second language. When they get to school, they already have some French skills. On entering junior secondary school, they are around eleven years old and have a regular practice of the French language. In this paper, I am interested in the construction of discursive coherence by examining the pronoun *he/they (il(s))* as anaphoric or exophoric. In the learners' copies, several occurrences of *he (il)* or *they* (ils) demonstrate indeterminations of various kinds.

- J'adore ces chemins parce qu*'ils* sont courageux *il* encourage les personnes de gagner leurs vie.
- *Il* ont le droit de construire ces routes ce sont des chefs
- Si dans plusieurs établissements, les études doctorales ne sont pas encore instituées, à la Flash, *elles* existent depuis l'année universitaire 2000-2001.

These examples contain pronominal anaphors which pose a problem in the construction of the expected co-reference between the signifier *he/tey* and its antecedent. Michel Charolles (1995 : 129) clearly indicates on this subject that: « les différentes formes d"anaphores […] assurent des solidarités référentielles (coréférence, associativité, etc.) entre certains constituants des énoncés et […] donnent naissance à des chaînes de référence. »

In this reflection, we are interested in "Anaphoric and exophoric practices with the pronoun *he/they* in Congolese school learners' writings".

Anaphoric practices are to be understood as anaphoric usages, anaphoric references with specific antecedents, mentioned in textual fragments generally placed to the left of the anaphoric *he/they*. Exophoric practices are usages that refer to the extralinguistic context. The anaphoric *he/they* then has a deictic value. The objective pursued is to read the types of inconsistency in learners' writing regarding anaphors and exophora. In these usages of the *he/they*, what attracts our attention are the referential indeterminations. It is therefore a question of identifying and describing them in order to understand the linguistic mechanisms which govern their use by learners in argumentative texts. Theoretically, Francis Corblin (1995, 2) can edify us when he speaks of:

> « l'utilisation du suffixe -phore dans les deux termes : anaphore/exophore. La terminologie est transparente une même opération de renvoi (notée par le suffixe -phore) distingue des renvois internes au discours (ana-) et des renvois externes (exo-). Se trouve ainsi éliminé de la représentation le terme de deixis, qui ne manifeste dans sa constitution lexicale aucune communauté de nature avec l'autre terme de l'opposition (anaphore).

The essays reviewed are produced by junior secondary school learners ranging in age from 13 to 16 years old. More than one hundred copies have been read. But within the limited framework of this reflection, we have isolated a few examples for the purposes of demonstration. Our problem is formulated as follows: what are the nature and functions of referential indeterminations in learners' writings?

To answer this question, we adopt a double approach distinguishing anaphoric relations from exophoric relations. Nathalie Decool-Mercier and Mehmet-Ali Akinci (2010) propose this same approach. Referential indeterminations refer to the reading of atypical usages by taking into account the text and the linguistic context. We will examine the referential indeterminations, on the one hand, in anaphoric practices and, on the other hand, in exophoric practices. We will pay attention to the constraints related to gender and number, the nature of the referent, the exclusion of interlocutors and the character of indeterminate plurality.

1. Anaphoric practices

In their contribution on « La gestion de l'anaphore en discours : complexités et enjeux », Laure Gardelle, Caroline Rossi and Laurence Vincent-Durroux (2019) mainly consider anaphoric forms as forms expressing a co-reference. The syntactic link is taken into account. A few examples allow us to describe the phenomenon.

1. « […] Mon père est réveiller Ils est parties au salon […] » (Massamba's copy).
2. « Mon père est partie dans la chambre Il a réveiller ma mère […] Il a boucher le bidant Il a entendu les cous de pied […] Il voulaient partir […] Il sont a beaucoup […] » (Massamba's copy).
3. C'est enfant j'ai pitié deux ils sont entre de vendre sous le soleil (Loukombo's copy).
4. […] pendant un demenagement il famille de 5 personne demenageait pour change de maison il avais loye une voiture. ils en mit les choses à l'intérieure pour aller depose le chaleur a profite en but vitesse, tout parti les meble tout tout il an panique et en appelle la la police » (Ntsele's copy)

In the example 1, the use of *ils* (*they*) corresponds to a relative break in the number with regard to the father's logical antecedent (masculine/singular). The verbal forms (auxiliary in the singular and past participle in the feminine plural) reinforce the ambiguity of the example. In the rest of his essay, the student uses the same type of break-up. The anaphoric use, however, guarantees textual progression and tends to neutralize the difference in number between the antecedent and the pronoun.

In the second example, there are two types of anaphoric. The first three occurrences of *il* are anaphoric with an antecedent in the phrase "mon père". At this level, there is a relevance in the anaphoric repetition about the gender and number of the antecedent, masculine singular.

- « Mon père est partie dans la chambre Il a réveiller ma mère […] Il a boucher le bidant Il a entendu les cous de pied […].

In the rest of the sentence, the learner uses the pronoun il with an exophoric value. The last two occurrences do not have the father signifier as an antecedent. And, the verbal forms wanted and are associated with them mark a break in number.

- Il voulaient partir [...] Il sont a beaucoup [...] » (Massamba's copy)

The antecedent is a priori exophoric. The linguistic context makes it possible to understand the meaning of these jobs. The learner mentions different actors from the one already indicated in the statement by the first anaphora *il*. At the end of his development, the student writes the following sentence:

> 2'. « [...] le voleur était passer dans tous les parcelle Ils sont voller les choses » (Massamba's copy).

In this sentence, there is a break in the number. The pronoun is masculine plural while the antecedent is masculine singular (the thief). The extralinguistic context suggests the existence of several thieves who had raged in several houses, but the student uses the singular. However, we can assume that there is no syntactic link between the two sentences which would then only be juxtaposed.

We finally understand that the anaphoric *il* has a referent in the text but difficult to identify because of the breaks (in gender and number) and the syntactic distance which harms the dynamics of textual progression and co-referentiality. The anaphoric *il(s)* has a history of "voleurs". The use of the plural form *ils* is more relevant and reflects a different takeover of the framework in which the action takes place. The anaphoric variation between *il* and *ils* for the same referent poses a referential inconsistency. The use of *ils* can be read as exophoric. This pronoun *ils* refers to the extralinguistic context and not to the textual structure. But we can also think of a cataphoric[2] use insofar as the referent appears later in the text.

In sentence 3, "It's a child, I pity the two they are between to sell under the sun (Loukombo copy)", it is indeed a question of an anaphoric job where the break in gender and number is a matter of graphics fault. A rewrite of the sentence to fully understand the language mechanism:

> 3'. Ces enfants, j'ai pitié d'eux. Ils sont entrain de vendre sous le soleil (modified Loukombo's copy).

Orally, we probably wouldn't have noticed this break in numbers. The passage to the written word therefore reveals the weaknesses of the learner in grammatical knowledge. The pronominal form *Ils* is anaphoric because it refers to the signifier

[2] The cataphor is understood as a figure of speech where the pronoun has its antecedent later in the text.

"*enfants*"(children) (masculine, plural). There is also a marked co-referentiality between the linguistic signs *enfants, eux, ils*.

In the fourth sentence « […] pendant un demenagement il famille de 5 personne demenageait pour change de maison il avais loye une voiture. ils en mit les choses à l'intérieure pour aller depose le chaleur a profite en but vitesse, tout parti les meble tout tout il an panique et en appelle la la police » (Ntsele's copy), the first occurrence of *il* is not consequent . It is used as determined by the word *famille*. The second occurrence of the anaphoric *il* mentions a break in gender and number. We should logically have *elle* (used for *famille*) or *elles* (used for 5 people). But above all, this he has an anaphoric value. The third occurrence expresses a break in gender. The plural is well observed but not the gender. The anaphoric value of this pronoun when we admit the break mentioned in gender. Otherwise, it is possible to think of an exophoric practice of *ils* which would then have a referent outside the text. It is in fact assumed that it was the movers (séménageurs) who carried the furniture in the vehicle.

These variations in agreement indicate the learner's lack of attention. It is probably also the expression of an inconsistent cognition of the language and its grammar. With regard to these few examples, anaphoric practices relate to taking the learner's text into account. But the discursive-cognitive hypothesis of the reference evoked by G. Kleiber (1997, 16) in these terms prompts us to consider other practices: "Referential expressions would therefore refer only to discursive entities, from discourse, to mental constructions, to representations elaborated by discourse, which have validity and existence only through and in discourse".

2. Exophoric practices

> Decool-Mercier Nathalie et Akinci Mehmet-Ali (2010 1515) notent : « La référence déictique renvoie donc au cas où le référent se situe dans la situation de communication immédiate. Les unités linguistiques marquant ce référent dans la phrase sont appelées « déictiques » (Benveniste, 1966) ou « embrayeurs » (Jakobson, 1963). Halliday et Hasan emploient quant à eux le terme d'exophore lorsque l'élément présupposé ne peut être trouvé dans le texte mais dans le contexte de situation. Ils précisent que « la référence exophorique n'est pas cohésive puisqu'elle ne lie pas deux éléments dans un texte »

We will appreciate how the cohesion and the connectedness in some learners' writings express the co-reference by the use of the pronoun *il(s*). The two examples below will help us to present the trends at this level:

5. « […] et le proprietair de la parcelle à appelée la police et la police ariver et ils ont emmener le voleur à la poste de police » (Mossouka copy).
6. « je racontre dans quelques lignes sa journée. sa journée n'est pas bonne ce que il reste seulement là à vendre et comme il voi les autres qui vant à l'école lui aussi il la maintenant en vue d'aller à l'école […] » (Malanda copy).

In Example 5, there is some ambivalence. On the one hand, we can consider that the pronoun *ils* has the antecedent of the owner and the police. This is then a situation where the speaker (the learner) is not one of the actors performing the action (taking the thief away). But syntactically, such a reading is not satisfactory. On the other hand, taking into account the extralinguistic context makes it possible to note that it is not the owner (of the plot) who takes the thief to the police station. Rather, it is the police officers. The form *ils* are an exophoric practice. For a police intervention, the police officers act in groups. By his knowledge of extra-linguistic reality, the learner uses a linguistic form which is not textually appropriate. G. Kleiber (1997, 16) particularly notes this: "language as a system of signs is turned outwards, towards what we call or what we believe to be reality, or even the world, precisely because that a sign is only a sign if it represents something other than itself "

Consequently, when the learner uses the signifier *police*, he forgets aspects of syntactic and grammatical constraint. The correct pronoun is *elle* (feminine/singular) because it is the police in question. By using the form *ils*, the learner is influenced by the extralinguistic context which is evident in a plural number of police officers. The reference to the context thus establishes the exophoric nature of the pronoun. The learner's knowledge of reality is evoked by Charolles Michel (1995, 132) in these terms: « Les marques de cohésion ne fonctionnent donc jamais que comme des signaux ou déclencheurs (cf. F.Cornish 1990) stimulant des processus d'élaboration inférentielle dans lesquels les informations contextuelles et les connaissances d'arrière-plan des sujets jouent un rôle essentiel. » It is therefore necessary to take into account an inferential dynamic in interpreting the student's text.

In Example 6, the anaphoric *il(s)* is no precedent in the text. The 6 occurrences of the pronoun *il* in the copy relate to the same exophoric antecedent mentioned however in the statement of the exercise. In fact, the subject noted this : « Tu as vu un enfant vendre dans la rue ou dans le marché. Imagine sa journée » ("You saw a child selling in the street or in the market. Imagine his day).

Exophoric practice allows us to consider the pronoun *il* as a deixis, an actualizer of discourse, a word that only has meaning in relation to the linguistic context.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of the use of the anaphora and the exophora of the pronoun *il(s)* in learners' copies revealed several specificities. When it comes to anaphoric practices, learners produce statements where gender and number breaks in the link between the pronoun and the antecedent remain considerable. There is obviously a telescoping between reality and discursive production. Regarding exophoric practices, we noted a certain ambivalence of the examples. However, it is the break in gender and number that is still noted. The out-of-text referent is probably not perceived by the learner. The misuse of anaphora does not break the coherence. Such a reality reveals the low incidence of anaphora in the construction of co-reference and of textual progression and coherence.

In view of these trends, it would be interesting to assess students' copies to detect the nature of the practices of pronoun.

5. References

Charolles Michel, « Cohésion, cohérence et pertinence du discours ». Travaux de Linguistique, Revue internationale de Linguistique Française, De Boeck Université, 1995, pp.125-151.

Decool-Mercier Nathalie et Akinci Mehmet-Ali, 2010, « Le fonctionnement des anaphores dans les textes oraux et écrits en français d'enfants bilingues et monolingues », Neveu F., Muni Toke V., Durand J., Klingler T., Mondada L., Prévost S. (éds.), Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française, Paris, 2010, Institut de Linguistique Française, Article disponible sur le site http://www.linguistiquefrancaise.org

Francis Corblin (1995, 2)

Gardelle Laure, Rossi Caroline et Vincent-Durroux Laurence, « La gestion de l'anaphore en discours : complexités et enjeux », *Cahiers de praxématique* [En ligne], 72 | 2019, mis en ligne le 26 juin 2019, consulté le 23 septembre 2021. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/praxematique/5368

Kleiber Georges, 2001, *L'Anaphore associative*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 385p.

Reboul Anne, « L'anaphore pronominale : le problème de l'attribution des référents », Moeschler Jacques, Luscher Jean-Marc et Jayez Jacques, *Langage et pertinence*. *Référence temporelle*, *anaphore*, *connecteurs et métaphore*, Nancy, Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1994, pp. 105-173.