

Week 1: Show me something deictic

The terms *deixis* and *deictic* come from the Ancient Greek and Proto-Indo-European root (*)deik- ('show', 'point'), a very robust root.

The occidental term *indexical* in fact derives from the same PIE root.

It might be thought, then, that these terms have to do with showing and pointing – and they do.

Consider the definition of *deictic word* at about.com:

A word ... that points to the ... situation in which the speaker is speaking.

Do we usually say that words *point* (to something)? No.

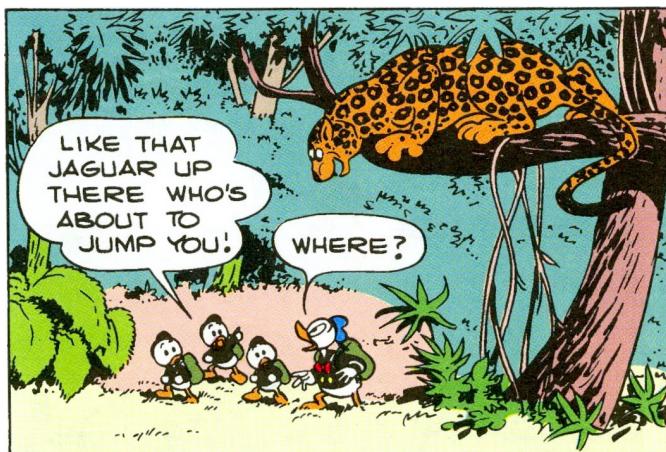
Words *mean* or *denote* something, or they *refer* to something (well, many do).

If they *point*, there is something special going on. The word *want* doesn't point.

But the words *I* and *you* could be said to point to something...

When we talk and use pointing gestures, how do we establish links between our verbal and nonverbal utterances, so that we are talking about what we are pointing at?

Put another way: can we use pointing gestures and talk simultaneously and coherently without using words that mean more or less the same as (or more than) the gestures?

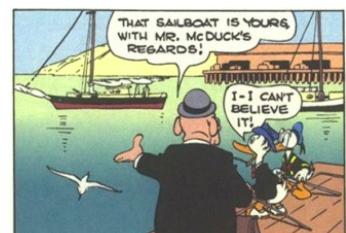


What is Obama saying?

How is he saying it,
intonationally?

If he were to point only while
uttering one word, would it
matter which?

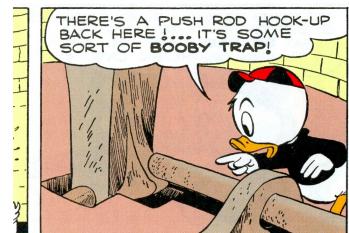
One answer: Jochen Raecke (1999) "Using Comics as Data for Research into the Connection between Pointing Gestures and Deictics"



How about this: we often use deictic words without pointing gestures, but we rarely use pointing gestures without also using deictic words?

(Note: 'pointing gestures' in a wide sense, including, e.g., eye-gaze and nodding.)

Are different deictic words different in this regard?



Some clearly deictic words are hardly ever accompanied by pointing gestures – *now*, for example.

When we report speech, do we ever report (replicate) pointing gestures? We might –

if the situation of utterance has not changed in the relevant regard. Or if it has changed in a manageable way. But mostly, we do not.

Kamp, Hans (1971)
"Formal properties of *now*",
Theoria 37: 227–273.

The deictic words encountered so far fit into this table:

personal	<i>I</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>(s)h</i>
demonstrative	<i>this</i>	<i>that</i>	
local	<i>here</i>	<i>there</i>	
temporal	<i>now</i>		

Where would the terms 'distal' and 'proximal' apply?

Which is the most often accompanied by some kind of pointing when uttered?
Which the least often? Try to range all on a scale!