

THE PRAGMATICS OF DEIXIS IN ENGLISH AND POLISH

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1. The aim of this paper is to examine some properties of deixis in English and Polish. Since natural languages are primarily designed for use in face-to-face interaction (cf. Lyons 1977:637), one cannot conceive of a linguistic analysis disregarding deixis which, as Levinson (1983:54) puts it:

“... concerns the ways in which languages encode or grammaticalize features of the context of utterance or speech event, and thus also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of that context of utterance”.

The traditional deictic categories are person, place and time. These have been complemented by Fillmore (1975) with discourse and social deixis. Due to an egocentric organization of deixis, the relevant expressions are anchored to specific points in the communicative event, thus the unmarked anchorage points which constitute the deictic centre are typically the following:

a) the central (first) person is the speaker; second person encodes the speaker's reference to one or more addressees, while third person constitutes the encoding of reference to persons being neither speakers nor addressees;

b) the central time is the time at which the speaker produces the utterance;

c) the central place is the speaker's location at utterance time or coding time (CT);

d) the discourse centre is the point which the speaker is currently at in the production of his utterance;

e) the social centre is the speaker's social status or rank, to which the status and rank of addressees or referents are relative, cf. Levinson (1983:63-4), following Fillmore (1975).

2. The topic of deictic (or indexical) expressions has been traditionally related to the analysis of natural language propositions, such as:

1. Letizia de Ramolino was the mother of Napoleon

According to the advocates of truth-conditional semantics the truth conditions of 1. would be due to the specification of the circumstances under which it would be true (in this case, the identity of reference of Letizia de Ramolino with the actual mother of Napoleon), cf. Levinson (1983:55).

Much of the philosophical interest in the area has boiled down to reducing all indexical expressions to a single primary one, cf. Russell's attempts to translate all indexicals into expressions containing a demonstrative *this*. However, there were sound arguments to the contrary (Bar-Hillel 1970:77-8; Lyons 1977:639-46). Vivid discussions on deixis have also concerned philosophers and logicians who viewed context as a set of pragmatic indices for speakers, addressees, times of utterance, places of utterance, indicated objects, etc. Sentences could then express different propositions on different occasions of use, cf. Montague (1974), Scott (1970), and others.

Be that as it may, while deixis has been widely disputed in philosophy and logic, the relevant linguistic studies are still scanty. As is noticed by Levinson in one of the latest works on pragmatics available (1983:61), there has been little descriptive work on deixis, let alone the deficiencies of possible frameworks of linguistic analyses. The only significant works in the field are Fillmore (1975), Lyons (1977:ch.15) and Levinson (1983:ch.2). The situation is even more dramatic in contrastive analysis where, to the best of my knowledge, a single article can be mentioned, i.e. Faerch's (1980) account of deixis in Danish and English¹ presented within the interpretative semantics model (Jackendoff 1972).

3. Consequently, in an attempt to fill this gap the present paper aims at signalling some discrepancies between the distribution of selected indexical expressions in English and Polish. For the reasons of brevity, the scope of the analysis will comprise only two demonstrative pronouns, i.e. *this/that* and their Polish equivalents. It is hoped that the limits set upon this study will not affect its primary goal, i.e. demonstrating to what extent certain pragmatic factors determine deixis in two natural languages, which might stimulate some more detailed, cross-linguistic investigations. The semanto-pragmatic framework adopted for the present purposes does not seem to need much justification. I take it after Lyons (1977) and Levinson (1983) that deixis mainly belongs within the domain of pragmatics because it directly con-

¹ See also an article on forms of address in the army (Jaworski 1982). Despite some revealing observations on social deixis made in this study important generalizations are missed since the analysis is restricted to Polish data only.

cerns the relationship between the structure of languages and the contexts in which they are used. It is admitted, however, that because pragmatics concerns those aspects of meaning and language-structure that cannot be captured in a truth-conditional semantics, the grammatical category of deixis will probably be found to straddle the semantics/pragmatics border (cf. Levinson (1983:55)).

There is a second, primarily linguistic and probably the most important reason justifying the selection of *this/that* pair for our analysis. They are, by far, the most universal of all indexicals, as the proximal/distal dichotomy represented by them cuts across all deictic categories of person, place, time, discourse and social deixis, cf. below.

Finally, it has to be noted that the systematization of contrasts between *this/that* and their Polish equivalents could be of some pedagogical value, as the problem seems crucial in the area of teaching English as a second language. It has been pointed out to me by some native speakers of English that there must be something peculiar about the distribution of *this* vs. *that*, as opposed to their Polish equivalents, which is the source of numerous mistakes made by Polish learners even at an advanced level. My investigations of the relevant data have resulted in a contention to the effect that the proximal/distal distinction represented in English by *this/that*, respectively, is to a large extent neutralized in Polish, except for some clearly defined contexts.

4. Let us start the analysis from the most common uses of *this* and *that* referring to proximate and distal objects (or persons), respectively. In such contexts they are labelled demonstrative adjectives, cf.:

- 2. This paper is below any standard
- 2'. Ten referat jest poniżej jakiegokolwiek poziomu
- 3. That presentation has been very poor
- 3'. Tamto wystąpienie było bardzo kiepskie
- 4. These remarks are not to the point
- 4'. Te uwagi są nie na temat
- 5. Those conferences were better
- 5'. Tamte konferencje były lepsze

The adduced examples reveal a comparable distribution of English demonstrative adjectives (in their singular and plural forms) and of their Polish equivalents. It is worth noting that even if we introduce, after Fillmore (1975:42) and Levinson (1983:65-66), the distinction between gestural, symbolic and non-deictic uses of *this* and *that*, it will have no bearing upon the present observations, cf. 6-8 and 6'-8':

- 6. This drink is too warm
 - 6'. Ten drink jest za ciepły
- } — gestural use

7. This country is beyond description }
 7'. Ten kraj jest nie do opisanania } — symbolic use
 8. I met this weird girl the other day }
 8'. Spotkałam tę dziwną dziewczynę pewnego dnia } — non-deictic use

As to the non-deictic uses of Polish proximal demonstratives *ten/ta/to* (representing the masculine, feminine and neuter gender, respectively), they can frequently be encountered in colloquial Polish where they play an emphatic function, particularly in connection with the 'historical present'. It goes without saying that such a constant repetition of the demonstratives gives the impression of a substandard, or at least, stylistically marked speech, cf.:

9. ??Ja to sama nie bardzo wiem, o co tej dziewczynie z tym facetem chodziło, jak sprzedawali ten samochód
 9'. *I don't know it myself what this girl and this guy were up to when they were selling this car
 10. I ten kelner przynosi ten francuski szampan i ta kobieta przy tym drugim stoliku podchodzi...
 10'. ?And this waiter brings this French champagne and this woman at the other table comes over...

Note that while 9—9' sound almost equally bad in Polish and English, respectively, 10—10' are slightly better since they employ the 'historical present' in the description of past events.²

The situation gets markedly different in ostensive uses of *this/that* and their Polish equivalents in what might be called introductions. Here the distinction between proximal and distal demonstratives is neutralized in Polish to the effect that *to* takes over the functions of both *this* and *that*. Note the impossibility of using *ten/ta* with masculine and feminine nouns, respectively (cf. 11'') and the ungrammaticality of the examples with *tamto* (12').

11. This is my father/grandma/flat
 11'. To jest mój ojciec/moja babcia/moje mieszkanie
 11''. *Ten jest mój ojciec/*Ta jest moja babcia
 12. That is my father/grandma/flat
 12'. *Tamto jest mój ojciec/babcia/mieszkanie

Note that the use of *tamto* might be possible only in sentences like:

13. Tamten mężczyzna jest moim ojcem³,

² On the distribution of demonstrative pronouns in Polish, cf. Pisarkowa (1969) and Fisiak, et al. (1978).

³ *Tamten jest moim ojcem* 'That is my father' would be possible in extremely limited contrastive contexts where the source sentence would be 13. with *mężczyzna* deleted due to some previous mention, e.g.:

Popatrz na tych dwóch mężczyzn. Ten jest moim kuzynem, a tamten jest moim ojcem.

i.e. analogous to the examples 2'—5' representing a distinct use of demonstratives.

It follows from our data so far that the proximal/distal dichotomy is marked by both languages only in case of demonstrative adjectives. However, in ostensive uses of demonstrative pronouns English preserves the distinction between *this* and *that*, while it gets neutralized in Polish, so that *to* ('this') is exclusively employed.

As has been noted above, the contrast represented by *this* and *that* cuts across all deictic categories. Apart from person deixis it is worth considering now to what extent the present remarks concern place and time deixis. Our observations seem to extend to these categories as well, i.e. while the demonstrative-adjective use allows both *to* and *tamto* (cf. 14'—17'), in ostensive contexts Polish exclusively employs the proximal *to*, (cf. 18'—20'):

14. This place is excellent
 14'. To miejsce jest doskonałe
 15. That location of our camping site should be reconsidered
 15'. Tamto usytuowanie naszego campingu powinno być ponownie rozważone
 16. I want to see you this Friday⁴
 16'. Chcę cię zobaczyć w ten piątek
 17. That Saturday was awful
 17'. Tamta sobota była okropna⁵
 18. This is a good seat
 18'. To jest dobre miejsce
 19. That was a fascinating city
 19'. *Tamto było fascynujące miasto
 20. That was time for work, and this is time for rest
 20'. *Tamto był czas na pracę, a to jest czas na odpoczynek
 To (Wtedy)

Consequently, Polish seems to allow for the proximal/distal contrast to be grammaticalized only if the relevant demonstrative pronouns play the role of adjectives, i.e. nominal modifiers. However, if they occur in sentence-initial position and are not followed by a noun, they naturally perform the function of a subject, analogous to that of pro-subject *it* in English. This observation is

⁴ I disregard here the distinct interpretations of *this Friday* conditioned by the fact on which day of the week the phrase is uttered, cf. Fillmore (1975: 46) for a more thorough analysis of this issue. The discrepancies between English and Polish which might arise in such cases would not have any bearing upon the present remarks.

⁵ Naturally, the occurrence of *that* and *tamta* triggers the use of a past tense form of the verb in both languages.

corroborated by the fact that the Polish equivalent of *this*, i.e. *to*, required in such contexts, is simultaneously the equivalent of English *it*. Hence, it might be conjectured that such uses of English *this/that* and Polish *to* are not fully demonstrative but simply neutral, which will lead to a significant generalization that Polish maintains the proximal/distal distinction only in purely deictic contexts; otherwise the problem of distance from the discourse center becomes immaterial.

The significance of the neutral use of *that* in English has been stressed by Lyons (1977:651):

"When *that* is employed in its deictically neutral sense as a referring expression it gives the addressee no information about the referent other than the fact that it is an entity rather than a place; and it would be natural to suppose that the form *that* would be unstressed in these circumstances and its utterance would not be accompanied by a paralinguistic gesture pointing to the entity in question".

Thus, according to Lyons, *That nice* will mean either 'The entity not near me is nice' or 'The entity (whose location is unspecified) is nice' (ibid.).

The neutral sense of demonstratives is directly related to what Lyons calls 'impure textual deixis', where they function between anaphora and deixis. Both *this* and *that* may be used deictically to refer not only to objects and persons and to linguistic entities of various kinds in the text and co-text, but also to refer to past, present and future events. Hence, in 21 *that* might refer to the proposition expressed by the sentence uttered by X or to the utterance-act (or speech-act):

21. X: I've never seen him

Y: That's a lie⁶ (Lyons 1977:668)

Note that while the borderline case between anaphora and deixis is grammaticalized in English by means of distal *that*, its Polish equivalent would, again, employ the proximal *to*, cf. the unacceptability of the b. example with *tamto*:

21'. X: Nigdy go nie widziałam

Y:a. To kłamstwo

b. *Tamto kłamstwo

The present examples constitute further support to our claim that while the distribution of English demonstratives *this/that* encompasses not only deictic but also neutral and non-deictic uses, in Polish the corresponding forms are allowed only in purely deictic contexts; otherwise, a single demonstrative *to* is employed.

⁶ The use of *this* in impure textual deixis is not exemplified here for the obvious reason that it will be rendered in Polish by means of *to*, thus no contrast will be observable.

Having tackled textual deixis, the analysis cannot possibly omit the issues of discourse and social deixis which might offer some particularly revealing data relevant to the present study. Discourse deixis has to do with the choice of lexical or grammatical elements which indicate or otherwise refer to some portion or aspect of the ongoing discourse, e.g. *the former vs. the latter* (Fillmore 1975:70). The demonstratives *this* and *that* can also be used to refer to an immediately preceding or following portion of the discourse (cf. above). Hence, with *this* one of the participants knows what is being referred to, but the other does not; and with *that* it is assumed that both the encoder and the decoder know what is being talked about, e.g.:

22. I met a friend of yours last night. This guy told me some interesting things about you.

23. Remember the man who sold us the football tickets?

Well, that guy told me...

According to Fillmore, (ibid.), also forward- and backward- pointing demonstratives are similarly distinguished because while one would normally say:

24. This is my explanation

before it is given, he would utter 25. afterwards:

25. That was my explanation

Let us consider the distribution of Polish demonstratives in the equivalent sentences:

22'. Spotkałam twójego kolegę wczoraj wieczorem. Ten facet powiedział mi kilka interesujących rzeczy o tobie.

23'. Pamiętasz tego człowieka, który sprzedał nam bilety na mecz piłkarski?

Hm, ?tamten facet powiedział mi...

ten

It must be noted that although *tamten* cannot be excluded in 23'. *ten* would be preferred in most Polish dialects. Further examples clarify the situation. As might be expected, 24' poses no problems, since English *this* is rendered as *to*. However, in 25' the difference in meaning is signalled solely by tense, the demonstrative being the same as in 24':

24'. To jest moje wyjaśnienie

25'. $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{To} \\ \text{*Tamto} \end{array} \right\}$ było moje wyjaśnienie

The unacceptability of 25' employing *tamto* may be due to the fact that in Polish the discourse distance, involving in this case both place and time, is incorporated in the form of the verb.

Some words have to be said about the relation between locative anaphoric *here/there* and *this* vs. *that*. Consider the following examples:

26. I was born in London and I have lived $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{here} \\ \text{there} \end{array} \right\}$ all my life
 27. I was born in London and $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{this} \\ \text{that} \end{array} \right\}$ is where I lived all my life
 26'. Urodziłam się w Londynie i mieszkam $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{tu} \\ \text{tam} \end{array} \right\}$ całe życie
 27'. Urodziłam się w Londynie i oto gdzie mieszkam całe życie

As can be seen, in English *here* and *there* are replaced by *this* and *that*, respectively. However, Polish does not allow for such a substitution. The only demonstrative that could occur in contexts of this kind is *oto*. Since it is a contextual variant of *to* (though much more restricted in its distribution), our hypothesis gets further support.

Finally, to complete the picture some attention should be paid to social deixis, i.e., as Fillmore (1976:75) defines it:

"The study of that aspect of sentences which reflect or establish or are determined by certain realities of the social situation in which the speech act occurs. In language these are: the devices for person marking, the ways of separating speech levels (-), the various ways in which names, titles and kinship terms vary in form and usage according to the relationship among the speaker, the addressee, and the audience (-)".

One of the examples of social deixis is attention-calling which is carried out in different ways depending upon whether a person with whom one wishes to establish person-deictic anchoring is known or not and whether the discourse is polite or impolite. *This* is one of those tricky words that switch roles between assertions and questions, e.g. used in a telephone conversation 28 means 'I am Harry Brown', whereas 29 means 'Are you Harry Brown?':

28. This is Harry Brown
 29. Is this Harry Brown? (American English)
 Is that Harry Brown? (British English)

As can easily be predicted, both Polish equivalents employ *to*:

- 28'. **To* Harry Brown/? *To* mówi Harry Brown/*Tu* Harry Brown
 29'. *Czy to* Harry Brown?

Note, however, that in 28' the use of *to* requires the insertion of a verb, so that *To mówi Harry Brown* is obtained, i.e. 'This is Harry Brown speaking'. Since its distribution is extremely limited (to contrastive contexts only), it has been marked as questionable (pragmatically odd). The best rendition of 28 in Polish would be *Tu Harry Brown* 'Harry Brown here'.

Finally, if the speaker takes his own, egocentric point of view, social deixis requires the use of *this*, whereas if the interlocutor's perspective is taken into account, *that* is employed. Thus pointing to the dentist your sore tooth you say 30 and 31, respectively:

30. It's this one
 31. It's that one

Incidentally, in gestural uses of demonstratives, as has been noted above, the distinction is also valid in Polish:

- 30'. Mam chory ząb. *To* ten. 'I have a sore tooth. It's this one'
 31'. Mam chory ząb. *To* tamten. 'I have a sore tooth. It's that one.'

5. It may be concluded that deixis is by far more pragmatically-conditioned in Polish than it is English, or rather, that discourse organization in Polish imposes more contextual restrictions on the distribution of proximal vs. distal demonstrative pronouns. However, as has been demonstrated above, the contrast between the two languages in question can be captured in some pragmatic terms, i.e. the actual uses of the respective indexicals. Thus, in purely deictic roles such as introductions and gestural uses, Polish demonstratives behave analogously to their English counterparts. Otherwise, the proximal/distal dichotomy is blurred in Polish, in favour of a single demonstrative *to*, an equivalent of *this*. In cases when deictic anchoring is vital, it is marked in Polish by some other grammatical means, like tense or different pronominal forms. However, when English *this* or *that* are employed neutrally, only *to* does the job.

In the light of the present analysis a pragmatic approach to deixis seems to be indispensable and further cross-linguistic studies in the field might come up with some more significant generalizations concerning the issue of indexical expressions and their distribution in different languages.

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