

# COURSE: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

LECTURE 8: DEIXIS AND DISTANCE  
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# Deixis

- ▶ By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:
- ▶ A. Evaluate the term deixis
- ▶ B. Discuss the types of deictics
- ▶ C. show the relationship between deictics and distance

# RELATIVE DISTANCE

- ▶ Pragmatics is the study of relative distance
- ▶ What did we say about distance?
- ▶ Social, physical, implied
- ▶ Discuss some of the ways we express nearness or farness.

# Types of deixis

- ▶ Person deixis
- ▶ Spatial deixis
- ▶ Temporal deixis
  
- ▶ Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. NY: Oxford University Press. (pp.9-15)

# Deixis

- ▶ Deixis (or Indexicality) is the pointing function of language
- ▶ Deictic expressions shift their referents depending on who's speaking, with whom, where and when
  - Personal pronouns: **I, you, he, she, it**
  - Adverbials of time/place: **now, then; here, there**
  - Prepositions: **in front of, behind, above, beside**

# Deictic Expressions

- ▶ Cannot be interpreted unless the physical context is known.
- ▶ Examples: here, there, this, that, then, yesterday, as well as most pronouns, such as I, you, him, her them

# DEIXIS AND DISTANCE

- ▶ Deixis - a technical term (from Greek) meaning ‘pointing via language (things we do with utterances).
- ▶ Deictic expressions- any linguistic form used to accomplish this pointing.
- ▶ *What is that?* Indicates something in a context.
- ▶ Deictic expressions are also called indexicals.

# Deictics

- ▶ They include:
- ▶ Person deixis- we, us, me and you.
- ▶ Spatial deixis- location e. g there, here.
- ▶ Temporal deixis- time eg now, then

# Deixis

- ▶ These expressions depend, for their interpretation, on the speaker and hearer sharing the same context,
- ▶ They have their most basic uses in face to face/spoken interaction
- ▶ where utterances such as these are easily understood by the people present,
- ▶ but may need a translation for someone not right there

# Deixis

- ▶ I will put **this here**.
- ▶ Deixis - a form of referring that is tied to the speaker context
- ▶ Basic distinction between deictic expressions being 'near speaker' (proximal terms) and away from speaker (distal terms ).

# Deixis

- ▶ Proximal reference- this, here, now
- ▶ The away/ distal terms- that, there, then
- ▶ Proximal terms- typically interpreted in terms of the speaker's location or the deictic center.

# Person deixis

- ▶ Operates on a basic three part division exemplified in the pronouns.
- ▶ First person- *I*
- ▶ Second person -*you*
- ▶ Third person- *he, she, it*
- ▶ In many languages, these deictic categories of speakers, addressees and others are elaborated with **markers** of relative social status

# Person deixis

- ▶ Addressee with higher status VS addressee with lower status expressions that indicate higher status are described as honorific.
- ▶ Consider the use of the Swahili word ‘wewe’.
- ▶ Semantically, it means ‘you’; but who can use it to who?
- ▶ It cannot be used to address someone’s senior.
- ▶ Are there similar occurrences in your first languages?

# Person deixis

- ▶ Circumstances that lead to the choice of one of these forms rather than the other is sometimes described as ‘social deixis.
- ▶ A commonly known social contrast encoded in person deixis as in French’s *TU* and *VOUS*
- ▶ *TU*- informal
- ▶ *VOUS*- Formal

# Person deixis

- ▶ choice of one form (tu/vous) -communicates something about the speaker's view of his/her relationship with addressee.
- ▶ The higher, older, more powerful speaker-tend to use the **tu** version to a lower, younger and less powerful addressee and
- ▶ be addressed by the **vous** form in return

- ▶ *French*
- ▶ Es tu un eleve?
- ▶ Vous etes un enseignant?
- ▶ *Malagasy*
- ▶ Mpinatra ve **ela**? Are you a student? (ela- higher status addressor to lower status addressee)
- ▶ Mpampianatra ve **ena**? Are you a teacher?(elao- used by a lower status person to a higher status person)
- ▶ Kiswahili greeting
- ▶ Shikamoo
- ▶ Sasa

# SPATIAL DEIXIS

- ▶ Indicates the relative location of people and things
- ▶ English makes use of the adverbs *here* and *there* to indicate spatial deixis.
- ▶ Other spatial deictic expressions include: *come*, *go* etc
- ▶ **This** and **here**- near the speaker
- ▶ **That** and **there**- far from the speaker.

# Spatial deixis

- ▶ Pragmatically, there also exists Psychological distance.
- ▶ Physically close objects will tend to be treated by the speaker as psychologically close.
- ▶ Something that is physically distant will generally be treated as psychologically far.

# Spatial deixis

- ▶ However, a speaker may also wish to mark something that is physically close as psychologically distant e.g
- ▶ I don't like that (referring to a perfume being sniffed by a speaker).
- ▶ In pragmatic analysis, a word like *that* does not have fixed(i.e semantic) meaning.
- ▶ Instead, it is inverted with meaning in a context by a speaker.

# Spatial deixis

- ▶ More examples:
- ▶ Addressing the dead like: He/ she **is**..... Rather than He/she **was**.....
- ▶ The way readers talk about the writers as if they are in their environment : Achebe says/ tells us....

# Temporal deixis

- ▶ Relates to time references
- ▶ Now- indicates both the time coinciding with the speaker's utterance (proximal form)
- ▶ The distant expression 'then' applies to both the past and future time relative to the speaker's present time.
  - a. **November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963? I was in Scotland then. (past)**
  - b. Dinner at 8.30 Saturday? Okay, see you **then.**(future)

# Temporal deixis

- ▶ There are also elaborate systems of non- deictic reference such as calendar time, clock time etc
- ▶ Others include: yesterday, tomorrow, today, tonight, last week, last month, next week.
- ▶ All these expressions depend, for their interpretation, on knowing the relevant utterance time.
- ▶ Psychological basis- we can treat temporal events as objects that move toward us ( into view) or away from us ( out of view).

# Temporal deixis

- ▶ some metaphor used in English is of events coming towards the speaker from the future (the *coming* week; the *approaching* year)
- ▶ Going away from the speaker to the past e.g **in the days gone by; the past weekend.**
- ▶ Kiswahili: siku zijazo(the days to come)
  - ▶ Siku zilizopita ( wiki iliyopita) (days gone by (the past week)

# Temporal deixis

- ▶ We also treat the near or the immediate future as being close to utterance time
- ▶ Uses proximal deictic ‘**this**’ as in this (coming) weekend or this (coming) Saturday.
- ▶ English uses the present and past forms to mark temporal deixis

I live here now (present)

I lived there then (past)

# Temporal deixis

- ▶ Something that is treated as extremely unlikely (or impossible)
- ▶ from the speaker current situation is marked in the distal (past tense )form
- ▶ I could swim (when I was a child)- it happened
- ▶ I could be in Jerusalem (if I had money)

# Temporal deixis

- ▶ The past tense is always used in English in the -if- clauses that mark events presented by the speaker as not being close to present reality.
- ▶ If I had a yacht.....
- ▶ If I was rich.....
- ▶ These expressions are presented as deictically distant from the speaker's current situation.

# Deixis and grammar

- ▶ The deictic expressions of
- ▶ Person (you)
- ▶ Place (here)
- ▶ Time (this evening)
- ▶ Can all be interpreted within the same context as the speaker who utters them
- ▶ Direct speech- communicates a sense of being in the same context as the utterance.

# Deixis and grammar

- ▶ The distant deictics of indirect reporting (reported speech) reporting make the original speech event more distant.
- ▶ (You)Get out of my office!
- ▶ She told/ commanded/ asked her to /leave her office/get/go out of her office.

# Deixis and grammar

- ▶ The interpretation of these deictic expressions depend on the context, the speaker's intention and they express relative distance.
- ▶ **It seems like yesterday!**
- ▶ **What does EARLY mean to you?**
- ▶ Given their small size and extremely wide range of possibilities, deictic expressions always communicate much more than is said.

# Summary

- ▶ We have seen that deixis is pointing via language.
- ▶ The context is important in interpretation of the utterance meaning
- ▶ Deixis can be:
  - ▶ Person- people using pronoun and honorifics
  - ▶ Spatial - place
  - ▶ Temporal- time
- ▶ Distance can be proximal or distal
- ▶ Here, social distance is taken into consideration.

# Next lesson:

- ▶ In our next lesson, we shall look at
- ▶ Cooperation and implicature.