

# Are there non-indexical expressions?

## Background

The notion of 'indexing' (and its derivations) is both pervasive and elusive in Linguistics. Compare the following sentences:

- (1) '/th/ stopping and /t/ release are likely to co-occur stylistically only in cases in which /th/ stopping is quite explicitly **indexing** annoyance' (Eckert 2008: 471)
- (2) 'both the [Agent] and the [Patient] are **indexed** by means of accusative prefixes' (Donohue 2008: 55)
- (3) 'An important kind of grammatical change is the development of grammatical indexes. At the word level, these are cases of allomorphy [...]. At other structural levels, there is phrase-internal (concord), clause-internal (agreement), cross-clausal (switch reference), text-grammatical (endophoric elements), and speech-act **indexing**' (Andersen 2008: 29)

All the types of 'indexing' in (1-3) go back to the indexical mode in C.S. Peirce's semiotic triangle (Merrell 2001), in which an 'index is a referral from the *signans* to the *signatum* by virtue of an effective contiguity' (Jakobson 1980: 11).

## Goal and research questions

My first goal in this paper is to provide a brief history of ideas relating to the various uses of 'indexing' in (1-3) in order to establish common ground and address the terminological confusion that the workshop examines.

I then turn to two practical descriptive questions: There are good reasons to apply indexicality to a broader range of phenomena in language description than is commonly done (cf. Nielsen 2016), but this also makes it difficult to restrict the notion. I therefore ask: (i) what types of linguistic elements are *not* indexical? This question leads to a definition of each of the types of indexing illustrated in (1-3). Second: Peirce explicitly introduces the index as part of a broader semiotic system that also includes symbolic and iconic modes. Therefore: (ii) how do these other Peircian modes relate to the index illustrated in (1-3)? This question leads to a further restriction and contextualisation of indexicality.

## Methodology

The paper combines a philosophy of science approach (in the metatheoretical discussion of indexicality) with a practical, descriptive account of the forms of 'indexing' illustrated in (1-3). The discussion is illustrated with fieldwork data from four Australian Aboriginal languages recorded by the author. This data is also used to test the proposed definitions and classifications of indexicality.

## Results

Jakobson (1957) and Silverstein (1976; 2003) have greatly contributed to our modern understanding of indexicality. However, as Nakassis (2018: 281) rightly points out, under Silverstein's interpretation indexicality is inherently ambivalent between 'on the one hand, immediacy and presence and, on the other hand, mediation and representation'. This leads to a notion of 'indexing' that is usefully inclusive because it allows us to see similarities between phenomena that are not obviously related, but it also glosses over some important differences. I base this claim on examples of (i) avoidance speech styles, (ii) optional case marking and (iii) undermarked reported speech in Australian languages (which roughly correspond to the types of indexing in 1-3).

Also: in many signs, the indexing, iconic and symbolic modes 'are blended as equally as possible' (C.S. Peirce, cited from Jakobson 1980: 11).

500 words

## References

- Andersen, Henning. 2008. Grammaticalization in a speaker-oriented theory of change. In Thorhallur Eythorsson (ed.), *Grammatical change and linguistic theory*, 11–44. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Donohue, Mark. 2008. Semantic alignment systems: what's what, and what's not. In Mark Donohue & Søren Wichmann (eds.), *The Typology of Semantic Alignment*, 24–75. Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press.
- Eckert, Penelope. 2008. Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12(4). 453–476.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1957. *Shifters, verbal categories and the Russian verb*. Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1980. *The framework of language* (MichiganStudies Humanities). Michigan: Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies.
- Merrell, Floyd. 2001. Charles Sanders Peirce's Concept of the Sign. In Paul Cobley (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*, 28–39. London/New York: Routledge.
- Nakassis, Constantine V. 2018. Indexicality's Ambivalent Ground. *Signs and Society* 6(1). 281–304. doi:10.1086/694753. <https://doi.org/10.1086/694753>.
- Nielsen, Peter Juul. 2016. *Functional Structure in Morphology and the Case of Nonfinite Verbs: Theoretical Issues and the Description of the Danish Verb System*. Leiden: Brill.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1976. Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description. In Keith H. Basso & Henry A. Selby (eds.), *Meaning in Anthropology*, 11–55. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico press.
- Silverstein, Michael. 2003. Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language & Communication* 23. 193–229.