Spatial Deixis
The Use of Spatial Co-ordinates in Spoken Language

Barbara Cairns

On this perfect day, when everything has become ripe and not only the grapes are growing brown, a ray of sunlight has fallen on to my life:

(Ecce Homo. F. Nietszche)

The idea of a speaker 'pointing out' something in space or time in order to draw the attention of the addressee to it is basic to both spatial and temporal deixis (see e.g. Lyons 1977, Fillmore 1982b, Lakoff 1987). The reason why it has come to be represented by a specific linguistic category and thus has special terminology is that all languages in some way or another allow for the 'pointing out' feature to be incorporated into their grammar. As we shall see, not all languages make the same distinctions with regard to deixis, but nevertheless it features to some extent in every natural language. The present essay will concentrate specifically on spatial deixis with examples from spontaneous spoken dialogue in English.

Deixis is particularly important in dialogue because it serves to hold the participants to a specific point in time and space. Without such anchorage every dialogue would appear to be a loose collection of disconnected utterances – which it clearly is not. The dialogue gains its significance within a given context partly from the deictic references which connect it to that context.

The general consensus amongst linguists is that spatial deixis is somehow more basic in language than temporal deixis and that the temporal use is related to the spatial by a general 'principle of localization' (Lyons 1977: 669 although Levinson 1983 disagrees with such an analysis). It will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

Fillmore 1982b:37 describes spatial deixis as:

> that aspect of deixis which involves referring to the locations in space of the communication act participants; it is that part of spatial semantics which takes the bodies of the communication act participants as significant reference objects for spatial specification.

The devices used to encode deictic information in language are systems of demonstratives (in English *this/that*), prepositions and other locating expressions (*here/there; in front of/behind*), personal pronouns (*I/you*) and systems of motion verbs. These grammatical elements have other functions besides their deictic ones but the deictic category of use can be distinguished from the other uses. Although they are referential, deictic terms do not usually include any identifying information about individuals – *this* man, *that* phone box. They tell us about the location of the individual in space and time but not about size, shape, colour etc. although there is nothing to say that there might not exist such deictics in some language or other.

The development of deictic reference in children is discussed by, amongst others, Quine 1960:101. All deictic reference originates in the child as ostensive definition = definition by pointing. When the child points at something and utters e.g. the word *teddy* he is referring to something which is "integrated into a cohesive spatiotemporal continuity." But in learning the indicator words (demonstrative *this/that*) the child learns "a higher-level technique: how to switch the reference of a term according to systematic cues of context or environment." These words are therefore acquired by the child at a later stage of development than words for objects, since deixis involves more complex concepts and relations.

Central to the concept of deixis as a whole is what Lyons calls the 'canonical situation of utterance' which is basically egocentric. "The speaker is at the zero point of the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the deictic context". This could be visualised as two axes, one for time and one for space, with the speaker at the point of intersection; cf. also Rommetveit 1974:36 on the spatial – temporal – interpersonal co-ordinates of the speech act. Locations in the utterances of the speaker are then relative to the speaker's rather than the listener's position on the spatial axis at the time of utterance. As speakers alternate their turns in a dialogue the deictic centre shifts accordingly. It is of course possible for the speaker to relate locations to someone or something other than himself, *taking the part of the other* (Rommetveit 1974:76) but this information must then be specified in speech. Although as Rommetveit points out this is only ever partially, temporarily shared knowledge by the participants.

Langacker 1983:148 refers to the 'transfer principle' which underlies the use of many deictic terms – "in construing a situation for linguistic purposes the speaker is able to conceptualise how it would appear from different

vantage points and to portray it accordingly, irrespective of his actual vantage point."

Part of the meaning of e.g. adverbial *here* derives from the situation of use and therefore refers to something different every time it is used. Without this situational element of meaning *here* conveys no information to an addressee. The speaker and addressee find themselves occupying a mutual space and use this space and its boundaries as their terms of reference. When a speaker says *Let's sit here*, he is referring to a location which is identical to (or close to) where he himself is at the time of speaking, as opposed to *there* which would be a location at some distance away from himself (but within view). Common to all verbal expressions of spatial deixis is the fact that they may be accompanied simultaneously, even in adult speech, by non-verbal gestures of pointing, hence Lakoff's 'pointing-out ICM' (see later). Talmy 1988 refers to an imagined mental demarkation line separating *here/there* or *this/that*. This might be a useful concept for English which divides space in terms of a binary opposition, but it would lead to problems for other languages which divide space in a different way. Theoretically in English there is no space between *here* and *there*, but there are languages with more complex divisions of space e.g Latin had a tripartate system, as did an older form of English, now retained only in certain northern dialects *here/there/yon*.

Bloomfield 1933:259 cites the Kwakiutl language (Amerindian: British Columbia) which has the same distinction as English *this/that* but "doubles the number by distinguishing between 'in sight' and 'out of sight'". Eskimo also adds to the basic distinction with information about points of the compass, land/sea opposition etc.: [manna] = this one, [panna] = that one in the east, [kanna] = that one down there, [sanna] = that one down in the sea. If anything they are thus even more dependent on the situation of use for a part of their meaning.

It is interesting to compare English and Swedish which differ in their encoding of deictic information, although historically English has had a similar system to the Swedish one. In modern English, however, the number of deictic distinctions appears to have been reduced. In addition to the two adverbials of place – *här/där*, which are the equivalent of English here/there, Swedish also has the adverbials *hit/dit*. Thus Swedish encodes in its deictic adverbials information not only about proximity but also about direction, more specifically GOAL. *Hit/dit* are used not only to indicate the

proximal relation of an entity to the speaker in the situation -of- utterance, but they also indicate the end GOAL of the verb e.g.

> kom *hit!* 'come here'

> när jag kom *dit* var han redan borta
> 'when I got there he was already gone'

In fact English has also had a similar system at some time – *hither/thither* being equivalent to modern Swedish hit/dit, but no longer makes use of this distinction. *Thence* 'from there', *whence* 'where from' are also forms which are no longer used in English but formerly encoded information about direction as part of their deictic interpretation. The lexical items for expressing the direction distinction in English have become obsolete although it is not clear why this should have happened. It may be that *hither/thither* were only ever used in formal or literary situations and since communication and social interaction has generally become a much less formal affair they have been made redundant by the acceptance of a more frequent use of non-verbal indication – pointing, nodding etc. (a tentative suggestion only.)

Lakoff 1987 finds that there is a prototypical case of deixis – the Central Deictic Construction – from which other cases of deixis are derived. The full representation of what he refers to as 'the pointing-out ICM' (idealised cognitive model) is extremely detailed in both syntactic and semantic respects. This is the prototype case of deixis, the simple clause/sentence which essentially contains a deictic locative adverb (*here/there*): *There's Harry!* He then lists and illustrates a number of non-central deictic constructions which are variations on the basic one:

> perceptual (non-visual): *there's the phone*
> discourse: *here's the best bit*
> existence: *there goes your last chance*
> delivery: *there you go!*
> paragon: *now there's a nice one*
> exasperation: *there he goes again*
> etc.

The reason that we as listeners recognise all of the variations as in some way pointing something out to us as opposed to having some other function in the language situation is by reference to the prototype, the basic case.

They all require the location of speaker/addressee to be fixed in relation to the entities being referred to at the time of utterance.

We have said that the 'canonical situation of utterance' is the zero-point of deixis. This is the point of explicit anchorage in a dialogue (Östman 1981:6). What is most relevant in this situation for the understanding of deictic expressions such as *here/there, this/that* has generally been taken to be the feature of 'proximity' in relation to the speaker. Fillmore 1982b (see also Lyons 1975) describes a system for English which he would place within a larger system of 'Frame Semantics' (Fillmore 1982a) where deictic expressions are marked for the proximity feature :

> D/ [+ proximal]   D/ [- proximal]
> *here*   *there*

As we have already said, there are other languages which require a more detailed distinction than the binary one, although Fillmore doubts that any language makes use of more than three basic spatial categories:

D/ [proximal], D/ [medial], D/ [distal]

Instead of differentiating two groups of languages like this it might be more economical to say that English and other languages with only binary distinction fit into the same group as the others but are marked only for [proximal] and [distal] and that the [medial] is lacking in such languages.

Lyons 1975 similarly suggests a lexical entry for the adverbial *there* which makes use of the proximity feature:

> | | + D |
> |--------|--------------|
> | *there* | - ENTITY |
> | | - PROXIMATE |
> | | + DISTAL |

The criterion of proximity is not without problems, and not all linguists agree that it is this particular aspect which is basic to all deictic expressions. Kirsner 1979 presents evidence from Dutch which shows that the proximate-distal axis is not the most relevant factor in distinguishing between the demonstratives *deze* 'this' and *die* 'that', as has traditionally been assumed. He suggests instead that there is HIGH deixis and LOW deixis and what distinguishes them from one another in discourse are the BACKGROUNDING/FOREGROUNDING of information, plus the NOTE-WORTHINESS value a speaker places on whatever he is pointing out.

It could be argued nevertheless, that Lakoff's prototypical Central Deictic Construction, which is proximal/distal in orientation, lies at the centre of even the counter-examples provided by Kirsner. Certainly the backgrounding/foregrounding of information has a proximal/distal element to it with relation to the speaker and addressee, on one level at least. The attention-drawing function is then a second function of deixis, parallel to the proximity marking distinction.

In fact the backgrounding/foregrounding of information is relevant in discourse as a whole, not only with regard to deixis, and has been treated quite often in the literature by e.g. Givón 1980, Lakoff 1987, Langacker 1983 and Fillmore 1982b:

> A Locating Expression, then, is an expression by which a figure is said to be at a Place identified with reference to a Ground. In the particular case of *deictic* Locating expressions, the Ground is the speaker's (or in some cases the hearer's) body.

As many linguists have pointed out, linguistic communication takes place in a face-to-face situation and many of the apparent 'problems' in linguistic interpretation only arise when the language in question is taken out of its situation of use and studied in a vacuum. It is particularly important to bear this in mind when thinking about deixis. Take, for example, the following extract from a spontaneous dialogue (Cairns 1991):

I. tell me where you've been on holiday
A. erm been to Skurup
I. where?
B. Skurup in the south of Sweden
I. I know where it is I live in Lund I'm from Lund
A. do you? we went *there* as well
I. did you? we'll have to sit round *here* on the...

There are two adverbials of place italicized in the text. Although their functions are different they are both referring to something. What differentiates them is that *there* refers back (anaphorically) to the previous mention in the text of a place – Lund. *Here*, however, is not interpretable outside the actual situation-of-utterance and as analysts-after-the-event we do not have the additional visual information which we would require in order to interpret it. The speaker is referring to a space in her vicinity by non-verbal as well as verbal signing. This particular example provides a

very good illustration of how the deictic expresson is anchored to the utterance situation at the time and in the space in which it occurs.

The backgrounding/foregrounding of information is marked phonologically by increased stress on the deictic expressions. Lakoff 1987:468 notes that stress can be (and often is) carried by the deictics *this/that* and *here/there*, whereas the existential there e.g. *there's a girl in my soup*, cannot bear stress. The reason why the deictics carry stress is that it is an intrinsic part of their pointing out function. They pick out a specific object or bounded space from its surrounding space in order to draw attention to it. For the purposes of intonation Gibbon 1983:202 identifies:

i. simple deictic function – "provision of spatiotemporal orientation points for spatial matching and temporal synchronisation of the indexical co-ordinate systems of speaker and addressee".

ii. demonstrative function – "attention-drawing to some of these orientation points"

Now THERE'S *a good idea* – this would be an example of the extended use of deictic pointing from the Central Deictic Construction, which Lakoff calls the Paragon-Intonation Construction. Ideas cannot literally be pointed at as taking up a specific part of space, but in a dialogue the above utterance would be pointing back in time and away from the speaker, so there is indeed a sense in which the usage is recognisably deictic.

Lakoff 1987:517 derives the discourse deictic from a metaphor of discourse as follows:

> a. immediately past discourse is in our presence at a distance from us
> b. discourse in the immediate future is moving towards us

On the basis of some kind of metaphor like this we refer to other parts of the dialogue with pointing-out expressions in the same way in which we point out entities or places in the world.

In the following extract of dialogue the demonstrative *that* is italicized:

B. go back to college yeah do A-levels A-level media studies
I. what's *that*?
B. it's er camerawork theatre er lighting and everything so...
I. *that*'s interesting
B. yeah
I. are you gonna work for the B.B.C.?
B. yeah
I. niiiice!

The use of the [+distal] demonstrative *that* in both cases relates back to what has previously been said in the discourse and confirms the metaphor of immediately past discourse being at a distance from the speakers. The first use of *that* has a fairly narrow reference in the text – media studies. The second occurrence has a wider reference and refers not only to the previous utterance but also to the idea itself, so in some ways it refers simultaneously to something outside the dialogue.

By contrast,in the next example of dialogue the deictic *this* is pointing to an item of clothing which the speaker himself is wearing:

I. no so you didn't buy anything there really you didn't buy anything?
B. this tee-shirt

The utterance of the deictic expression was accompanied by a non-verbal pointing gesture. In adults, non-verbal gesturing is usually regarded as a secondary, back-up function to the verbal. But in this particular case, and in similar ones, it could be that the situation is reversed and that the verbal is secondary to the non-verbal. Pointing alone would provide enough information, the verbal back up provides nothing new – it simply fullfills the social requirements of conversation. The proximity to the speaker is obvious since he was pointing at himself and is not being used here to mark this particular tee-shirt out in opposition to some other tee-shirt. Thus the deictics do sometimes have rather weak uses (cf. Kirsner above), nevertheless it is proximity to the participants in the speech act which determines the use of *this* as opposed to *that*.

Conclusions

The evidence from the use of deictic expressions in spontaneous dialogue points to the validity of the use of the proximal/distal continuum as the basic criterion for spatial deixis. Even when speakers are using deixis purely to draw attention to something without making specific spatial reference, the prototypical [± proximal] use seems to be basic even to such usage.

Speakers can also distance themselves mentally from things by discriminate use of the deictics: compare the difference between (i) *here's a good film* with (ii) *there's a good film*, said by one of two speakers looking at the entertainments page of a newspaper and trying to decide which film to see. The first utterance somehow implies that the speaker is accepting more responsibility for the finding of the information than the second one.

Even temporal deixis can be related to the more basic spatial deixis by regarding time as an axis where the speakers are at the 0 point – past time and future time are then increasingly distant from the speakers on a continuum which is spread across space. Speakers tacitly agree to divide up space between themselves in a mutually convenient way which is compatible with the particular linguistic system with which they are familiar. Not all languages utilize the concept of space in the same way, as we have seen (nor time for that matter), but the deictic system forms a fundamental axis for dialogue in all natural languages and is clearly deserving of further linguistic investigation.

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Who Takes Whom?
Response-Analysis of Mother-Child Interaction[1]

Boel De Geer

Certain aspects of the interaction between internationally adopted children and their mothers
are described, such as choice of interactive strategy, patterns of responsiveness, use of
different utterance functions and syntactic form of utterances. These patterns are studied
developmentally and compared to behaviour in non-adoptive dyads. Furthermore, it is
shown that differences between mothers' performance are not only a matter of individual
style, but also a result of the children's behaviour.

Introduction

Mother-child interaction has become an increasingly popular topic of
investigation during the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's. This study
deals with a special kind of mother-child interaction – namely of dyads
where the mother and the child are complete strangers to each other. This
kind of dyad constellation can be found in families who have adopted a child
from abroad. In such a family the child and the mother are strangers to
each other both in the sense of acquaintance and lack of a common and
continuous background and in the sense that they speak different languages.
The internationally adopted child is a language switcher, at whatever age the
adoption takes place.

Ever since international adoptions (IA) started in the 1950's, Sweden has
been a major adopting country. There are now over 30,000 people in
Sweden who have been adopted from abroad and the yearly number of
children arriving is approximately 1,000. The most important countries of
origin are at present Korea, India and Columbia. For a review of the adop-
tion procedure in Sweden and its participants and consequences as well as a
presentation of previous research within the field, I refer to De Geer 1990.

Interaction in IA dyads

There are many interesting aspects of the interaction between IA mothers
and children. In this study I have concentrated on the following: