

## Deixis, indexicals and referring expressions

Deixis: the process of pointing via language

- deictic expressions = indexicals, are acquired early

types of deixis:

1. person deixis (*me, you*)
2. spatial deixis (*here, there*)
3. temporal deixis (*now, then*)

- most useful in face-2-face conversations: *I just found this here*

- most basic distinction in deixis:

near to speaker (proximal terms) vs. away from speaker (distal terms)  
**speaker = deictic center** (space/time)

- distal terms: can indicate **near listener** or **away from speaker and listener**, cf. Japanese

reflected in: demonstratives

## Types of deictic reference 1

**1. Person deixis:** in conversations constant shift of *I/you* (in L1 acquisition: phase of confusion)

- many languages include social status (higher vs. lower)
- indication of higher status: honorifics (cf. social deixis)

- German *du/Sie* contrast, aka T/V- distinction from
- French *tu/vous*
- Spanish *Usted* → 3rd person → indicates distance
- English *His excellence, please this way!*

3rd person distance: used in accusations  
*Somebody made a mess in the kitchen!*

**2. Spatial deixis:** modern English: *here/there*, but older forms are *yonder* (more distant from speaker)  
place + motion: *hither* (to this place),  
*thence* (from this place)

## Types of deictic reference 2

*This/here:* acquired early, can be seen, experienced because close  
*That/there:* acquired late

Deictic projection: (parked car) *I'm over there!*

- anthropological basis of spatial deixis: psychological distance  
→ physically close objects are psychologically close,  
→ some physically close objects can be psychologically distant  
(nasty food on plate) *I'm NOT going to touch THAT!*

### 3. Temporal deixis

*yesterday/tomorrow* – depend on knowing the utterance time

→ similar to spatial deixis, events are conceptualized as objects

tenses: present = proximal, past = distal

unlikely situations: marked distal *If I had 1mio \$...*

reported speech: I asked her if she was planning to go there...

→ focus shifts to new relative center

deictic expressions depend on: context, speakers intention;  
used for **relative** distance

## Referring expressions 1

**reference:** act from speaker to enable listener to identify something  
**referring expressions:**

- a.) proper nouns (Mary),
- b.) definite NPs (the pianist)
- c.) indefinite NPs (a woman)
- d.) PRO (she)

→ choice based on speaker's assumptions what listener knows

- shared knowledge in shared visual contexts: *Look at her/this!*
- shared memory: *Remember that weird guy in the first semester?*
- shared perception: invent names: *Mr Aftershave is late today*
- shared world knowledge: *We need to find a cop* (entity is unknown but can be assumed to exist)
- shared knowledge about descriptive properties:  
*He needs a rich wife* (who/whatever fits the description)

→ **successful reference is collaborative**

## Referring expressions 2

In discourse: **collaboration in reference**

- a.) intention to identify
- b.) recognition of intention

- context makes difference between persons/objects

person as object: *Can I borrow your Shakespeare?*

object as person: *Where is the lobster sitting?*

→ convention at work:

- a.) *Shakespeare takes up the top shelf*
- b.) *I hated Shakespeare at school*
- c.) *We're going to see Shakespeare in London*

→ pragmatic connection between proper names and objects

- invites listener to make expected inference

- role of co-text:
  - a.) *Japan wins world cup*
  - b.) *Japan wins trade talks*