
Lecture 2

Context, Deixis and Reference

语境, 指示 与 指称

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Recap of last week's lecture

- Distinction between syntax and semantics/pragmatics
(study of structure vs. study of meaning)
- Distinction between semantics and pragmatics
(meaning in language vs. meaning in context)
- Central topics of pragmatic studies
(deixis, presupposition, conversational implicature and speech acts)

Today

- Basic concepts
 - Context
 - **Deixis** (指示语，指称语的一种)
 - reference
- Types of **deixis**
 - Person deixis
 - Spatial deixis
 - Temporal deixis
 - Discourse deixis
 - Social deixis
- **Deixis** and grammar

1. Definition of deixis

- The phenomenon of **deixis** (from *Greek*, meaning 'pointing' via language) constitutes the singlemost obvious way to show **how (situational) context determines meaning**.
- Any linguistic form used to accomplish 'pointing' is called a **deictic expression** (指示语), e.g. *you, I, s/he, this, that, here, there*
- 《百年孤独》第一段里写道：
“……世界新生伊始，许多事物还没有名字，
提到时需用手指指点点。”



1. Definition of deixis

- Any linguistic form used to accomplish 'pointing' is called a **deictic expression** (指示语),
e.g. **you come here now**.
 - Question: how many deictic words are there in this utterance?
- Deictic expressions are also known as **indexicals** or **indexical signs** (index finger: 食指).
 - **among the first words acquired by children.**
 - **used in face-to-face spoken interaction,**
 - They can be easily understood by the people *present* (but difficult for someone *not right there and then or in darkness*),
e.g., **I'll put this here** (Yule, 1996: 9).

2. Relationship between context and deixis

- **Deictic words** depend on **context** for meaning.

In this short dialogue

concerning birth control (计划生育), how many deictic words has been used by Jin Xing?



Question: What is context?

Situational context and linguistic context

- There are basically **two primary forms of context: situational context and linguistic context.**
 - **Situational context** (情景语境, 场合语境, 物理语境) refers to every *non-linguistic factor* that affects the interpretation of words, phrases, and utterances, such as *the lecture room where we are now*.
 - **Linguistic context** (语言环境, 上下文) refers to *the language surrounding the expression* in question.

Situational context (場合语境; 物理语境)

- Nearly **anything** can be a factor of **situational context**, *from the time of speaking to the people involved to the location of the speaker*, and so on.
 - *who is speaking*
 - *the time of speaking*
 - *the location of speaking*
 - *gestures or body language of the speaker*
 - *The topic of the discourse*

I'll put this here. (I? will (what is the time of speaking) ? this? here?)

Linguistic context (上下文)

- The words co-occurring with the expression in question.

The boy said *he* has five girlfriends.



Here, the pronoun *he* depends on a previously occurring expression *the boy* for meaning or reference: *The boy* is the antecedent of *he*, and they co-refer to the boy (note that ‘he’ is used **anaphorically** ‘替代’, **NOT deictically**, since it doesn’t involve a physical situation 物理环境).

- Try to understand the anaphoric expressions in the following utterance:

*Rooney cheated on his wife Coleen
when she was pregnant with their son.*

(from *Daily Mirror*)



Do we need help from non-linguistic factors to understand *his/she/their*?

Context is so powerful in helping us understand language.
Can it help to make sense of Chomsky's nonsense example?

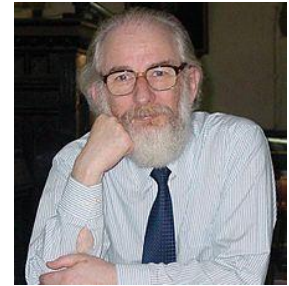
语境可以救乔姆斯基的例子吗？

- Noam Chomsky, 1957, *Syntactic Structures*:

Colorless green ideas sleeps furiously.

- David Crystal (1941-)

- British linguist, writer, broadcaster
- Awarded **OBE** in 1995 (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) 95年被授予不列颠帝国勋章（金庸先生也获得过）
- One of the world's most respected linguists, who once attempted to make sense of Chomsky's (1957) nonsense example. 世界上德高望重的语言学家，曾试图使乔姆斯基的荒诞例句变得有意义



Make sense of Chomsky's nonsense example in context

(Note that “**Green Ideas**” happens to be the name of a garden centre)

“Green Ideas” 碰巧是一个园艺中心的名字

Lady: *What a lovely name!*

DC: Yes, but **the ideas** don't seem to be very **green**, at this time of year.

Lady: No. They'll come, though. It's such a lovely climate here.

DC: They're rather **colourless green ideas**, in fact.

Lady: *(laughing)* That's true.

DC: *(still pushing)* Everything's still sleeping, at this time of year.

Lady: *It surely is.*

DC: **The colourless green ideas are sleeping**, indeed.

Lady: *Excuse me?*

DC: I said **the colourless green ideas are sleeping**.

Lady: *That's what I thought you said.*

DC: *(going for broke)* Mind you, I expect there's a tremendous amount of activity taking place, just beneath the surface. **The colourless green ideas are sleeping furiously**, wouldn't you say?

(Crystal, David. 2009. *Just a Phrase I'm Going Through*)

3. Reference (deals with the relation between language and the world)

- **The act of using a word/phrase to pick out something in the world** (Cf. **referent** ‘指代物’ : **the entity** picked out by the act of reference)
- **referring expressions (指称语):**
 - proper nouns (*Mike, Mary*)
 - definite NPs (*the linguist, the writer*)
 - indefinite NPs (*a linguist, a writer*)
 - pronouns (*he, she*)
- **choice of referring expressions is based on the speaker's assumption about what the listener knows.**
 - shared visual contexts: *Look at her/this!*
 - shared memory: *Remember that weird guy in the first semester?*
 - shared world knowledge: *We need to find a cop* (entity is unknown but can be assumed to exist)
- **Successful reference is collaborative.**
 - The speaker has the intention to refer
 - The addressee recognizes the intention and then identifies something

4. The deictic centre

■ proximal (近) vs. distal (远)

Since deixis is a form of referring that is tied to *the speaker's context*, there is a basic distinction between things '**near**' or '**away from**' the speaker.

- proximal terms: *this, here, now*
- distal terms: *that, there, then*
- These terms are defined in relation to the **deictic center** (指示中心):
 - central person** is the speaker
 - central time** is the time of utterance production
 - central place** is the speaker's location at utterance time
 - discourse center** is the point which the speaker is currently at in the production of his/her utterance
 - social center** is the speaker's social status to which the status of the addressee(s) is relative

5. Deictic usage

- **gestural**: terms used in gestural deictic way can only be interpreted with reference to an audio-visual-tactile(触觉), and in general, the physical monitoring of the speech event.

(with different gestures)

***This one's** genuine, but **this one's** fake.*

***She's** not my girlfriend. **She** is.*

- **symbolic** (使用语言等符号表示特定的人或物): **symbolic usages of deictic terms** require for their interpretation only knowledge of the basic spatio-temporal parameters of the speech event.

***This city** is really beautiful.* (general location is sufficient)

***You** can all come with me if you like.* (set of potential addressees)

*We can't afford a holiday **this year**.* (general time)

II. Types of deixis

- Person deixis
- Spatial deixis
- Temporal deixis
- Discourse/Text deixis
- Social deixis

1. Person deixis

- Any expression used to point to a person
- basic three-part division (Note that almost every single language does so): **speaker, addressee, others** (1., 2., 3. person)
- each person in a conversation constantly shifts from being **I** to being **you**
 - Children may go through stages of acquisition where this is problematic:
 - Son: Read **me** a story, Daddy.
Dad: Read **you** a story!

1. Person deixis

■ Inclusion/exclusion distinction:

- speaker and others ***without addressee*** vs. ***speaker and addressee included***, 'we'

Let's go to the cinema. = 'we-inclusive-of-addressee'

?*Let's go to see you tomorrow.* = 'we-exclusive-of-addressee'

(Levinson, 1983)

我们看电影去。 (addressee may or may not be included)

咱们看电影去。 (addressee must be included)

- Some languages grammaticalize this distinction (i.e., the distinction is conventionalized), e.g. **Fijian** (the language spoken by the nation of Fiji in South Pacific Ocean, whose word order is **VOS**)

keimami we excl.

keda we incl. (Yule, 1996)



2.Spatial/Space/Place deixis

- Words used to point to a location, e.g. *here*, *there*.
- locations can be specified relative to other objects or a fixed reference point.

The bus stop is 100 yards from *the South Gate*.

target location

reference point (参照点)

- Locations can be deictically specified relative to the location of participants.

The bus stop is 100 yards away. (away from participants)

- some pure place-deictic words: *here* and *there* (adverbs), *this* and *that* (demonstrative pronouns), which are organized in a proximal/distal dimension.

here = proximal (near); there = distal (more distant)

Bring that here and take this there.

2. Spatial/Space/Place deixis

- Languages do not organize demonstratives (指示词) in the same way.
- some languages have **demonstratives with three- or four-way distinctions** (how about Chinese?) on the proximal-distal dimension, e.g.
 - **Turkish**: ‘bu’ (close to speaker), ‘şu’ (close to addressee), ‘o’ (remote from speaker and addressee)
 - **Tlingit** (特里吉特语, 生活在阿拉斯加南部的美洲印第安人的语言): demonstratives distinguish between
 - *this one right here*
 - *this one nearby*
 - *that one over there*
 - *that one way over there*

2. Spatial/Space/Place deixis

- Some **verbs of motion**, e.g. *come/go*, retain a **deictic sense** (指示意义).
 - *He's coming* = he is moving **towards** the speaker's location.
 - *He's going* = he is moving away from the speaker's location.
 - *(i.e. A male person is leaving farther and farther from the speaker)*
 - *I'm coming* = the speaker is moving **towards** the location of the addressee *(i.e. the speaker is getting closer and closer to the hearer)*
 - **come** = movement towards **either** the location of the speaker, **or** towards the location of the addressee.

2. Spatial/Space/Place deixis

- **Deictic Projection:** location from **the speaker's perspective** can be fixed **mentally** as well as **physically** (Note that we usually locate things in the physical way).
 - The phrase *'I am not here now'* should be nonsensical. It is of course possible to say this on your answering machine, projecting that 'now' will apply **to** any time somebody calls and **not to** when the words are recorded (**projecting one's presence into the future and a different location**).
- **Psychological Distance** as the pragmatic basis of spatial deixis
 - **Physical and psychological distance often correlate with each other**, but deictic elements can be used to express psychological distance, e.g.
I'm NOT going to touch that ! (disgusting food on plate)

Therefore, **physically close** objects can be marked as **psychologically distant**.

Psychological distance

- We can understand movies better if we're sensitive to language use, e.g. the use of deictic words (指引词) like *this* and *that*

《美国丽人》



When do we use “this” and “that” to refer to a person or an object?

3. Time/Temporal deixis

- expressions used to point to a time (e.g. *now*, *then*, *yesterday*, *today*).
 - Proximal '**now**' indicates both the time coinciding with the speaker's utterance and the time of the speaker's voice being heard (the hearer's now).
 - Distal '**then**' applies to both past and future time relative to the speaker's present time.

*December 25th, 2005? I was in Scotland **then**.*

*Dinner at 8:30 on Saturday? Okay, I'll see you **then**.*

3. Time/Temporal deixis

- Temporal deictic expressions depend on knowing the relevant utterance time (Fillmore 1971).
 - Time when the utterance is made = **coding time** (CT)
 - time when the utterance is heard/read = **receiving time** (RT)
 - **Deictic Simultaneity**: CT = RT (in the canonical situation of utterance 说话时间亦即听话时间), e.g.
 - *It is cold outside.*
 - complication in written messages
 - Back in an hour*
 - Free Beer Tomorrow* (Yule, 1996)



In this case, a decision has to be made about whether the deictic center remains on the speaker (and CT) or is projected on the addressee (and RT).

3. Time/Temporal deixis

- Temporal events can be treated as objects that move towards us (e.g. *the coming years*), or away from us (e.g. *the past years*).
- Choice of tense expresses temporal deixis.
 - present tense is proximal: *I live **here** in Hangzhou now.*
 - Past and future are distal: *I lived **there then**/ I will be in London by **then**.*
 - conditional/unlikely event also treated as deictically distant: *I could be in Hawaii (if I had a lot of money).*

3. Time/Temporal deixis

- In both Chinese and Western cultures, the future is usu. considered to lie ahead (e.g. 展望未来 'look forward/look into the future'), and the past is behind us (e.g. 回首往事 'recall the past'). But, for the **Aymara people** [pronounced as **ajaju**], an ethnic group of 2 million people living in the Andes of South America, **the future is unseen and conceived as being behind the speaker**, whereas the past is in front since it has been witnessed.
- Thus, in both spoken and gestural terms, these people **point behind themselves** when discussing **the future**, and **gesture farther in front of them** when discussing **the past** (see *Science* , Vol.336: 411, 27 April 2012)



4. Discourse/Text deixis

- Use of expressions referring to a part of the discourse, e.g. *in the next chapter, in the last paragraph* (Cf. time deixis: *next week, last year*).
- In English discourse, there are many **words and phrases** that **indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse**:
 - but, therefore, in conclusion, to the contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all in all, so, after all*
 - all these words **make reference to a statement, sentence, etc. that was said before.**
- Discourse deictic words are very important in academic writing!

5. Social deixis

- Those expressions that encode the *social identities* of participants, or the *social relationship* between them
- **Honorifics** (敬语) : forms to show respect and social status, e.g. *Your majesty, Sir John Lyons*

- French: T/V distinction (*tu – vous*, etc.)
- Chinese: 你 (ni) – 您 (nin).

- **Absolute Social Deixis**

- **authorized speakers:** only certain types of speakers may use particular words/morphemes, e.g. **Hello/你好** is used by both men and women, but
 - Thai: ‘*khra**b***’ a politeness particle only used by **men**, ‘*khá*’ only by **women**
 - 男生说 “你好” สวัสดีครับ (sawadee khra**b**) 女生: สวัสดีค่ะ (sawadee kha)
- **authorized recipients:** only certain type of addressees may be addressed with certain words/morphemes, e.g. *Mr. President*



6. Deixis and grammar

- The basic distinctions presented here for *person*, *spatial*, and *temporal deixis* can be seen at work in a structural distinction made in English grammar, i.e. that between **direct** and **indirect speech** (Yule 1996).
 - The proximal deictic forms of a direct speech give the sense of being in the same context as the utterance.
 - When the context changes, the proximal forms will be shifted to the corresponding distal forms.
 - The distal deictic forms of an indirect speech reporting make the original speech event seem more remote.

Are you planning to be here this evening?

(DIRECT SPEECH)

I asked her if she was planning to be there that evening.

(INDIRECT SPEECH)

Summary

- Deictic expressions, which are a type of referring expressions, depend on situational contexts for their meanings.
- The pragmatic basis of temporal as well as spatial deixis is what is called 'psychological distance' (Note that physically close objects can be marked as psychologically distant).
- Shift from direct to indirect speech in languages like English usually involves shift from proximal forms to distal forms of deictic expressions.

Suggested Reading: Apart from Chen, pls read

Yule, G. 1996. *Pragmatics*, Chapter 2. OUP.

Huang, Y. 2007. *Pragmatics*, Chapter 5. OUP.

Lenz, F. 2003. *Deictic Conceptualization of Space, Time and Person*. John Benjamins.

Levinson, S. 2004. Deixis. In L. Horn (ed.), *The handbook of pragmatics*, pp. 97-121. Blackwell.

Homework

WTO = watch + think + others?

■ **Watch:** *My Fair Lady* (《窈窕淑女》, 爱奇艺、土豆网等有带字幕视频)

■ **Think:**

- Why are humans so sensitive to each other's use of language? (note that this is genuinely a thought-provoking question)
- Can you tell a story to illustrate how important context is?

■ **Other questions?**

