

Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory 2

Documenting deixis in Wik-Ngatharr and Wik-Ngathan

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Spatial proximity of the referenced object to the speaker or addressee has long been considered a central factor in describing deixis across languages. However, a 'spatialist, egocentric picture' of deixis is rarely adequate to account for how deictic reference is actually used and pragmatically interpreted within the context of the utterance (Hanks, 1990, 2009: 11). Drawing on evidence from Yucatec Maya, Hanks (2009) proposes that deixis is less about physical space and more about the *access* of speech participants to the object or entity of reference. Approaching deictic use from a concept of relational interaction and participant access (e.g. social, perceptual, attentional) has implications for how reference systems and the contextual information required to understand them, can be adequately documented and analysed in fieldwork.

In this paper I examine the challenges and successes involved in documenting Wik-Ngatharr and Wik-Ngathan deictic expressions using a relational framework that conceives of deictic speech as comprising three parts: "a referential focus (the object), an origo from which it is picked out (the indexical ground), and the relation between the two" (Hanks, 2009: 11). Languages have been shown to differ significantly in how these relational aspects of deixis are categorised and pragmatically realised (Levinson, 2003).

Wik-Ngatharr and Wik-Ngathan, two closely related Paman dialects spoken on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, Australia, have a relatively complex demonstrative system. Demonstrative adverbial and nominal forms are frequently combined with directional and aspectual particles, morphological case-suffixes and ideophones to communicate a range of deictic reference functions with accompanying pragmatic and suprasegmental features (e.g. gesture, speaker orientation and a stylised 'pointing' voice (see Sutton, 1978)). Based on data published in Sutton (1978, 1995) and field data recorded at Aurukun, Cape York Peninsula (2008-9), I present an analysis of Wik-Ngatharr and Wik-Ngathan deictic forms and function, evident at the level of grammar and in the situational context of use. In particular, I consider the possible contextual factors motivating speech participants' selection of the linguistic encoding and decoding of deictic terms. The intersection of space and manners, where participant access to the referent (for example through rights of knowledge, ownership, identity as well as physical and perceptual access) is constituted through speech etiquette and indirectness, is shown to be a salient factor in Wik-Ngatharr and Wik-Ngathan reference.

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