

Week 5: Nonautomatic Deixis

Some deictics require reasoning: the context does not determine the reference on its own but in interaction with the interlocutors. Or, it does determine it but the meaning must be an intelligent function, modelling mental maneuvers.

And some expressions have deictic uses but also nondeictic ones.

3rd person personal pronouns – *she, it, he, they* – are normally used **anaphorically**, coreferring with discourse antecedents; but sometimes they are used deictically.

A definition of this use of *he* could be:

- $[[he]] = \lambda i \lambda j$ the male individual in *i*, if one and only one there is (undefined else)

But in the picture to the right, there are **4** male individuals. So we need something like:

- $[[he]] = \lambda i \lambda j$ the **most salient** male individual in *i*, if one there is (undefined else)

Salience now is something that is subject to **assessment**. It is not something that can be read off some table.

Consider also the plural 1st person pronoun, *we (us, our)*, consistently a deictic but far less 'automatic' than *I (me, my)*:

- (17) We love each other but we have nothing else in common
- (17) (so let's call the whole thing off.) /
- (17) (so I've called the whole thing off.) /
- (17) (so we could use some expert advice.)

Why is the addressee included in the referents in one case but not in the other two? Ultimately, because the utterance would be strange otherwise: it would violate a conversational maxim, or no felicitous speech act would ensue.

Cases like these have sparked criticism of Kaplan's picture among philosophers – e.g., Kent Bach (2005) argues that contexts do not determine what discretionary indexicals refer to, it merely enables audiences to figure it out.

Linguistic semanticists have tended to abstract away from these issues...

John Perry (2001) *Reference and Reflexivity*, Stanford: CSLI Publications – **discretionary indexicals**



"Context ex machina", in Zoltán Szabó (ed.), *Semantics versus Pragmatics*, Oxford: Clarendon, 15–44.

Deictic pronouns as determiners? Shocking thought! – by Paul Postal (1966)

“It’s an empirical business, this study of language. **We linguists** can be wrong about things, and evidence can be used to show it when we are.” (Geoffrey G. Pullum)

“**You musicians** will be missed.”

Helen de Hoop and Sammie Tarenskeen (2013) “It’s all about you in Dutch”

Wide uses of “you” and “they”:

(18) You don’t argue with a police officer.

(19) They’re reconstructing the railroad that runs through here.

The wide we: Gauguin’s *D’où venons-nous? Qui sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?*



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