

“From East LA to Montebello to Whittier”: Deixis in the Construction of Los Angeles

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Theoretical Foundations

This study is concerned with understanding the indexical, mutually constitutive connection between experience in the world and language. Two theoretical foundations are used in understanding the implications of the emergence/invocation of specific deictic fields in the narratives of fifty-something Mexican Americans from East Los Angeles:

1. William Hanks' concept of *referential practice* (1990, 2005), which formulates a dialogic connection between the day-to-day experiences of people and language using Bourdieu's concept of practice/habitus;
2. J.R. Martin's concept of *phoricity* (1990), which provides a way to examine the mechanics of referentiality in language, based on the semantic conditions precipitated by the context in which an utterance occurs.

Together, these concepts show how deixis is referential at both the social and textual levels, allowing an examination of the mechanics of language as a metonymic representation of experience.

Deixis

Deixis is a system of reference represented in speech; it can also be represented gesturally or in text. Deictic fields are constituted by the intersection of contextual factors and are inherently referential.

The vase is [there].
(spatial demonstrative)



Deictic fields are rooted in the material and social world. They must be understood in context, that is, an interlocutor must know the situation in which the utterance occurs in which to make sense of the deictic term or field.

Bühler's concepts of the *Origo de Ziegfeld* and *Symbolfeld* provide a theoretical framework to understand how people interpret deictic terms along material and semiotic matrices. In a sense, to understand deixis, people must have a dynamic theory of the origin of the term or an *orientational frame* in which to embed and interpret the deictic utterance. This study argues that this field can be semiotically extended to encompass material and symbolic factors, allowing the inherent referentiality of deixis to do additional indexical work.

Some basic deictic types terms include:

- Spatial Deixis**
here v. there
this v. that
- Temporal Deixis**
now v. then
- Person Deixis**
me v. you
- Social Deixis**
tu v. usted
- Deixis in Text: Phoricity**
anaphora
cataphora
exophora
endophora

Bühler's Origo

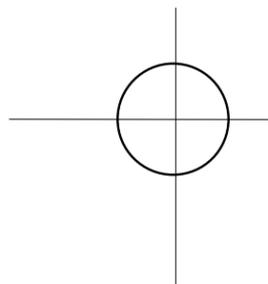


Figure 1. This figure represents Bühler's conceptualization of the *origo* or origin from which to make sense of deictic utterances. The baseline *origo* is the *I, here, now* frame from which all other deictic terms are theorized to derive.

Whittier Boulevard as a Deictic Origo

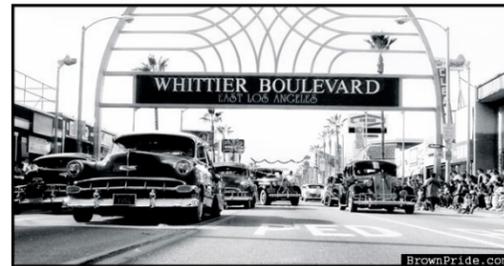


Figure 2. Iconic photo of *lowriders* cruising eastward on Whittier Boulevard appearing on the website brownpride.com.

I grew up in East L A and Whittier Blvd. was our Mecca. It was our own parade route of every week end. You didn't need much money to have fun. Most of us were poor and didn't know it. Those who did have money, invested it in their rides. But we were all rich because we believed in our brotherhood, carnalismo, chicano power, viva la raza, viva la causa, brown is beautiful, unity, and community. We were all brown berets, activists, cruisers, and lowriders.

-- Submitted by: Fox East L A
3:03 PM PDT, May 16, 2008 to LA Times Article

Deixis in Narrative

- Excerpt 1: Ana on the polynucleation of Los Angeles
- Frame 1: Set-up
- 01 [You know], let's face it
[person 2, non-referential][person 1 (pl.), non-referential]
- Frame 2: EditorIALIZING
- 02 It's the whiteman
[homophoric category]
- 03 The whiteman did that shit / years and years ago
[homophoric category] [demonstrative, anaphora] [temporal, pre-immediate]
- Frame 3: Whiteman Voicing Frame
- 04 What we gotta do with the Russians
[person 1, hypothetical origo][homophoric category]
- 05 Gotta do with the Mexicans
[homophoric category]
- 06 Gotta do with the Jews
[homophoric category]
- 07 Who's got more money?
- 08 We'll stick them over here
[person 1 (pl.), hypothetical origo] [participant 3, anaphora] [demonstrative, exophora]
- 09 [Oh you know] what
[person 2, hypothetical non-referential]
- 10 They'll be from the other side of the tracks
[participant 3, anaphora][demonstrative prepositional homophora]
- 11 We'll stick 'em way out in the boonies with all the industry
[person 1 (pl.), hypothetical origo] [person 3, anaphora][demonstrative prepositional homophora]

This narrative is constructed to highlight the places *certain types of people* live. The "right side of the tracks" is the deictic construction for historically white areas of Los Angeles, including the elite Westside, and the suburbs, and the "other side of the tracks" is the deictic construction for Mexican and Mexican-American populations historically concentrated around areas along Whittier Boulevard. 8 thus provides a window into how Ana conceptualizes the way Los Angeles is planned and the distributions of people within it. One of the questions that arise from this is to ask whether Whittier Boulevard as an organizing entity was *constituted by or constitutive of* the way that people conceptualized the deictic fields of "here" and "there" in East Los Angeles.

The Intersection Between Conditions in History and Language

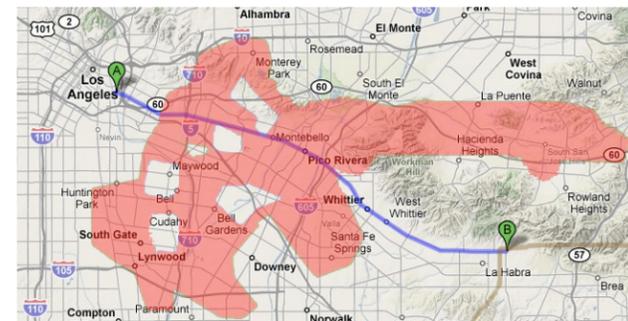


Figure 3. This map represents the concentration of Mexican Spanish (L1) speakers in relation to Whittier Boulevard traced in blue. Note the way that Whittier Boulevard splits off from this demographic concentration after Pico Rivera. Whittier Boulevard experienced significant semiotic loading during the 1950's and 1960's when the children of first generation immigrants living in East LA began to migrate into more affluent areas to the east. This map is derived from the language maps compiled by Derrick Auyoung of "Project Languages of Los Angeles" at UCLA.

The Polynucleation of Los Angeles

Polynucleation is defined as a process whereby "the production of space has occurred in the main not because of economic processes alone, but, more specifically, because of a joint state-real estate sector articulation that forms the leading edge of spatial transformations" (Gottidiener 1985:241). The polynucleation of Los Angeles has profoundly shaped the ways that space is used and conceptualized by people that live there. Not only did real-estate polynucleation act as one of the central forces that gave shape to the conceptualization of space by residents, but this conceptualization also shaped ideas about mobility.

Real-Estate Woes
Isolationist 'Burb
Slow-growth Movements of the Westside Elite

City	% White	% Hispanic	Median Income	Total Population
LA County	74.2%	47.3%	\$43,518	9,519,338
Beverly Hills	85.1%	4.6%	\$70,945	34,979
West Hollywood	86.4%	8.8%	\$38,914	36,514
Los Angeles	46.9%	46.5%	\$36,687	3,849,378
Montebello	46.8%	74.6%	\$38,805	62,968
Pico Rivera	49.4%	88.3%	\$41,564	64,336
Whittier	63.2%	55.9%	\$49,256	84,015
La Habra	63.0%	49.0%	\$47,652	59,264
Brea	77.3%	20.3%	\$59,759	38,585

Figure 4. According to the census explanation of the "Hispanic" category includes "people who identify with the terms "Hispanic" or "Latino" are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 or ACS questionnaire – "Mexican," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban." It also includes people who indicate that they are "other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino." These terms are synonymous." US Census. This table represents select cities in Los Angeles and the associated demographic information. Cities with the highest concentration of "Hispanics" in LA County appear in bold font.

The Emergent Deictic Field

In the narratives of residents of East Los Angeles, phorics constitute the indexical entailments of the deictic field in three ways: 1) they reveal the dialogic constitution of the deictic field; 2) they mobilize social and historical matrices imbued with meaning; 3) they demonstrate that an intimate understanding of the deictic field is dependent on a mutual orientation of speaker and hearer to a specific epistemic frame.

Excerpt 2: Ana on the gentrification of stores in Montebello on Whittier Boulevard

01 I used to shop here as a child
[temporal, habitual aspect] [demonstrative, immediate present]

02 And they were like the best stores
[person 3, anaphora] [anaphoric category]

Excerpt 3: Ana on childhood experiences in East Los Angeles

01 What I used to know was great and pristine
[temporal, habitual past]

02 And I lived in
[person 1]

03 One foot in the white world and one foot in the Mexican world

Excerpt 4: Ana on Whittier Boulevard as a way "out of East Los"

01 And I was the sprinkle
02 But I was Mexican-American
03 I was born here
04 But they gave me a time
05 Like him in Montebello
06 Had friends
07 Their parents wanted a better life
08 So they moved further east
09 From East LA to Montebello to Whittier
10 Hacienda Heights

Whittier Boulevard was developed as a semiotic center which organized discourses and practices regarding the mobility of Mexican Americans. Because of its material nature, Whittier Boulevard was a prime candidate for semiotic loading using deixis as the vehicle of the indexical chain.

In the case of Los Angeles, we can locate the origins and habituation/reproduction of specific deictic fields of ways of the parsing the city by persons that grew up in East Los Angeles in the 1950's and 1960's to specific historical processes which delimited their range of mobility and subsequently informed the development of certain deictic fields as locally relevant ways of parsing the world. Deixis is thus a kind of practice insofar as it is precipitated from experiences in the world; language in this sense may be said to be linked to a kind of habitus.

Conclusions

The concepts and theoretical implications of practice, frames of orientation and phoricity form the foundational framework that I use to understand how fields of deixis are locally formed, what they mean in context and how they provide a window into how people think about the world. Previous studies on deixis have avoided the first step of why fields of deixis appear the way that they do, leaving out the orientational force that history and experience may have on epistemic models developed by the individual and/or community. As outlined by Hanks, an analysis of practice as the embodied coalescence of the sum of social conditions imminent in practice is a powerful framework to understand these day-to-day negotiations. This model lends credence to the ways that history and social conditions inscribe themselves on how one's universe is reflected in grammar. The action of social conditions on the habitus through schemes are "implicit, embedded in actual practices, flexible enough to apply to an open-ended list of changing circumstances and non-predictive" (Hanks 1990:12). Examining deictic fields as forms of practice provides a window into understanding social conditions and history reflected in language.