

Spatial Deixis in Oral Communication. An Interactionist Point of View.

Think of a mundane conversation like sitting together around a table and talking to each other. Imagine that it becomes necessary or important for whatever reason to refer to something that is in front of the participants and, in principle, easy to notice. Take that as the natural pragmatic context in which pointing occurs, i.e. you might point (with the finger) to something that you have just noticed and take to be somehow 'informational' (*did you already notice this stain?*). Without further pondering you will then use expressions which support your pointing activities or are at least closely connected with pointing (such as *this*), which is why they are called 'demonstratives' or 'deictic' expressions. Linguists tend to define 'deictic' expressions by emphasizing their reference to the 'speech situation' (and its 'spatial parameters'). It is the speech situation that provides information which fills the open slots of deictic expressions. While appearing rather neat at a first glance, this theory turns out to be misleading in the end: Neither should the speech situation and its spatial surroundings be treated as (pre)givens, nor is the use of an expression such as *this* (as in our example) adequately described by stating that it 'points' to something. Even the extended forefinger does not point by itself but is part of a communicative practice that depends on familiarity with this practice. But what then does this practice consist of? And what is the genuine functionality of deictic expressions?

In my paper, I will introduce an interactionist point of view of face-to-face interactions. Restricting myself to deictic expressions within the *demonstration ad oculos et ad aures* I will argue that deixis contributes to the interactive achievement of the speech situation and the interactional space. The speech situation (of which space is a part) is not something that exists prior to interaction but is an interactive achievement in the strict conversation analysis sense. 'Situational anchoring' (=the achievement of the speech situation) usually depends on the multimodality of face-to-face interaction. Those present must not only listen to what has been said, but also make use of their sensory perception, including visual perception. In many cases, situational anchoring is accomplished by means of this multimodality of face-to-face interaction: It is achieved in terms of joint attention and mutually shared sensual perception. To allow for this achievement, the perception (for instance, to notice a stain on the tablecloth) has to become itself perceivable. This is exactly what deixis is made for. 'Pointing' then appears to be an everyday expression for symbolic devices of communication (verbal expressions and / or pointing gestures) that function as shifters in that they switch over to a non-symbolic communication channel. It is the mechanism for perceived perception that allows a participant's individual perceiving activity to become an interactionally relevant move. This is a basic mechanism essential for the interactive task of situational anchoring and helps to explain why deictic expressions are so omnipresent in face-to-face interaction.