Deixis as a Type of Nomination: English-Armenian Cross-Linguistic Study

The continued interest in deixis as a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon shows that it is in the mainstream of linguistic thought and still remains an underexplored field of research.

The category of deixis is regarded as a specific pragmatic-semantic category which plays a significant role in the process of verbal communication. As a type of reference and nomination constituted by the meaning of a linguistic sign being relativized to the situational context, deixis is based on the conceptualisation of the speech event, the cognitive categorisation of which is systematically reflected in the grammatical and lexical systems of a language.

Deixis is one of the most salient language universals, although very variably expressed. Deictics are complex linguistic units with a number of distinguishable, but related features. They constitute a specific class of words that differ from all other types of lexical units: the adequate interpretation of deictic signs involves a particular point of reference, the so-called "origo". The origo is the centre of a "coordinate system of subjective orientation" that is usually determined by the *speaker* (Bühler, 1934, p. 202). We argue for a broader understanding of deixis as "a marking off point" in relation to which actions and objects, persons, phenomena, and events of the real world are characterized, thus considering Bühler's concept of deixis as too narrowly associated with the actual speech act and the speaker, in particular, as there is much in language that goes beyond this framework (Yerznkyan, 2013).

The present study undertakes a cross-linguistic analysis of temporal deixis in Armenian and English with special reference to such an understudied language as Armenian where there is little systematic research on this topic. Using extensive lexicographic and corpus data the paper particularizes the range of forms and functions of the two deictic systems, investigates the degree of deictability of different types of deictic expressions, reveals the level of equivalence across these diverse, non-related (historically and geographically) languages, explores some theoretical issues that arise from the empirical observations, including the ongoing debate on the deictic type of meaning. The research methodology is based on contrastive, distributional and componential methods of analysis as well as is backed up by corpus analysis tools.

Thus, our study is an attempt to reveal the mechanisms of the development of the deictic word meaning according to a linguistic and cognitive approach involving a comprehensive analysis of language data from semantic, pragmatic and functional perspectives. It focuses on the referential usages of closed paradigmatic sets of deictic expressions belonging to different parts of speech (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs).

In view of the fact that languages vary with respect to the degree to which they grammaticalise or lexicalise deixis, that they may differ considerably in various details and each of the deictic dimensions could be elaborated into a set of semantically and pragmatically related deictic categories, the paper intends to explore the subtleties of the deictic systems in the languages under study taking into account different distinctive features. For that purpose we have worked out a system of pragmatic-semantic criteria to characterise a definite unit and the whole subset of lexical units as to the degree of their deictability. These are: subjective, objective or double (subjective/objective) deixis, pure/impure (mixed, semi-deictic) deixis, abstract/concrete deixis, implicit/explicit deixis.

The analysis shows systematic interlinguistic tendencies. The languages under study vary considerably with regard to the number of deictic grammatical categories, the number of contrastive deictic terms in each category, the pragmatic uses of deictic expressions. The structural and semantic-pragmatic characteristics of the deictic systems of the two languages predetermine the differentiation of the interlingual correlation of Armenian and English deictics into full equivalents, partial deictic correspondences, non-equivalent units. We also discriminate among others two different types of equivalence: semantic and pragmatic equivalence. The differences are mainly determined by the heterogeneous cultural and historical conditions for the development of the Armenian and English-speaking communities and the typological features of the languages – the "synthetism" of the Armenian language and the "analyticism" of the English language.

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