

Spatial Deictics in Face-to-Face Communication: Findings in Baltic Languages

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Abstract : The present research is aimed to discuss semantics and pragmatics of spatial deictics (deictic adverbs of place and demonstrative pronouns) in the Baltic languages: in spoken Lithuanian and in spoken Latvian. The following objectives have been identified to achieve the aim: 1) to determine the usage of adverbs of place in spoken Lithuanian and Latvian and to verify their meanings in face-to-face communication; 2) to determine the usage of demonstrative pronouns in spoken Lithuanian and Latvian and to verify their meanings in face-to-face communication; 3) to compare the systems between the two spoken languages and to identify the main tendencies. As meanings of demonstratives (adverbs of place and demonstrative pronouns) are context-bound, it is necessary to verify their usage in spontaneous interaction. Besides, deictic gestures play a very important role in face-to-face communication. Therefore, an experimental method is necessary to collect the data. Video material representing spoken Lithuanian and spoken Latvian was recorded by means of the method of a qualitative interview (a semi-structured interview: an empirical research is all about asking right questions). The collected material was transcribed and evaluated taking into account several approaches: 1) physical distance (location of the referent, visual accessibility of the referent); 2) deictic gestures (the combination of language and gesture is especially characteristic of the exophoric use); 3) representation of mental spaces in physical space (a speaker sometimes wishes to mark something that is psychically close as psychologically distant and vice versa). The research of the collected data revealed that in face-to-face communication the participants choose deictic adverbs of place instead of demonstrative pronouns to locate/identify entities in situations where the demonstrative pronouns would be expected in spoken Lithuanian and in spoken Latvian. The analysis showed that visual accessibility of the referent is very important in face-to-face communication, but the main criterion while localizing objects and entities is the need for contrast: lith. čia 'here', šis 'this', latv. šeit 'here', šis 'this' usually identify distant entities and are used instead of distal demonstratives (lith. ten 'there', tas 'that', latv. tur 'there', tas 'that'), because the referred objects/subjects contrast to further entities. Furthermore, the interlocutors in examples from a spontaneously situated interaction usually extend their space and can refer to a 'distal' object/subject with a 'proximal' demonstrative based on the psychological choice. As the research of the spoken Baltic languages confirmed, the choice of spatial deictics in face-to-face communication is strongly effected by a complex of criteria. Although there are some main tendencies, the exact meaning of spatial deictics in the spoken Baltic languages is revealed and is relevant only in a certain context.

Keywords : Baltic languages, face-to-face communication, pragmatics, semantics, spatial deictics

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