

# Indexicality

## Workshop conveners:

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The concept of indexicality – originating in the semiotics of C.S. Peirce and his triad symbol, icon and index – has been applied in the description of a broad range of linguistic phenomena, from the internal workings of phonology and morphology via relations within syntactic constructions and lexical and grammatical elements designed to hook on to features outside the clause, to the choice of linguistic variants in social interaction.

In morphology, indexicality has been employed to describe the semiotic function of bound allomorphs (Anttila 1975, Andersen 2008: 29, see also Enger 2019, Andersen 2010, Andersen 2020 a.o.).

Case in languages such as Modern German have been analysed as having indexical meaning, as in (1), where the nominative, accusative and dative case index the ditransitive predicate *empfehlen* ‘recommend’ that assigns argument status and semantic roles to the case-marked DPs (Heltoft 2019: 154-155).

- (1) *der Rechtsanwalt hat dem Klient-en den Börsenmakler empfohlen*  
the.NOM attorney has the.DAT client-OBL the.ACC stockbroker recommended  
‘the attorney recommended the client the stockbroker’

Deictic elements, e.g. personal pronouns and deictic temporal adverbs such as *now*, are a classic example of linguistic indexicality (*shifters*, cf. Jakobson 1957) as the encoded meaning of the deictic element points beyond the internal structure of the utterance for interpretation.

The term indexicality is also well established in sociolinguistics in analyses of how linguistic choices may index aspects of speaker or addressee identity, such as in-group identification, gender etc. An example is ‘G-dropping’ (alveolar [n] instead of velar [ŋ]) in e.g. *waiting* by young men in US college fraternities to index social attributes such as ‘hardworking’ or ‘casual’ (Coupland 2007: 23).

The recent decades have seen a growing interest in the concept of indexicality as a tool for analysis and explanation and as an important semiotic aspect of the organization of linguistic structures (see Nielsen 2016). However, there is a number of phenomena that have (typically) not been approached as instances of indexicality present themselves as cases that would benefit from an index analysis, including Insubordination and dependency relations (see, a.o. Mithun 2008, Sansiñena 2015, D’Hertefelt 2018, Beijering et al. 2019); disambiguation of polysemous lexemes by inflectional allomorphs (cf. Wurzel 1980: 448–451), semiotic shifts from indexical to symbolic function, and the creation of domain-straddling indexicality (Nielsen and Heltoft forthc.)

The aim of the workshop is bringing together linguists working with different linguistic phenomena to discuss how distinct phenomena from different domains of language and

linguistic analysis can be brought together under the heading of indexicality, and how linguistic analysis and description may benefit from interpreting them as instances of indexicality as a uniting property and a general semiotic phenomenon.

## Topics and questions

The theme of the workshop will encompass the following aspects of investigations into indexicality:

- Empirical cases of linguistic indexicality that further our understanding of what an index may be
- Analysis of different types of indexical function (e.g. indexing of a morphosyntactic feature, of a semantic property, of speaker attitude etc.), of what they have in common, how they differ and what the full range of possible types of linguistic indexing may be
- Examinations of the role of indexes and indexicality in synchronic accounts of (a) language and in diachronic processes of linguistic change
- Theoretical discussions of how indexical function fits into the larger picture of linguistic meaning and the semiotics of linguistic phenomena.

Of particular interest are the following topics and questions:

- *Indexical functions that straddle different linguistic domains*
  - What types of domain-straddling indexical functions are found in languages, and what domains may be straddled (e.g. morphology/syntax, utterance-internal/extra-linguistic)?
  - Are different types of domain-straddling indexical functions essentially similar or different, and are they motivated and shaped by the same factors or different ones?
- *Changes in indexical functions whereby the domain of the indexical relation is changed* (e.g. extension of what is indexed to include extra-linguistic situational features, or replacement of that which is indexed)
  - How do changes in the domain of indexical relations occur, what motivates the changes, and are they unidirectional?
  - How do these indexicality changes fit into mechanisms of grammaticalisation?
- *Semiotic shifts whereby elements change from having indexical to symbolic function, or vice versa:*
  - What role do semiotic shifts play in diachronic changes, and are the shifts unidirectional?
  - What factors motivate or trigger a shift from indexical to symbolic function (or vice versa)?

Invited speaker: Livio Gaeta (University of Turin)

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