

Week 2: Definitions and Deictic Diagnostics

Deictic expressions refer to some aspect of the situation of utterance – or something along those lines. But such definitions are not very useful for distinguishing between deictic and nondeictic expressions.

Utterance reports are a better tool, since they provide us with two different situations of utterance, and in a sense, expressions must choose which one to depend on.

“Indexicals are normally defined as expressions whose reference is fixed by the context of speech.” (Schlenker 2004: 279)

Taken in the strictest sense, this includes words like *now* and maybe also *today*, but excludes words like *yesterday* or *tomorrow*, yet these are indexicals too.

Taken in a looser sense, however – expressions whose reference is **determined** by the situation of utterance – the definition could include too much: all the words in (1) or (2).

(1) I’m right behind you.

(2) I’m stitching up your wound now.

Words like *behind* and *stitch up* are said to depend on the **world** for their denotation, but here, the world is right here in the utterance situation – indeed, it can be difficult to distinguish between situation and world as far as simple sentences are concerned.

We can get a more reliable working definition of deictic words, or indexicals, if we base it on their behavior in complex sentences, in particular, in **speech reports**.

(3) She said to me that she loves you.

What could she actually have said, to make (3) true?

She said to me: “ ... ”

There are two utterance situations involved here: the **source** situation, call it s , and the **current** situation, call it s_0 . Now if (3) is true, we have:

- the speaker of s = the subject of *said*
- the hearer of s = the indirect object of *said*



Schlenker, Philippe (2004)

“Context of thought and context of utterance: a note on free indirect discourse and the historical present”, *Mind and Language* 19: 279–304

*You think you lost your love
I saw her yesterday
It's you she's thinking of
She told me what to say
She says she loves you*

- the time and place of s = the time and place of the saying event

Let us say that the speaker of s is Sue, the hearer of s (= the speaker of s_0) is Paul, and the hearer of the current situation s_0 is John.

Crucially now, Sue could not have said “I love you” (to make (3) true) – why? Because *you* **always refers to the hearer of the current situation**.



Consider the other direction: Suppose John tells Sue (4) upon leaving and she reports this to Kate the next day – how?

(4) Close your eyes, let me kiss you; tomorrow I'll miss you.

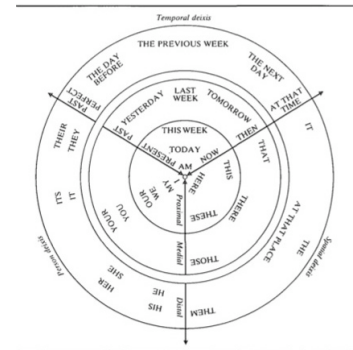
He told me ...



Let us adopt this as a working definition:

A deictic expression is one that may have to be replaced in a speech report.

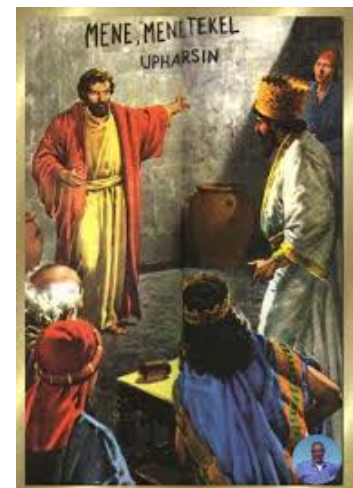
– “may have to be”? Somebody read through the pedagogical paper “[Teaching indirect speech: deixis shows the way](#),” by Ian P. Harman (in ELT journal 44 (1990): 230–238) (whence the ‘Deictic Circle’ was taken) and try to figure out “what went wrong” with Ariane’s statement ‘Carlos said that he had arrived there the previous week.’!



What is the 1st person pronoun / replaced by? In English, a 3rd person pronoun. But in some languages, a special form of 1st person pronoun, or (for *me*) a reflexive. Somebody read the first two pages of Clements (1975) and present us with a summary!

Daniel: “And these words mean that God has numbered your days as king.”

Daniel told the king that ...



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