Reference and Accessibility from a Givenness Hierarchy Perspective

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The notion of accessibility, in one sense or another, has played a central role in most accounts of discourse reference. While accessibility is rarely mentioned in research within the Givenness Hierarchy (GH) framework (Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski 1993 and other work), the GH has often been interpreted by others as an accessibility hierarchy, within the broader family of referential hierarchies that includes work of Prince (1981), Givon (1983), Ariel (1988) inter alia. In this paper, I will show how the GH is fundamentally different from these other referential hierarchies, both with respect to accessibility and in the kinds of assumptions and predictions it makes. While forms that are hypothesized to encode cognitive statuses on the GH as part of their conventional meaning may be characterized as constraining, and thus providing information about, manner of accessibility (specifically how/where the referent can be accessed in the hearer's mind), the GH itself is not a hierarchy of degrees of (ease of) accessibility in the sense of other referential hierarchies. I will discuss the implications of this distinction and the role of the GH as one of a number of interacting systems/factors that contribute to the production and interpretation of referring forms in natural language discourse, some of these grammar-driven and some determined by more general pragmatic/cognitive principles.