DEIXIS AS A STRATEGY FOR EXCLUSION IN INFORMAL INTERACTIONS

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Abstract
Deictic expressions are those linguistic forms employed to realize 'pointing' via language. They depend for their interpretation on the speaker and hearer sharing the same context. They have their most basic uses in face-to-face inter- actions where utterances are more easily understood by the people present. In language use there are issues that are private to people and so in the course of verbal interactions between individuals, other people could eavesdrop and share information not intended for them. The need therefore arises for a means of maintaining secrecy in informal interactions apart from whispering or speaking in low tones. The study seeks to find out the functions that deictic expressions perform apart from pointing, the peculiar feature of deictic expressions that lend them as tools for preserving privacy and the impact of deixis as a strategy for exclusion in informal interactions. To carry out this research, an unobtrusive participant observation method was adopted using the tape recorder. Findings revealed that apart from performing the functions of pointing, deictic forms were used by participants in the discourse in the various informal situations as a means of exclusion to persons who were not party to the discourse. Most expressions used to maintain secrecy in the informal interactions therefore were deictic in nature.

Introduction

Deixis means pointing via language. (Yule 9) Any linguistic form employed to realize this pointing" is referred to as a deictic expression such as the personal pronouns ('you', 'me'). The purpose of deictic elements in an utterance is to link aspects of the meaning of the sentence containing them to the context in which they are uttered, either spatially, temporarily or in terms of the participants in the discourse (Cann qtd in Ezeifeka 91) Pragmatic meanings according to Grundy (22) are determined by contexts as it relates to deictic reference where the critical contextual element is the point of origin of the utterance. Context is very important in the interpretation of utterances. Deictic expressions are only meaningful when the context is known. They are tied to the context of use. When utterances are placed in their proper contexts they yield meaning. Context is about understanding or having an interpretation of what things stand for in a given situation. It helps to determine reference in language use. It is what gives our utterances their intended meaning. The relevant facts of the context of an utterance are required before the meaning is interpreted. Context is user-oriented and so it (context) can be expected to differ from user to user and from user group to user group. Context is very necessary because it allows us to use our linguistic resources to the utmost without having to spell out all the details each time we use a particular construction. Deictic expressions which are context-determined could be employed as a strategy for exclusion in language use. Conversation, which is an informal talk involving two or a small group of people, provides the necessary environment for the use and evaluation of these linguistic phenomena in communicative terms.

Research Problem

In the course of conversation between individuals, situations may arise where there is need to keep from a third party the knowledge of vital information which they share. Some linguistic forms are employed to obscure meaning in such situations. This research investigates the strategy adopted by interlocutors in informal discourse to safeguard their privacy without having to resort to speaking in low tones or whisperings.

Research Questions

The following research questions helped to provide dare for the study which served as a guide:

    i.   What other functions do deictic expressions serve apart from pointing?

ii.   What peculiar features of deictic expression lend them as tools for preserving privacy?

iii. What are the impacts of deixis as a strategy for exclusion in informal interactions?

Objectives

The purpose of this research is to identify and examine the deliberate use of deictic expressions as a strategy for exclusion by interlocutors in informal conversations and also to determine the impact of such in informal interactions.

Research Methodology

The methodology adopted for this research is conversational analysis based on unobtrusive method of participant observation using the tape recorder. Various informal interactions at various locations were used as instruments for data collection. Some of them were gathered from students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, an office in the same university, a restaurant in the town, between a couple in their home, at a wedding ceremony, among passengers in a bus etc. To determine the use of deixis as a strategy for exclusion in such informal interactions, excerpts were collected from the recorded conversations and analyzed.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Social Exclusion by Gary Runcinan and Peter Townsend was adopted. It highlights the interconnectedness of various forms of disadvantage and the profound impact that exclusion can have on individuals and communities.

The Concept of Deixis

Deixis is a Greek word for pointing, showing or indicating (see Levinson (54)) and Finch (214). It is the phenomenon of encoding contextual information using lexical or grammatical distinctions which provide this information only when paired with this context (Jaszcolt 191). Grundy (22) points out that such uses of language pick out a person, a place and a time which can only be determined by someone either present when the exchange occurred or informed of the context in which it took place. The critical contextual element is the point of origin of the

utterances. Deictic expressions sometimes referred to as indexical in pragmatics are those expressions in language use which cannot be interpreted unless the physical context of the speaker is known such as the pronouns I, you, he, she, it, this, that, there, etc. The contrasting special functions of the demonstratives 'this' and 'here' and 'that' and 'there' usually refer to objects and locations proximal and those not proximal to the speaker. The function of deixis in language use usually is held to be to anchor the utterance to the speaker at the moment of speaking (Fillmore, Lyons and Levinson qtd in Brown (108). It is the most evident way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in structures of languages themselves.

Lyons, cited in Levinson (54) observes that the fact of deixis should serve as a pointer, especially to theoretical linguists, of the simple but immensely important fact that natural languages are basically designed for face-to-face interactions and so the extent to which they can be analyzed without taking this into consideration is limited. This according to Yule (129) means that deictic expressions are those words th at cannot be interpreted at all unless the physical context is known. These are words like here, there, this, that, now, then, yesterday, the following day as well as pronouns such as I, you, him, them, etc. Some sentences are impossible to understand if we do not have related information like who is speaking, about whom, where and when.

For example: you will have to tell him that tomorrow because he isn't here now. When used out of context this sentence is extremely vague. It contains a large number of expressions (you, him, that, tomorrow, here, now) which depend for their interpretation on the immediate context in which they were used. Linguists acknowledge that the most important function of language is the communication of information. Brown and Yule (2) cite Bennet as remarking that communication is primarily a matter of speaker seeking either to inform a hearer of something or to enjoin some actions upon him. They add that "one of the pervasive illusions which persist in the analysis of language is that we understand the meaning of a linguistic message solely on the basis of the word and structure of the sentences used to convey the message (223).The meaning of the words and structure of the words so formed while making sense to the addressee may be lost on a by-stander for whom the message is not intended. Such a person by chance or by design has been excluded from the discourse. Such expressions give instruction to the addressee that context has to be consulted in order to grasp the meaning of the utterance. Deixis is used to point to things ('it'. this', 'these bags') and people ('him', 'her', them' 'those drivers') often referred to as

person deixis. Words or phrases used to point to a location such as 'here, 'there', near' that are examples of spatial or place deixis while those used to point to a time such as 'now', 'then', 'yesterday', 'last week' are instances of temporal deixis. All these deictic expressions can only be interpreted in terms of which person, place or time the speaker has in mind. They are mostly used in face -to- face spoken interactions where utterances are easily understood by people present. A distinction can also be made between what is marked as close to the speaker such as 'this', 'here', 'now' and what is distant such as 'that, 'there', then' etc. Deictic expressions, according to Yule (131), can also be used to indicate whether movement is away from the speaker's location with a word like 'go' or towards the speaker's location when the word 'come' is used. If a person is looking for someone and he /she appears moving towards the person, that person can say 'Here he/she comes', If however he/she is moving away from the person in the distance, the person will say 'There he/she goes.

The Concept of Exclusion

Oyelaran explains the concept of exclusion to mean "a conscious denial of 16 participation to persons well placed to be party to an operation"(23). He notes that although any denial whatsoever carries with it a notion of violence, violence in his intended sense will include any act of injustice which diminishes the victim in any sense. This exclusion as denial of participation includes and goes beyond "physical force out". He notes further that Kings and his co-researchers identify three degrees of exclusion in the American educational system-primary, secondary and tertiary exclusion. While tertiary exclusion according to him, involves physical removal from the classroom situation, the other two do not; but their effect may be psychologically more devastating. In his own study, the categories of exclusion mentioned apply to the phenomenon of the "exclusion of Nigerians from participation in the activities which alone can promote the socioeconomic development of Nigeria." In his opinion, the vast majority of Nigerians are excluded in the primary sense from participating in the productive life of the nation. This 'minority' by virtue of their being able to read and write the English language according to him, strip the non-educated Nigerians of "their meanings, values and activity in those undertakings geared to the promotion of the Nigerians perceived well- being."(24) To be excluded in the intended sense in this present study means that one is denied the background information necessary for the interpretation of an utterance or not a party to the speech event.

This implies that the act of exclusion using deixis could also be done intentionally by parties in an exchange to obscure meaning or maintain secrecy from a third party or one not a party to the discourse.

Deixis as a Strategy for Exclusion in Informal interactions

In every day interactions language is employed for expression of ideas, feelings and emotions and for several other purposes, Language according to McLaughlin (19) "is the system of arbitrary verbal symbols that speakers put in order according to a conversational code to communicate ideas and feelings or influence the behaviour." He adds that in communicating our ideas, the mode or manner of expression can vary from speaking to writing. Wardhaugh for his part defined language as "what the members of a society speak."(1) Speech according to him can take very many different forms. He observes that a close look at language will disclose that there is a considerable internal variation and that speakers make constant use of the many different possibilities offered to them. No one, he points out, speaks the same way all the time and people constantly exploit the nuances of the language they speak for a variety of purposes. Language use according to Wardhaugh (5) is influenced by cultural requirements. Within society, there are certain conventions on how to live life and the need to safeguard our secrets. Such conventions within the social system, as asserted by Sapir in Wardhaugh (216), influence our language use. There are positive or noble issues that people may want others present to note or acclaim when they are engaged in discourse. In such instances those issues are publicized or made open. For example, when one wins a prestigious prize or buys a new car or bags a degree in academics, it is normal within some cultures like ours that such feats be publicly acclaimed.

On the other hand, there are issues or acts that society by convention may not approve or people may consider as being private to them. Such unconventional behavior includes the use of hard drugs, engagement in pre-marital or extramarital affairs, stealing or other societal ills. To conceal reference to such issues or other private matters from a third party in the course of informal discourse, deictic expressions could be intentionally employed for the purpose of exclusion.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Location1- Within the campus)

Student A: While we were there, that tall guy said it will soon end.

Student B: I sincerely hope it does.

In this exchange the researcher who happened to be standing by the students did not know who student A's use of 'we', 'there', 'that tall guy' and 'it' referred to as well as student B's reference to 'it'

Location 2-Another spot within the campus)

Student C: How much will it cost him to buy that thing?

Student D: I don't really know the prize now.

In this exchange also, the researcher who was in the scene of the conversation did not understand Student C's reference to 'him' and 'that thing'.

(Location 3- Wedding Ceremony)

Lady l: When I got there, I was shocked to see what she did to that poor girl.

Lady 2: She is really heartless.

In this talk exchange, the researcher though present at the scene of the discourse, did not know who Lady I's use of 'there', 'she' and that girl' referred to.

(Location 4 - Restaurant)

Woman A: I heard that she is now living in Lagos.

Woman B: It was because of that incident that happened that made her to leave his house.

Again in this exchange, the researcher is not able to tell woman A's reference to 'she' nor Woman B's reference to 'that incident', as well as 'her' and 'his' as used in the discourse.

(Location 5– Passengers in a bus)

Passenger A: When did he say he will go there?

Passenger B: He said that it is after they have discussed with them.

Also in this interaction, the researcher did not have the least idea who passenger

A's 'he' referred to nor passenger B's reference to 'they' and 'them'.

(Location 6- office setting)

Staff 1: His boss came in just as the girl was about to leave.

Staff 2: What did he do after that?

In this exchange also, the researcher cannot tell who staff 1's use of 'his' and the 'girl" refer to.

(Location 7-Couple in a family setting)

Husband: That was how he died. By the time he got to her house, she had gone.

Wife: That was very strange.

In this interaction as well, the researcher who entered the home of the couple in the middle of the conversation did not know who the Husband's use of 'he' in the two instances and 'her and 'she' refers to. In all of these excerpts, the researcher, because she did not understand the reference made in each case, was excluded from the knowledge of such references.

(Location 8- Market Scene)

Buy: How much did you say you will sell it?

Seller: The last prize is #50

In this interaction, the researcher who was passing by did not have an idea what the item referred to as 'it' was since the trader many items on display.

(Location 9-In a Commercial bus)

Passenger: Driver please remember to stop me when you get there.

Driver: No problem.

In this exchange, the researcher who did not board the bus the same time with the passenger in question did not have knowledge of the place referred to as 'there'.

(Location-10 In a friend's house)

Friend: Have you called her?

Maid: Yes ma, she is on her way.

In thisinteraction, the researcher, who just entered the friend's house, did not have an idea who was referred to as 'she' and 'her'.

Findings

From the analysis of the exchanges recorded from the different settings it is obvious that apart from performing the function of pointing, the use of deictic forms by the participants in the discourses in the various informal situations served as a means of exclusion by chance or by design to persons who were not party to the discourses. This is because they did not have knowledge of who the references were unless they were supplied with the information. The use of deictic forms underlines the critical role of context in language use. It goes to show that the relevant facts of the context of an utterance are basic to the interpretation of its meaning. The use of deictic forms also serves as a means of maintaining privacy in the issues or persons referred to in the discourses. The impact of the deictic expression when used intentionally by the

participants in the discourses served as an indicator to the third parties that the information so concealed was private to them.

Conclusion

Deixis means pointing via language. Any linguistic form used to accomplish this 'pointing' is referred to as deictic. They can be used to indicate people, location or time referred to as person deixis, spatial deixis and temporal deixis respectively.

These expressions depend for their interpretation on the speaker and hearer sharing the same context. Deictic expressions cannot be interpreted if the context is not known, especially the physical context of the speaker. They have their most basic uses in face-to-face spoken interactions where utterances are easily understood by the people present. As conceived in this study however it is explored as strategy for exclusion in informal interactions either by chance or by design by participants in the discourse in order to maintain privacy.

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