

On Embodied Use of Recognitional Demonstratives

Guillaume Stern¹

¹Department of Language and Information Sciences, University of Lausanne, Switzerland
guillaume.stern@unil.ch

Abstract

This study focuses on embodied uses of recognitional demonstratives. While multimodal conversation analytic studies have shown how gesture and speech interact in the elaboration of exophoric references, little attention has been given to the multimodal configuration of other types of referential actions. Based on a video-recorded corpus of professional meetings held in French, this qualitative study shows that a subtype of deictic references, namely recognitional references, are frequently associated with iconic gestures, thus challenging the traditional distinction between exophoric and endophoric uses of deixis.

Index Terms: deixis, demonstratives, indexicality, reference, iconic gestures, intersubjectivity, interaction, talk-at-work

1. Introduction

As a set of verbal resources that “necessarily invoke features of the context because of a contextual variable built into their semantic conditions” (Levinson, 2006, p. 106), deictic words such as *here* or *there* have often been considered along with their embodied correlates, pointing gestures. Because of their similar functioning as indexes that are used to identify an entity within the speech situation, they tend to be considered as inextricably linked (see Lyons, 1991, p. 150: “Identification by pointing, if I may use the term ›pointing‹ in a very general sense, is deixis at its purest.”). Nonetheless, such a description focuses on only one particular type of deictic references, namely exophoric references.

The present paper intends to show that another type of deictic uses, namely recognitional uses, may be correlated with specific embodied conducts. Section 2 starts by distinguishing exophoric and endophoric references, emphasizing the specificities of recognitional uses, before highlighting the importance of a multimodal perspective in the study of deixis. The data used for this research are then presented in section 3, while section 4 offers a qualitative analysis of two excerpts which show the sequential embodied organization of recognitional demonstratives in French. Finally, section 5 discusses how such gestural uses of recognitional references invite to a reconsideration of the traditional distinction between endophoric and exophoric deixis.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Exophoric and endophoric references

Within the study of deixis, one largely admitted distinction is that between exophoric and endophoric references (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Even if both categories implicate that the referent must be pragmatically retrieved from contextual information due to their incomplete semantics, the nature of the context involved differ.

With exophoric uses, the speaker draws attention to an entity within the physical context of the speech situation. In this respect, they involve the speaker as the deictic center of the reference or, as Bühler (1990 [1934]) puts it, the *origo* of the deictic reference, “the point of origin at the perceptual *here*, [from which] all other positions are linguistically pointed out” (p. 122). In other words, the speaker instantiates the center of reference from which the referred entity has to be identified.

Endophoric references consist of all other, non-situational uses of deixis. Most frequently, this type of reference involves that the referent is retrieved from the surrounding discourse. However, depending on the way the entities referred to are to be identified, endophoric uses can further be divided into three subtypes: *anaphoric*, *discourse deictic* and *recognitional uses*. As the next section shows, even if recognitional uses are usually considered as part of endophoric uses, their specificities invite us to set them apart from the anaphoric and discourse deictic uses.

2.2. Recognitional demonstratives

Previous research on recognitional uses of deixis has highlighted numerous features attached to this type of reference (Diessel, 1999; Himmelmann, 1996, 1997). In morphosyntactic terms, it has been illustrated on a cross-linguistic basis that recognitional uses can only be implemented through an adnominally positioned demonstrative article, whereas anaphoric and discourse deictic uses can be implemented with demonstrative pronouns¹.

In terms of semiotic functioning – i.e., the way the entity introduced by such reference has to be identified – recognitional references are quite distinct from the two other subtypes. With recognitional references, the recipient must not look for the

¹ The same function has however been identified with the distal deictic adverb in German (Auer, 1981 on ‘da’) and French (Barb ris, 1992; Mondada & Pf ander, 2016 on ‘l ’). See Stern

(2021) for a joint analysis of demonstratives and adverbial deictics in French.

intended referent into the linguistic or discursive co-text, as is the case with anaphoric and discourse deictic use, but into the “specific ‘personalized’ knowledge that is assumed to be shared by communicating parties due to a common interactional history or supposedly shared experiences” (Himmelmann, 1996, p. 233)¹. Consequently, while the referent of anaphoric and discourse deictic uses has to be previously mentioned (e.g., “*Your aunt gave you a radio for your birthday. Do you still have **that** radio?*”), the referent of recognitional uses does not have to be previously mentioned and is introduced for the first time in the interaction (e.g., “*Do you still have **that** radio that your aunt gave you for your birthday?*”(adapted from Diessel, 1999).

Such ambivalence between introducing new discourse referents and activating past shared knowledge gives recognitional demonstratives a special role within interaction. Since the intended referent has not been mentioned within the interaction so far, the speaker can only presume that it is known by his recipient. In other words, recognitional demonstratives constitute “tentative reference acts” (Consten & Averintseva-Klisch, 2012), in the sense that they leave open to the recipient(s) whether the semantic deficiency can be resolved or not. More precisely, interactional studies (Auer, 1981, 1984) have shown that in conversation, recognitional demonstratives are used to signal and anticipate potential problems with the accessibility of the intended referent. The identification of the referent being based on the recipients’ background knowledge that is only presumed by the speaker, the use of the demonstratives invites the recipient(s) to react in the case where the reference might not be successful.

This pragmatic function of the demonstratives makes them particularly relevant in specific sequential contexts where intersubjectivity between interactants is at stake. More precisely, they tend to be produced at the beginning of referential sequence and to be followed by a pause. As such, they “foreshadow referential repair sequence”(Auer, 1984, p. 637) inviting the recipient to take turn during the pause to ask for additional information if needed before the interaction is pursued. They are also frequently accompanied by relative clauses and nominal adjuncts that give further information about the referent as well as “try-marking techniques” (cf. Sacks & Schegloff, 1979) like false-starts, reformulations, hesitations and pauses that signal the speaker’s effort to produce an intelligible reference.

These features lead Auer (1984) to interpret recognitional demonstratives as ‘indexicality markers’, in the sense that they explicitly indicate that the reference is deficient and cannot be retrieved based on verbal information only but must be identified through contextual information: “they give the instruction to look ‘somewhere outside the verbal expression’” (p. 639). In that respect, recognitional demonstratives thus appear to have specific properties that distinguish them from both exophoric and endophoric categories: they do not rely on

the preceding speech just as endophoric uses do, nor do they refer to an entity that is present in the material context the way exophoric uses do.

2.3. A multimodal perspective on deixis

As previously mentioned, this paper focuses on the embodied uses of recognitional demonstratives and, as such, invites to reconsider the study of deictic references from a multimodal perspective, that is a perspective which considers all the different resources (linguistic, embodied and material) that speakers use to produce an intelligible reference.

Conversation analytic (Sidnell & Stivers, 2013) and interactional linguistic (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018) studies have shown that the accomplishment of a deictic reference is not just produced verbally but also gesturally, in an embodied way. With the impulse of the embodied turn in the study of social interaction (Streeck et al., 2011) and the solid background on gesture-speech interaction provided by gesture studies (e.g., Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992), these investigations on deixis have highlighted how interactants make some specific features of the context relevant, using different types of embodied resources besides verbal deictics, such as pointing gestures, gaze directions, body movements as well as the manipulation of material objects (e.g., Hindmarsh & Heath, 2000; Mondada, 2012; Stukenbrock, 2015).

The present paper draws on the interdependence of multiple semiotic resources in the production of deictic references and investigates it more specifically with regard to recognitional demonstratives.

3. Data

The data² used for the present research were taken from a corpus of professional meetings recorded in 2019 in two different firms in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (Jacquin & Roh, 2019). More precisely, the corpus consists of eleven meetings for a total of 11 hours of video-recordings. Seven meetings were recorded within an architecture firm and four in a communication company.

This institutional context constitutes a perspicuous setting for investigating the use of recognitional deixis. Since participants of the interaction are members of the same firm, they share a common “interactional history”, i.e., they have previously shared interactional experiences with one another (Deppermann, 2018). In most cases, the professionals have been working together for years on many different projects. Moreover, each project has its own temporal unfolding and as such involves recurrent meetings between the participants. This allows them to build on their previous common interactions and experiences and to use them as a “common ground” (Clark, 1996) to conceive and elaborate new ideas. As has been shown (e.g., Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986; Schegloff, 1972), such prior mutual experience between the participants leads them to favor

¹ For similar reasons, the term “emotional deixis” has been used to talk about recognitional demonstratives (Lakoff, 1974).

² The data have been transcribed in ELAN. All names are pseudonymized and identifying information has been removed.

recipient design formulations, that is to adjust the formation and deployment of their actions to the addressee(s) in order to build and maintain intersubjectivity. This is reflected as well as accomplished in the context under investigations through the participants' frequent uses of recognitional demonstratives and their references to entities that have been discussed during their previous meetings or during previous projects.

As the next section shows, these shared referents are mentioned within the context of the interaction to be used as resources for elaborating new ideas.

4. Analysis

The following qualitative analysis is based on two representative excerpts of a collection of 14 occurrences taken from the corpus mentioned above illustrating recognitional uses of demonstratives in French.

The first excerpt takes place within the architecture firm. It involves four participants: Sarah, Florence, Grégoire and Sophie who is the team leader. The meeting is dedicated to take stock of the situation and as such participants go over previous as well as future steps of different ongoing projects. At the beginning of the excerpt, participants are discussing a meeting that is to take place the next day and during which two of them (Florence and Sarah) are expected to meet the contracting authority of the project they are working on.

Excerpt 1 : REU_BL2 (simplified)

1 SAR ouais mais demain il faut qu'on lui représente
 yeah but tomorrow we have to present him once again
 2 déjà un: bout d'la présentation/ non/
 already a bit of the presentation haven't we
 3 (1.1)
 4 SOP ouais/ mais sur la partie sur laquelle on est
 yeah but on the part about which we are
 5 euh: °on on° est de toute façon sûrs que: qu'on
 ehm we are in any case sure that we will
 6 la fera\ (0.3) *sur les *courbes* et sur les
 do it on the curves and on the
 *.....*raises 1 finger*raises
 7 quinze mètres/*# et puis sur *cette partie## euh
 fifteen meters and then on that part ehm
 2 fingers-----*,,,,,,,*points down--*,,,,,,
 fig #fig.1



Fig.1

8 *d'entrée/# (0.4) sur cette euh ce ce tou-* sur
 of the entrance on that ehm that that on
 claw-like gesture-----.....
 fig #fig.2



Fig.2

9 ce:# ce *ce élargissement## de: devant\
 that that that enlargement in the front
*depictive gesture*
 fig #fig.3 #fig.4



Fig.3

Fig.4

10 (1.6)
 11 FLO mais ça c'est juste sur l'plan technique (.)
 but this this is just on the technical level
 12 °euh: qu'on va [bouger e]uh:°
 ehm that we are going to move ehm
 13 SOP [.tsk oui]
 yes
 14 SOP ouais
 yeah

On lines 1-2, Sarah retrospectively acknowledges what was said before by Sophie (not displayed in the transcript) and, prospectively, produces a question to have further information on the content of the presentation they have to make.

This question makes consequently relevant an answer, which is produced by Sophie on 1.4-9 after a 1.1s pause. Through her answer, Sophie specifies that the presentation should be on the part that they are sure to make, that is on the elements of the buildings that they are sure they will construct. Interestingly, this first turn-constructural unit (TCU) already shows that the participants are talking about something which has already been discussed between them before – although it has not been mentioned up to that moment in this meeting. This can notably be seen through the use of the definite expression “la partie” [the part] (1.4) and the implied distinction between elements that they are sure to build, as opposed to those they are not, meaning that some elements have already been discussed and ratified by the members of the project.

After a possible completion point (1.6) which is not taken by her recipients as an opportunity to take turn and which might therefore signal a potential identification problem of what is meant by “the part that we are sure to build”, Sophie clarifies what she means with that rather vague expression. Her new TCU is built in an incremental way as a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990). Reusing the preposition “sur” [on], she formulates three referents that are part of the building to be constructed: “les courbes” [the curves] (1.6), “les quinze mètres” [the fifteen meters] (1.7) and “cette partie d'entrée” [this entrance part] (1.7-8). While the first two elements of the list are introduced with the plural definite article “les”, the third one is introduced through the demonstrative article “cette”. This use of the demonstrative can be identified as a recognitional use whereby Sophie refers to a shared entity that the recipients are supposed to know. Indeed, the identification of the referent is problematized by the speaker herself whose reference includes hesitation and a prototypical try-marker – i.e., a production of a unit with final rising intonation in order to demonstrate its potential inaccessibility – which are characteristic features of recognitional demonstratives. Moreover, the recognitional

7 ROG [absolument]
 absolutely
 8 BOR [pour euh l']truc tech
 for ehm the tech thing
 9 CAR [ça c''était] très chouette] ouais
 this this was really nice yeah
 10 GEO oui
 yes

On l.1, Boris takes turn, overlapping Roger's previous turn who was acknowledging the relevance of the theme suggested. His first TCU (l.1-2) builds a similarity between the theme he suggested and a previous project that had been elaborated by the company members. Boris explicitly refers to his co-participants memory through the (rather vague) reference "c'que vous aviez fait à salplace" [what you had done in salplace], which is not immediately acknowledged by his co-participants as the short pause (l.2) signals. This leads him to further specify what he is talking about through a prepositional phrase which functions as a syntactic increment of his first utterance. The phrase contains the preposition "avec" [with] and the noun phrase "ces grandes horloges" [those big clocks] (l.3), which is introduced by a demonstrative article. Once again, such use of the demonstrative can be interpreted as a recognitional use, manifested as such by different features.

First, Boris' explicit reference to the interactants shared past experience at the beginning of his turn indicates to his addressees the frame of reference that is specific of recognitional references. Then, the formatting of Boris' turn exhibits the features mentioned above that characterizes recognitional uses of the demonstrative, namely vowels lengthening, hesitations and repetitions, all of them constituting try-marking techniques whereby the speaker can be seen to be "doing being hesitant".

Along with these linguistic and interactional features, Boris' embodied conduct also participate in defining the reference produced as a recognitional one. As fig. 1 shows, he first starts by pointing behind him as he utters the place name "salplace". This pointing gesture gives the absolute reference an indexical component as something being almost within reach¹. What is significant here is that the gesture anchors the speaker's embodied activity within the here and now of the interaction and thus installs his body as the frame of reference, as is characteristic of exophoric references. This has important consequence for the next part of Boris' turn. Indeed, at the exact moment when he starts his second TCU, Boris transforms his deictic gesture into a depictive one. As can be seen on fig. 2 and 3, Boris raises and joins his hands above his head, his palms facing the addressees he is simultaneously looking at, and then gradually lowers and separates them, turning his palms downwards, thus drawing two circular arcs. His gesture reaches its end by the end of l.4 and thus precisely coincides with the end of his turn. In this way, he depicts the referent's shape that he utters at the same time, namely the big clocks. Carole's

simultaneous embodied conduct is also relevant. At the time of fig.2, Carole is writing on the flipchart, thus turning her back on her co-participants. However, shortly after Boris produces the embodied recognitional reference, Carole turns towards him saying "ouais" (l.6, fig.3). Through her multimodal conduct, Carole thus makes accountable how Boris' actions create a joint focus of attention in the speech situation between the participants, the same way an exophoric reference would. By the end of the excerpt, participants display their understanding of the reference and confirm the relevance of the idea suggested by Boris (Carine on l. 6 and 9, Roger on l.7 and Georges on l.10).

Just as the previous one, this excerpt shows that the frame of reference that ensures the identification of the referent and its joint ratification by the participants does not only involve their shared knowledge; it is meticulously accomplished by the multimodal action and coordination of the participants.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis provided in the previous section has shown the significant interplay between gesture and speech in the use of recognitional demonstratives. It has illustrated the way these references are implemented in a multimodal way within the elaboration of a speaker's turn and how gestures help sustain intersubjectivity between the participants. More precisely, the frequent association of recognitional demonstratives with depictive gestures in a specific sequential context, i.e., at the beginning of referential sequences, constitutes a complex multimodal Gestalt (Mondada, 2014) whereby different semiotic resources are assembled to achieve and make this particular type of reference intelligible.

Along with previous research on recognitional demonstratives, it appears that this type of reference problematizes the traditional distinction between exophoric and endophoric references. As has been shown, the embodied production of recognitional references involves a complex frame of reference which includes not only the common ground between the participants, activated through an explicit reference to shared experiences, but also the body of the speaker which indexically grounds the reference within the spatial ecology of the interaction. The ambivalent nature of recognitional references invite us to follow different propositions to apprehend deictic references in a more scalar way (e.g., Colletta, 2017; Cornish, 2011) according to their relative anchorage within the speech situation. Most significantly in the case of recognitional demonstratives, this degree of indexicality is not only reflected by the verbal deictic unit² but also the embodied conduct that accompanies it. Indeed, whereas exophoric references are characterized by deictic (pointing) gestures, recognitional ones are embodied through iconic

¹ This type of pointing toward entities that are not perceptible within the context of the interaction typically coincides with Bühler's third type of *Deixis am Phantasma* (1990 [1934], pp. 149–152)

² Cornish (2011) inscribes the demonstrative article at the exact center of its continuum between deixis and anaphora, thus constituting the prototypic case of 'anadeixis', an intermediate mode of reference.

gestures. The interaction between gesture and speech thus illustrates that these two semiotic resources constitute together the referential action and its relative anchoring within the context.

More generally, such type of reference allows us to reconsider the notion of common ground anew. Looking at the analysis, it appears that the shared and mutual dimension of any reference – even when involving common memories – is constantly reactivated, reanchored and reframed within the sequential unfolding of the interaction in a situated and embodied way, to ensure its recognizability. The embodied use of recognitional demonstratives thus appears as a resource for the participants to orient to the seriality of their encounters as well as to manage the practical problem of intersubjectivity and resolve it through the specific multimodal formation of their referential actions.

6. Appendix: Transcript conventions

Conventions adapted from ICOR (v.2013, *Groupe ICAR*) and (Mondada, 2018) for embodied conducts:

/ \	Rising and falling intonations
:	Sound lengthening
-	Truncation of a word
(.) (n)	Micro-pauses and timed pauses
[YY YYYY]	Overlapping speech
(it; eat)	Transcription doubts
° °	Lowered voice volume
---	Descriptions of embodied movements synchronized with talk.
*--->	The action described continues until the same symbol is reached.
--->*	Preparation
....	Full extension of the movement
-----	Retraction
''''''	The moment at which a screen shot has been taken.
#fig	

7. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on a first version of this paper and the members of the Swiss National Science Foundation project n°100012_188924 for the collection and transcription of the corpus.

8. References

Auer, P. (1981). Zur indexikalitätsmarkierenden Funktion der demonstrativen Artikelform in deutschen Konversationen. In G. Hindelgang & W. Zillig (Eds.), *Sprache: Verstehen und Handeln. Akten des 15. Linguistischen Kolloquiums*. Niemeyer, 301–310.

Auer, P. (1984). Referential problems in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 8(5–6), 627–648.

Barb ris, J.-M. (1992). Un emploi d ictique propre   l'oral: Le l  de cl ture. In *La Deixis. Colloque en Sorbonne (8-9 juin 1990)*. Presses Universitaires de France, 567–578.

B hler, K. (1990). *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*. J. Benjamins Pub. Co.

Clark, H. H. (1996). *Using Language*. Cambridge University

Clark, H. H., & Wilkes-Gibbs, D. (1986). Referring as a collaborative process. *Cognition*, 22(1), 1–39.

Colletta, J.-M. (2017). La deixis spatiale: Entre indexicalit  et repr sentation. *Langue fran aise*, N  193(1), 127–144.

Consten, M., & Averintseva-Klisch, M. (2012). Tentative Reference Acts? 'Recognitional Demonstratives' as Means of Suggesting Mutual Knowledge – or Overriding a Lack of It. *Research in Language*, 10(3), 257–277.

Cornish, F. (2011). 'Strict' anadeixis, discourse deixis and text structuring. *Language Sciences*, 33(5), 753–767.

Couper-Kuhlen, E., & Selting, M. (2018). *Interactional Linguistics: Studying Language in Social Interaction*. Cambridge University Press.

Deppermann, A. (2018). Changes in turn-design over interactional histories – the case of instructions in driving school lessons. In A. Deppermann & J. Streeck (Eds.), *Time in Embodied Interaction: Synchronicity and sequentiality of multimodal resources*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 293–324.

Diessel, H. (1999). *Demonstratives: Form, function and grammaticalization* (Vol. 42). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. Longman.

Himmelmann, N. P. (1996). Demonstratives in Narrative Discourse: A Taxonomy of Universal Uses. In B. A. Fox (Ed.), *Studies in Anaphora*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 205–254.

Himmelmann, N. P. (1997). *Deiktikon, Artikel, Nominalphrase: Zur Emergenz syntaktischer Struktur*. De Gruyter.

Hindmarsh, J., & Heath, C. (2000). Embodied reference: A study of deixis in workplace interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32(12), 1855–1878.

Jacquin, J., & Roh, S. (2019). La constitution d'un corpus vid o-enregistr  de r unions professionnelles. *Carnet de recherche. Revue Tranel*, 70, 89–106.

Jefferson, G. (1990). List-construction as a task and a resource. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Interaction Competence*. University Press of America, 63–92.

Kendon, A. (2004). *Gesture Visible Action as Utterance* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Lakoff, R. (1974). Remarks on *this* and *that*. *Chicago Linguistic Society*, 10, 345–356.

Levinson, S. C. (2006). Deixis. In *The Handbook of Pragmatics* (pp. 97–121). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Lyons, J. (1991). *Natural Language and Universal Grammar: Essays in Linguistic Theory* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

McNeill, D. (1992). *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought*. The University of Chicago Press.

Mondada, L. (2012). Deixis: An Integrated Interactional Multimodal Analysis. In P. Bergmann, J. Brenning, M. Pfeiffer, & E. Reber (Eds.), *Prosody and Embodiment in Interactional Grammar* (p. 173–206). De Gruyter.

Mondada, L. (2014). The local constitution of multimodal resources for social interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 65, 137–156.

Mondada, L. (2018). Multiple Temporalities of Language and Body in Interaction: Challenges for Transcribing Multimodality. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 51(1), 85–106.

Mondada, L., & Pf nder, S. (2016). Corpus international  cologique de la langue fran aise (CIEL-F): Un corpus pour la recherche compar e sur le fran ais parl . *Corpus*, 15.

Sacks, H., & Schegloff, E. A. (1979). Two preferences in the organization of reference to persons in conversation and their interaction. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Irvington Publishers, 15–21.

Schegloff, E. A. (1972). Notes on a conversational practice: Formulating place. *Studies in Social Interaction*.

Sidnell, J., & Stivers, T. (Eds.). (2013). *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Stern, G. (2021). *Interagir par l'imaginaire. Une approche prax ologique de la Deixis am Phantasma*. Bulletin de linguistique et des sciences du langage.

Streeck, J. (2008). Depicting by gesture. *Gesture*, 8(3), 285–301.

Streeck, J., Goodwin, C., & LeBaron, C. (Eds.). (2011). *Embodied Interaction: Language and Body in the Material World*. Cambridge University Press.

Stukenbrock, A. (2015). *Deixis in der face-to-face-interaktion*. De Gruyter.