

Deixis in Kenyah and Punan languages of Borneo Antonia Soriente

University of Naples "L'Orientale"
and
Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

This paper presents a description of the spatial and temporal deictics in some languages of North Borneo. A comparison of deictic pronouns in Kenyah Lebu' Kulit and Òma Lóngh, Penan Benalui, Punan Tubu' and Punan Malinau reveals a complex pattern of similarities and divergences.

In Lebu' Kulit there are three locative dimensions designating locations in space with reference to the position of the Speaker (proximate, medial and distal *ini inyé iti* respectively.), whereas Òma Lóngh distinguishes two categories along the basic spatial deictic dimension, based on a distance oriented system: *ji* 'close to speaker' referring to a singular referent, *di* if the referent is plural or mass name, *jé* 'remote from speaker and from both speaker and hearer- it does not always seem relevant the position of the hearer, referring to a singular referent, *dé* if the referent is plural or mass name. On the other hand three main locations are expressed by local deictics in Òma Lóngh and Lebu' Kulit each distinguishing between proximate and distal respectively. In Punan Tubu' there is a quadripartite division of the space (*tanih* here, *tarih* there, *tarèh* there, *baq idèh* over there) distinguishing furtherly the 'there' and 'yonder' between the visible and invisible.

Spatial deixis also is related to the environment where the language is spoken. Traditionally these people live along rivers in villages facing one side of rivers. Therefore the main directional deictics depend on the position of the speaker with the respect of the river without any reference to the cardinal directions as orientation.

| Òma Lóngh | Lebu' Kulit |
|------------------|---|
| saqo | so'o go downriver |
| metiq | medik go upriver |
| kaba | ko' ava/kava downriver direction |
| ke razó | ko' déé upriver direction |
| réfa/ke sehaq-te | ke dipa across the river |
| sadóvai | saré bengaaí rivershore |
| kuseng | kusun up away from the rivershore, generally the hill |
| | ko' daai inland |

The directions left and right are applied to the sides of the river and are always used together with the direction of the speaker, whether he is going upriver or downriver. The position of the sun is very seldom considered as a directional term although terms like east and west have been elected as terms where the sun is born, sunrise, and where the sun disappears, sunset. This means that most of these languages do not have any absolute spatial reference terms. Their orientation is mostly egocentric.

Temporal deixis localises the speech event in time by means of adverbs ('now', 'then'), therefore it is expressed by means of adverbs or demonstratives and of some aspect markers.

One of the scopes of this research is to answer basic questions about deictics: to find out whether, as pointed out by Himmelmann (1996), there is a way to distinguish between demonstratives and 3rd person personal pronouns, whether demonstratives are also used anaphorically and whether there is any correlation between the spatial and temporal deictic differentiation in three locative dimensions.

One of the main problems addressed when studying deictics and in particular demonstratives is to investigate whether it is possible to track the development of demonstratives into grammatical markers. As Diessel (1999: 114) says, "crosslinguistically demonstratives provide a common historical source for a wide variety of grammatical items such as definite articles, relative and third person pronouns, copulas, sentence connectives, complementizers, number markers and possessives". In Òma Lóngh like in Lebu' Kulit, the language employs the particles *na* and *ta* that encode the speaker's feeling about how distant is something in the speech. It might be that these particles are directionals marking the opposition "towards the speaker" and "away from the speaker" that are strictly related to the verbs for 'come' *nai* and 'go' *tai*. Anaphoric demonstratives derive from exophoric demonstratives: the Òma Lóngh *zìqì* is related to the exophoric *zì*, and the same happens with the Lebu' Kulit *irai*. As for the 3 person pronouns they can be derived from demonstratives in Òma Lóngh and in a similar way also relative pronouns are derived from demonstratives.

Psychological deixis encodes information about the referent that is related to the psychological framework of the speech participants rather than to the localisation of the speech event in space and time. For this reason a certain number of terms are used in narrative, where every statement must contain a specification of the type of evidence on which it is based: for example, whether the speaker saw it, *dito*, or heard it *dae*, or inferred it from indirect evidence, or learnt it from someone else *re/de*. In almost every utterance it has to be specified who said it. This has created a class of verbs of very high frequency where the pronouns are hardly recognizable; they have become frozen with the root to which they were attached. These terms and other particles (probably evidentials) appear indeed in every single sentence and seem to be obligatory in narrative texts.