Lecture 4. The 'spinning wheel' in the 4th dimension – Time (2): All generalizations are 'general' but *some* are more 'general' than others

Today's Menu: Grammaticalization – 'function' words & deixis

1. Syntactic change: function words
2. Deixis: the 'pointing' words (person, spatial, temporal, & social).
3. Deixis & Ambiguity

Last week, we examined the smallest units of the social tool (language) in the 4th dimension of all existence – Time, and discussed how word-meanings change over time, and why.

This week, we are going to review the concept and causes of 'meaning development,' noting different 'levels' of generalization, and consider a peculiar type of generalization, a *kind* of grammaticalization – deixis. We will conclude our discussion with a look at how deictic words and phrases often cause ambiguity (either inadvertent or deliberate).

1. All generalizations are 'general,' but some are more 'general' than others: 'function' words

Every word of language is already a generalization, an act of social thought. Being the products of living minds, word-meanings develop and change in time:

> …In the historical evolution of language, the very *structure* of meaning and its *psychological nature* also change. ***From primitive generalisations, verbal thought rises to the most abstract concepts. It is not merely the content of a word that changes, but the way in which reality is generalised and reflected in a word***.
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> (Vygotsky: 1934)

As a result of the changing way in which reality is generalized in the signs a society uses to communicate, some word-meanings rise to more abstract concepts than others. Grammaticalization is one such process, when words lose their concrete 'lexical' meaning (i.e., 'pig' or 'tree') and acquire more abstract grammatical meanings (this is how all '**function**' words/ grammatical structures developed over time – prepositions, auxiliary & modal verbs, articles, affixes, etc.). For example,

He: O.E. *he* (see paradigm of O.E. third pers. pronoun below), from P.Gmc. **hiz*, from P.Gmc. base **khi-*, from PIE **ki-*, the "this, here" (as opposed to "that, there") root (cf. Hittite *ki* "this," Gk. *ekeinos* "that person," O.C.S. *si*, Lith. *šis* "this"), and thus the source of the third person pronouns in O.E. The feminine, hio, was replaced in early M.E. by forms from other stems (see she), while the *h-* wore off O.E. neut. *hit* to make modern *it*. The Proto-Germanic root is also the source of the first element in Ger. *heute* "today," lit. "*the* day" (cf. O.E. heodæg).

CASE	SINGULAR			PLURAL
	masc.	neut.	fem.	(all genders)
nominative	he	hit	heo, hio	hie, hi
accusative	hine	hit	hie, hi	hie, hi
genitive	his	his	hire	hira, heora
dative	him	him	hire	him, heom

2. Deixis

Deixis [daɪksɪs] (from Ancient Greek δείξις /deixis, or '**pointing**') means some *reference* which can only be interpreted within the context of a particular sentence, i.e. '*The use of pronouns relies on a **deixis** to correctly interpret them*.'

Examples of *deixes* (plural of *deixis*):

        I am talking to **you**. (person deixis)
        That was **then**, this is **now**. (temporal deixis)
        Take it from **here** to **there**. (locative deixis)

Deixes are of different kinds: person deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, social deixis, etc.

Person deixis

Person deixis usually refers to the speaker (**1ˢᵗ person**), the interlocutor/addressee (**2ⁿᵈ person**), and others (**3ʳᵈ person**). All these may come in singular or plural form, and in many languages they are also marked for case; English marks only for Nominative, Genitive and Objective cases:

Person	Singular	Plural
First	I / mine /me	We / ours /us
Second	You / yours	You / yours
Third	He/his/him; she/her/her; it	They/ theirs / them

Spatial deixis

'Spatial deixis manifests itself primarily in the form of locative adverbs, such as *here* and *there*, and demonstratives, such as *this* and *that*. English has a relatively impoverished spatial deictic system, with only two terms, usually labeled **proximal** and **distal**. Many languages have three or more terms. The most common types of three-term system subdivide the distal category. There are two ways of doing this. The first involves a **distal/remote** distinction. (English at one time had such a system, with three terms here, there, and yonder.) The other type of three-term system does not strictly depend on distance, but is closely related to the person system, that is to say, the terms can be glossed "near to me" (=here), "near to you" (=there), and "not near to either you or me" (=third person)' (Alan Cruse: 2004, pp. 333-334).

English spatial deixis, in the case of demonstratives, also show a similar relation to the personal pronouns (singular/ plural distinction): *this* man/ *that* man; *these* men/*those* men, etc.

Temporal deixis

Temporal deixis indicates time, with the time of utterance being the reference point (present, past, or future), i.e., *today*, *yesterday*, and *tomorrow*; *this week*/ *last week*/*next week*, now/ then, etc. "If the proper name of the period of time is used, additional restrictions come into play. Take first the names of days. The lexical items *today*, *yesterday*, and *tomorrow* have priority, so that, for instance, this Wednesday cannot be uttered on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. Last Wednesday cannot be uttered on Thursday to refer to the previous day, but may be used to refer to the Wednesday of the preceding week. … In referring to months, *this July* means 'the July falling within the calendric year which includes the time of utterance" (Cruse: 2004, pp. 334-335).

Social deixis

Social deixis refers to the so-called TV (*tu/vous*) pronouns in many languages. Apart from being person deixes, they also indicate social 'distance' (*Thou/You* distinction has disappeared in Modern English).

3. Deixis & Ambiguity

Because deictic expressions are subjective to the speakers and the circumstances of communication, they are often ambiguous and, thus, can be manipulated. Example: the recent controversy about President Obama's "**You didn't build that**" remarks – make up your own mind as to what they mean:

> There are a lot of wealthy, successful Americans who agree with me -- because they want to give something back. They know they didn't -- look, if you've been successful, you didn't get there on your own. You didn't get there on your own. I'm always struck by people who think, well, it must be because I was just so smart. There are a lot of smart people out there. It must be because I worked harder than everybody else. Let me tell you something -- there are a whole bunch of hardworking people out there.
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> If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business -- **you didn't build that**. Somebody else made that happen. The Internet didn't get invented on its own. Government research created the Internet so that all the companies could make money off the Internet.
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> The point is, is that when we succeed, we succeed because of our individual initiative, but also because we do things together. There are some things, just like fighting fires, we don't do on our own. I mean, imagine if everybody had their own fire service. That would be a hard way to organize fighting fires.

References

Cruse, A. 2004. Meaning in Language. Oxford textbooks in linguistics.