

# Referring Expressions in A Number of Social Science Articles in Vietnam

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**Abstract:** Referring expressions have long been studied in the fields of pragmatics and discourse analysis. From the pragmatic perspective, linguistic expressions themselves do not refer to any specific objects as it is only people who create a connection between language and the existing world to help readers realise the relationship between a language expression and an individual object of the outside world. The referring expressions accurately represent the purpose of a statement and the speech situation to decode the referring action. Through the study of referring expressions used in *Tạp chí Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam* and some other journals during 2018-2020, the author of this paper shows that anaphora and cataphora referring to different subjects highlight the elements of objectivity and the scientific style to serve readers harmoniously. The choice of using certain referring expressions depends on the authors, and they are being paid more attention to make readers easily to follow the main course of the article.

**Keywords:** Referring expression, pragmatics, linguistics, social sciences, Vietnam.

**Subject classification:** Linguistics

## 1. Introduction

Ferdinand de Saussure who laid the foundation of modern linguistics, defined language from the point of view of semiotics, in which lexical systems are considered "signifiers", referring to things, people, and concepts in the real world, that is, "signified" (F. Saussure, 2006). In communication practice, the form and semantics of referring expressions are rather more complicated than Saussure's theory. In other words, language is a system of reference; everything in the real world is identified through referring expressions, i.e. the vocabulary of the language (Nguyễn Thiện Giáp, 2010). A referring expression is any noun phrase, or surrogate for a noun phrase, whose function in discourse is to identify some individual object. Its definitions differ a great deal from one school of linguistics to another. The study

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of reference relations mainly belongs to pragmatics, the study of language use, though it is also a matter of great interest to researchers of other studying fields.

Cohesion and coherence are linguistic elements used to reveal the connection and relation between interconnected parts (Nguyễn Đức Dân, 2005). Writers can use referring expressions to perform cohesion and coherence operations. Reference and referring expressions are one of the ways to achieve cohesion and coherence in text, and the writer's intention to achieve the purpose of communication (K. Bach, 1988). These language expressions play an important role in creating and analysing discourse, text cohesion and coherence, performing interpersonal functions of language, and contributing to understanding the meaning of utterances in each specific type of communication activity (Searle, J. K., 1969).

Linguistics today tends to focus on analysis of reference in a certain language context rather than from the perspective of general linguistics (Brown, G. & Yule, G., 2001). In other words, the working mechanism of reference must be operated through the so-called "expression" that exists in a specific utterance or text substantiated by a situation and language context. We study social science articles from *Vietnam Social Sciences Review*, *Journal of Literary Studies* and *Journal of Economic Studies* and some other journals published during 2018-2020 to find out the significance of the referring expressions in the works. The papers are chosen mainly in these journals because there are a variety of research field within it, so readers can see a considerable amount of categories that a referring expression can fill in.

Referring can take place in a number of ways. They are likely to succeed in picking out the referent because the words in the expression and the way they are combined together give a true, accurate, description of the referent, in such a way that the hearer of the expression can recognize the speaker's intention. Readers and listeners can build up the meaning of the expression from the words and grammar and use it to identify an intended object.

From a pragmatic point of view, this paper studies the classification and usage of referring expressions in a number of social science articles published in Vietnam in recent years, including *Vietnam Social Sciences Review*, *Journal of Xưa and Nay (Past and Present)* in the period 2018-2020, and puts forward some proposals regarding the use of referring expressions in social science articles.

## **2. Classification of referring expressions**

According to Levinson, referring expressions can be divided into the deixis, the anaphora, and the cataphora. The deixis has the advantage of pointing directly to the object, whereby the listener can recognise the correct referent with almost no difficulty. For example "the table in the middle of the room", "the rooster in the corner of the yard", etc. Of course, there are also cases where the speaker cannot use the deixis. For example, when the power goes off at night and the whole room has no light and people cannot see

anything, the chairperson cannot continue with something such as “I like this guy's picture, not that guy's, and just this one, not that one.” However, such cases are rare (Levinson, S. C., 1983). Meanwhile, both the anaphora and the cataphora require the listener to have certain presuppositions and knowledge in order to correctly determine the “identified” object.

Referring expressions may have the form of a noun phrase of any structure, typically marked for definiteness. They may be a noun-phrase surrogate, i.e. a pronoun, or a proper name. Proper names are often taken to refer, in principle, to the same referent independently of the context in which the name is used and in all possible worlds (Ngô Hữu Hoàng, 2013).

Referring expressions may be classified as indefinite as opposed to definite reference, and collective and distributive reference. Definite referring expressions refer to an identifiable individual or class, and indefinite referring expressions allow latitude in identifying the referent. Collective reference is the picking out of the members of a set as a set, whilst distributive reference is the picking out of the members of a set individually. The difference may not be marked linguistically, but arrived at by interpretation in context (Austin, J. L., 1962).

Pragmatics in particular and linguistics itself, in general, do not study the references themselves, but only the relationships between words and references. The relationships here are those of the semiotic value of words only (Nguyễn Hoà, 2008). In order for a referring expression to signify a certain person or thing, the following must be satisfied: (1) Indication of a specific entity that exists in reality; (2) The author must make sure that the reader knows exactly what referent is being referred to. The reader must uniquely recognise the referent and not confuse it with another, and (3) The referring operation is carried out according to guaranteed conditions of the context and the circumstance under which the utterance containing the referring expression occurs. For example:

*“Tuy nhiên, từ cuối thế kỷ XIX, đầu thế kỷ XX, khi thế giới bước vào cuộc tranh đua mới về quyền lực (mà V.I. Lê nin gọi là chủ nghĩa đế quốc) thì phương Tây mới thực sự bàn đến địa chính trị với tư cách là một cách tiếp cận trong nghiên cứu về không gian quyền lực của một thực thể trong quan hệ quốc tế”.* (However, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the world entered a new competition for power (which V.I Lenin called imperialism), did the West really talk about geopolitics as an approach in the study of the power space of an entity in international relations” (Trần Khánh, 2018, pp.48-49).

In this example, readers (especially those in Vietnam) can point out who V. I. Lenin is, because he was the founder of Soviet Russia. They do not need the specific process to know Lenin. Generally speaking, a reader can point to Lenin quite easily.

To understand the specific meaning of the referring expression and the speaker's intention, it is important to understand the regularity of the corresponding relationship between the words distributed in the utterance. Encoding operations (by the transmitter) and decoding (by the receiver) determine the word reference to the correct object. This is the behaviour of the signal transmitter to identify the content of a language expression with the character so that the reader can correctly infer which entity, property, or event is being mentioned

(Ngô Hữu Hoàng, 2013). Readers may find it difficult to spot out “the majority of people” in the following example, instead, they can infer it in the second encounter. For example:

*“Nhóm tuổi của vợ và chồng không có ảnh hưởng tới việc ai là người quyết định chính trong việc chăm sóc dạy dỗ con, nhưng nghề nghiệp của chồng lại có ảnh hưởng. Trong tất cả nhóm nghề nghiệp của chồng, đa số mọi người đều trả lời rằng vợ là người chăm sóc chủ yếu con cái”*. “The age groups of the husband and wife have no influence on who is the main decision maker in the care and upbringing of the children, but the husband's occupation does. In all husband's occupation groups, the majority of people answer that the wife is the main caregiver for the children” (Nguyễn Hữu Minh, 2018, p.13).

“The majority of people” does not refer to the whole population, rather it directs to those who answer the questions given by the researcher in the study. More precisely, it refers to the majority of people to have the same occupation as the husband who takes part in the study.

When the author of an article mentions someone by a proper name expression, the readers can determine who that expression refers to, though this is not absolutely correct. From this proper name expression, when reading to the next parts of the article, readers will refer to the correct object and not mistakenly refer to another object. For example:

*“Thứ trưởng ngoại giao Lê Mai, người trực tiếp tham gia các vòng đàm phán bình thường hóa giữa hai nước, đã nhận định rằng: “Cái khó khăn nhất từ phía Việt Nam chúng ta là làm sao hóa giải được “những cái đầu nóng” của một bộ phận vẫn nhìn Hoa Kỳ như là kẻ thù chiến lược”*. (Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Lê Mai, who was directly involved in the normalization negotiations between the two countries, commented that: “The most difficult thing from Vietnamese side is how to resolve the “hawkish heads” of a section that still sees the United States as a strategic enemy” (Hoàng Hải Hà, 2018, pp.67-68).

Reading the above paragraph, we can refer to a person named Lê Mai, who was Vietnam's deputy foreign minister for a period in the past. Using a proper name may help readers refer to the right object, and the number of people mentioned in an academic article is usually not much, so readers may refer to the right person. Even when there are many people with the same name, the given name as in the example above, the title of “deputy foreign minister” may help readers to refer to the right person.

Especially, the English language is quite simple when it comes to the system of expressions in the form of personal pronouns because there are only seven (i.e. I, we, you, he, she, they, it). Due to the fact that the English language has only seven vocabulary items with no expressive tone when English speakers want to indicate an object or person in a very specific way, a certain noun phrase to denote that person may be used instead of the words “she or he”. This is because the function of a referring expression not only indicates a certain entity but also reflects the speaker's feelings about and attitude towards that entity.

In contrast, in the Vietnamese language, there are numerous ways of referring to someone or something, through various Vietnamese reflexive pronouns. These reflect different moods of the speaker concerning the listener, and the author concerning the

reader, regarding the person or object being referred to - i.e. the referent. For example “chú/bác/anh/chị”, “cô ấy”, “cụ”, “lão ấy”, “mụ ấy”, “ông ấy”, etc. When the speaker denotes themselves when addressing someone younger, it is easy to see that they can use words such as “em” (commonly used to address one's elder brother or elder sister) and “cháu” (used when addressing one's uncle/aunt/grandfather/grandmother respectively) depending on the context. One also encounters phenomena where the speaker uses Vietnamese words such as “ta”, “chúng ta” to include both the speaker and the listener(s), thus forming a unified whole. For example, “*Chúng ta muốn hòa bình, chúng ta đã nhân nhượng. Nhưng chúng ta càng nhân nhượng, kẻ thù càng lấn tới*” means “We want peace, we have made concessions. But the more we give in, the more the enemy encroaches”. Here, the Vietnamese word “chúng ta” includes both the speaker and the listener thus forming a unified Vietnam. If the pronoun “we” is used to translate “chúng ta” into English, it is not entirely certain that the translator has conveyed the author's full and correct meaning. In the phrase “We want peace”, the word “we” refers to “me and the Vietnamese compatriots who were listening to Uncle Ho's appeal” (Ngô Hữu Hoàng, 2013).

In the past, it was always thought that in order to make a text accurate, a scientific writing style should only employ objective, impersonal, explicit language and remove the agent factors. However, later on, scientists confirmed that in social science texts there is always a communication relationship between the author and the readers. Objectivity is not only related to issues such as beauty, but also to scientific judgements. Objectivity is often taken to be a characteristic of scientific claims and thus is identified with the role that science plays in society (Gonzales, R. A., 2018). The use of referring expressions clearly demonstrates the pragmatics of a text, avoiding repetition of monotonous and boring linguistic items which lead to a cumbersome writing style, while still ensuring a correct denotation of the target entity that the author wants the readers to pay attention to (Nguyễn Thị Tố Quyên, 2010).

In social science research, referring expressions are used to signify those subjects who are important persons. The application of referring expressions will have a significant impact on the readership, determining the position of the author and readers in an interwoven relationship. Today's authors will most likely be tomorrow's readers, and today's readers will be different in 20 years from now. Therefore, if rereading the same text, those readers still need to feel in tune with what the author has mentioned. The use of suitable expressions to denote readers and different objects, therefore, becomes very necessary.

### **3. Usage of referring expressions in a number of social sciences articles from a pragmatic perspective**

In the process of editing social articles to be published, one realises that the authors had to carefully choose those referring expressions that denote themselves, the readership, or certain objects. Studying the use of referring expressions from a perspective of pragmatics

can help readers better understand an author's intentions. Basically, in terms of referencing, pragmatics studies the reasons why an author uses one referring expression and not another, and the extent and the effect of using such an expression on the text. Pragmatics does not study the structure of the referring expression, but rather the impact and power of the referring expression used. The findings of referring expressions included in social articles in recent years show the reasons why those authors chose to use them, and their effects on the readers.

*Firstly*, it is a reference to the author themselves i.e. the person who wrote the article. In most edited articles, authors primarily used Vietnamese expressions such as “*bài viết*”, “*chúng tôi*”, “*tác giả*”, “*nhóm tác giả*” (meaning “the article, we, the author, the group of authors” respectively) to refer to the actual author of the article. Common Vietnamese expressions would be “*bài viết/tác giả/chúng tôi*”, “*đề cập/phân tích/trình bày/khái quát những vấn đề nghiên cứu*” (meaning “the article/author/we”, “referring to/analysing/presenting/generalising research issues” respectively). To a certain extent, the avoidance of personal opinions, or even the appearance of the authors themselves, has become part of the British-American negative politeness culture, and authors often use the referring expression “*bài báo*” (i.e. the article) which seems to carry more negative politeness than “*tác giả*” (i.e. the author). For example:

“*Bài viết phân tích chính sách của Nhà nước về phát triển nhà ở xã hội, nêu kết quả và những hạn chế về phát triển nhà ở xã hội ở Việt Nam, đề xuất giải pháp phát triển nhà ở xã hội ở Việt Nam hiện nay.*” (“The article analyses the State's policy on social housing development, state the results and limitations of social housing development, propose solutions to develop social housing in Vietnam today.”) (Nguyễn Thị Thanh Thủy, 2018, p.61).

In research articles, the Vietnamese personal pronoun “*tôi*” (meaning “I”) rarely appears. Instead the words “*chúng tôi*” (meaning “we”) are used even though the article was written by only one person. Some people support the use of “*tôi*”, others oppose it because it is subjective and lacks objectivity in research work. With the characteristics of scientific articles, there maybe different categories of potential readers, so it is essential to use appropriate referring expressions. The act of writing articles is a kind of one-way conversation between the writer and the reader, but once the article has been published, to some extent it becomes a conversation (also one-way) between the author and various readers. A very elderly Vietnamese person would not feel very comfortable reading an article where the author employs inappropriate forms of address, and where he/she clearly knows that the author is very young and of the same generation as his/her children or grandchildren. Even if the article is in English, a feeling of “face-threatening act” in other ways may also make the reader feel uncomfortable.

In some research articles, the characters participating in answering questions and interviewing may be substituted with pseudonyms and aliases. We find that the referential function of the proper name expression has not changed, the reader can still refer to the right person that the author wants to refer to. For example:

*“Vía hè là cuộc sống của người Hà Nội, cái đất thủ đô này mà không còn văn hóa vỉa hè, bia hơi, trà đá, cà phê, bún bánh... không còn tụ tập vỉa hè, chơi cờ, mua bán trên vỉa hè... thì còn cái gì nữa. (Ông Nguyễn Thích, 78 tuổi, phố Phan Chu Trinh)”* (Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm, 2019, p. 119). “Sidewalk is the life of Hanoians, this capital land without sidewalk culture, beer, iced tea, coffee, and vermicelli... no longer gathers on the sidewalk, plays, buys sold on the sidewalk... so what else can it be.” (Mr Nguyễn Thích, 78 years, in Phan Chu Trinh Street)” (Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm, 2019, p.119). Though the author uses the character's pseudonym in the article, the readers should accept that there is such a person in the above area who has answered the questions. In this case, “Mr Nguyễn Thích” is just a referring expression to direct readers to a person living in the area that engages and answers questions in the interview, and this is the norm in social sciences. For the sake of the study, any pseudonym name appearing in the questionnaire is appropriate.

*Secondly*, it is the phenomenon of using expressions referring to characters in the text. In Vietnamese writing, an author may often use anaphora, cataphora, and deixis more than the repetition of pronouns. Too much of the latter can make a text very boring. Instead of just using the Vietnamese expression “*ông ấy*” (meaning “he”), Vietnamese speakers will use various expressions to demonstrate different attitudes and feelings when it comes to the same character.

When referring to a certain character in an article, the author always needs to think about using a “referring” mode in a way to ensure objectivity, neutrality, or to share his or her attitude discreetly with the reader. The objective expression or sharing of feelings and attitudes has a great influence on the reader's psychology; however, according to observations made by the authors of this paper, an author is always mindful of making references successful. Specifically, using the English expression “he” is a safe choice because it does not come with complements indicating any modifiers or nature of the character, so the reader can feel the extent of the objectivity of the author's opinion. Authors of an article may also use noun phrases containing descriptive elements indicating typical characteristics of the person that appears in the circumstances. For example: “*Một nhà nghiên cứu văn hóa thường xuyên ngồi trà đá vỉa hè phố Trần Xuân Soạn*” (A cultural researcher often sits on the sidewalk with iced tea in Trần Xuân Soạn Street) (Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm, 2019, p.119). Readers can refer to this person by knowing his or her significant appearance. This can also distinguish him or her from other culture researchers who: 1) do not often sit on the sidewalks; 2) do not often sit on the sidewalks with iced tea; 3) do not often sit on the sidewalks with iced tea in Trần Xuân Soạn Street.

Referring expressions used in the articles include both expressions of anaphoric reference and expressions of cataphoric reference. Expressions of anaphoric reference are words and phrases used to refer to people, things, and events. However, in order to understand exactly which entity/entities are being referred to and, as mentioned previously, the fact that language expressions may refer to different entities, it is necessary to go back to the previous section to understand specifically what is being indicated or signified by the stated entity/entities.

In the social articles appeared in *Tạp chí Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam* during 2018-2020 examined by the author of this paper, the Vietnamese expression “họ” (i.e. they) appeared 230 times, of which 100 cases were expressions of anaphoric reference, 110 were expressions of cataphoric reference, and the remaining 20 were not referring expressions because they did not refer to any specific entity. Cases that do not refer to any particular entity in the possible world are not considered referring expressions.

*Thirdly*, apart from using referring expressions as pronouns, the authors also used noun phrases for reference. As mentioned above, in English if referring expressions are pronouns, they are often neutral, while noun phrases tend to have more positive politeness elements. When referring to a third person, the English language has only one form of personal pronouns, namely, “he” and “she” for a person and “it” for an object without distinction to express the author’s feelings and attitudes. On the contrary, the choice of a noun phrase itself shows the subjective intention of the author. For example:

“*Trần Quốc Tuấn (1232-1300), vị nhân tài tiêu biểu đời Trần đã khẳng định: dựa vào dân chính là kế “sâu bền gốc rễ” để xây dựng đất nước trường tồn.*” (Trần Quốc Tuấn (1232-1300), the typical talent of the Trần Dynasty affirmed that relying on the people is the “deep rooted” plan to build a lasting country) (Thân Thị Hạnh, 2019, p.39).

In this example, the author intends to describe the king as a typical talent, so the meaning of the sentence becomes more clearly with such referring expression. This is also the way that English writers prefer to use because the English pronouns themselves do not contain negative or positive feelings. If a writer wants to show his or her attitude, he or she has to add some adjectives to the noun, or adding descriptive phrases, so that they can put a face-threatening act or face-saving act upon the person that he or she intends to mention. In contrast, the Vietnamese language has a diversified set of pronouns so that users can be applied to different purposes. For looking down on somebody, the Vietnamese language has the words such as “nó”, “bè lũ”, “bọn”, “chúng”, etc. Whenever the writer uses these words, the readers understand his or her feeling towards the people that s/he mentions.

*Fourthly*, the authors of the reviewed articles mentioned above, used a number of different demonstrative pronouns and in various ways. The Vietnamese indicative word “này” (i.e. this/these) is an expression of anaphoric reference, denoting the entity mentioned in the sentence or paragraph immediately preceding the expression. Nevertheless, “đây”, “đó” (i.e. “here”, “there”) were used in a rather special way, sometimes as an expression of anaphoric reference and sometimes as an expression of cataphoric reference. To the reader, it is not clear which one is the referent as a result of an expression of cataphoric reference without reading the following section. There were several cases where demonstrative pronouns were used in the published articles as expressions of both anaphoric and cataphoric reference.

The inclusion of a good selection of referring expressions helps an author present their knowledge and information in the most complete, accurate, and objective manner, while still showing a cautious and modest approach. In addition, to save face against the possibility of divergent opinions criticising their scientific statements, appropriate referring



expressions will help authors avoid personal liability as in the case of disclaimers, serving to limit possible damage to utterances, and at the same time, help authors avoid negative reactions from readers.

Thanks to their close relationship with face-saving strategies, referring expressions contribute to building the relationship between the author and reader, thereby helping to address the respect and cooperation needed to influence and reach a consensus with the reader. After all, every utterance or discourse is a product created between the speaker and the listener, the author and the reader. When reading a social science article, one not only relies on the written information but there is also a thought process, association and inference, to embrace and properly understand the scientific information conveyed in an article. Within this the decoding of referring expressions and the correct identification of the referent are essential. Such cohesion media increase the coherence in the discourse and the text in general (Nguyễn Thị Huyền Trang, 2019). Therefore, they should be considered first as independent utterances, and at the same time compared to establish their cohesion function and semantic value in the utterance.

For example: “*Xin Quốc hội nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa đổi tên từ Cam Lâm thành Đường Lâm vào ngày 21-11-1964. Tóm lại, tổng hợp sự khảo cứu về diễn cách Đường Lâm - Sơn Tây của chúng tôi với kết quả nghiên cứu thực địa của Nguyễn Tùng, tạm thời có thể đi đến nhận định rằng: trong suốt chiều dài lịch sử hai ngàn năm từ đời Hán cho đến năm 1964, xã Đường Lâm dường như chưa bao giờ có tên là Đường Lâm.*” (Asking the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam change its name from Cam Lâm to Đường Lâm on 21 November 1964. In short, our research on the expression of Đường Lâm - Sơn Tây with the results of field research by Nguyễn Tùng, we can temporarily come to the conclusion that: during the history of two thousand years from the Han Dynasty until 1964, Đường Lâm Commune never seemed to be named Đường Lâm) (Trần Trọng Dương, Nguyễn Tô Lan (2011)). In this case, the name “Đường Lâm” may confuse readers, therefore the two writers’ argument make it easier for readers to refer to the correct place.

#### 4. Some suggestions for using referring expressions in social science articles

*Firstly*, a neutral, objective, and scientific style should be adopted in articles. Scientific texts need to describe, explain, and define phenomena as accurately as possible. Therefore, the author may consider using multiple active and passive complex sentences in which nouns, adjectives, the passive voice, and impersonal forms of verbs should be dominant. Depending on the nature of each article, an author may consider using the phrase “article” instead of “author” if the article deals with highly controversial issues. This helps the author avoid unnecessarily negative reactions from readers. In political writing, some words can also highlight the speaker's position; for example the word “*đế*” in “*Nam quốc sơn hà, Nam đế cư*” (meaning “the Southern Country Bestowed on the Southern King by

Heaven”). The speaker claimed to be worthy of the status of “*đế*” (i.e. king/emperor) which was the king or emperor, and superior to the title “*vuong*” (i.e. prince), and therefore on a par with other dynasties. As for scientific articles, the style needs to be objective, scientific, and unbiased.

*Secondly*, the author should distribute expressions of anaphoric and cataphoric references in a harmonious manner, and should not use too many expressions of anaphoric and cataphoric references. The proportion of referring expressions used in an article should, to some extent, be considered in the manuscripts, so that the author is able to know the degree of harmony between the components of the referring expressions. In the Vietnamese language, a referring expression can feature quite often in a paragraph, but in English, authors tend to use less repetition of words, often preferring synonyms instead. The use of only one personal pronoun in an entire paragraph to denote a person is often considered a poor writing style coupled with poor vocabulary, so an author needs to pay due attention to the use of various referring expressions. A good article often has a harmonious distribution of referring expressions, and to achieve this, it should be analysed with specific data so that the author can gradually edit it.

*Thirdly*, it is necessary to use a diverse selection of referring expressions, because they are one way to achieve text cohesion, in order to avoid unreasonable repetition of words and phrases. Referring expressions serve as connections between sentential components, paragraphs, and text elements. A good command of referring expressions will help the author connect ideas, indicate the right referent, and help the reader understand the text in a precise, unambiguous manner. Apart from explicit referring expressions, authors can utilise implicit referring expressions such as ellipsis to refer to sensitive issues. When Nam Cao wrote “*hắn*” (i.e. he/him), readers immediately think of Chí Phèo, although the pronoun “*hắn*” can refer to any male, and who is not too old. But in the short story of the same name (i.e. Chí Phèo), “*hắn*” can still only be Chí Phèo, because of the author's great dexterity in applying these expressions. Diversity in the use of referring expressions can help readers comprehend the text better (Tạ Văn Thông, 2001). In scientific articles, diversification of referring expressions can help readers more easily understand the content and the research problem.

*Fourthly*, the choice of descriptive referring expressions can help readers understand more deeply the author's intention about the referent. This is quite common because the way of addressing one another is limited to only seven personal pronouns in English, forcing an author to consider more descriptive forms of reference. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese system has many different personal pronouns that indicate the same person and are highly modal. However, one should avoid overusing pronouns. Descriptive referring expressions can help a passage be more flexible, avoiding word repetition and adding new expressive nuances to the referent on which the author wants the reader to focus. When referring to President Hồ Chí Minh, many authors use other descriptive referring expressions such as “*Bác*”, “*Vị lãnh tụ kính yêu*”, “*Người cha già dân tộc*” (i.e. Uncle, The Beloved Leader, The Old Father of the Nation, respectively). When coming

across such descriptive referring expressions the reader can immediately recognise the referent, and thus the effect of the author's text will be more impactful.

## 5. Conclusion

Research on referring expressions used in social science articles written in Vietnamese and English is not a new topic, but it is necessary to help one gain a further perspective on the strategy of using referring expressions in social science literature. Balanced use of referring expressions in an article makes the argument coherent. It helps readers quickly grasp the author's ideas and understand the scientific message being conveyed.

The word power of referring expressions used in articles published in the *Vietnam Social Sciences Review* is clear and positive, directing readers to better understand the message those authors wish to convey. Because an author's choice of referring expressions is more or less subjective, their influence on the reader through the choice of referring expressions also have a positive impact on the coherence and cohesion of the text. Therefore, further study of referring expressions at a deeper and broader level is a direction research needs to continue to take in the future.

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