A preliminary investigation of the differing use of deixis between spoken and written discourse: In the case of direction giving

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Introduction

This paper examines use of deixis in both spoken and written English texts produced by five native speakers. The type of text chosen is direction giving. Among five sets of data, four participants gave directions from their house to their school and/or work place. The remaining participant gave directions from her house to her boyfriend’s house. The spoken data was recorded on an audio tape and later transcribed for analysis. The duration of the spoken discourse was about two minutes long on average, and five minutes for the written discourse. While the focus will be placed on spatial and person deixis, other types of deixis will be briefly mentioned when their occurrences were found to be notable. Differing patterns between spoken and written texts will be pointed out and discussed in terms of the use of deixis. Since the paper refers to each data precisely, all the spoken and written data were provided as appendix for your reference.

Analysis

Spatial Deixis

1. There

There had quite high frequent occurrences in spoken data. For example, it occurred twice in the dialogue in data #1. The first there occurred in line 4 (you see a traffic light there). There refers to the first intersection in line 3, furthermore, the use of there denotes that the speaker/ addressee is not at the first intersection yet. On the other hand, in his written description, he did not mention ‘the first intersection’, and as a result, he did not use there to refer to it. Instead, he combined two pieces of information, ‘the first intersection’ and ‘a traffic light there’. He quite
succinctly uttered go right to the first traffic light as is seen in line 2. This trend was found again later in the data of the same speaker. He used there in line 8 of the spoken data, whereas he wrote in line 5, make a left on L st. He previously had mentioned ‘L st.’ in line 4, and basically repeated ‘L st.’ here instead of using there. Other participants also seemed to use there more often in their spoken descriptions. Quite interestingly, proximal spatial deixis, here, was not found in any data. The preference of use of there over here indicates that every time the speakers used there, the speakers identified the spatial locations of the objects ‘distant’, but not ‘proximate’, from the speakers. Regarding the more frequent use of there in the spoken compared to the written texts, some discernible patterns were found. For instance, as mentioned earlier, one participant combined two utterances that involve the object location, so that he did not have to mention there to refer to the location. In another participant’s case, there was basically omitted in his written text, while he used it in his spoken equivalent. With the data that were obtained, it can be suggested that the participants tended to be more neutral in writing. Therefore, it can be said that they did not employ deixis that specify the spatial location of object relative to the location of the speakers.

2. Down and up

Among the data #1 #4 and #5, frequent use of down, up, straight up, straight down was found. These words could be used both deictically and idiomatically and the difference between the two usages is quite subtle. For this reason, I will carefully explore these words in each data. Interestingly, in data #1 the verb, ‘continue’ was used fairly often along with various prepositions. For example, in his speech in line 10, he used continue down L street and in line 20, continue straight up 36th until... In his written description, he used continue straight down M st... in line 7, and continue up the hill in line 14. This down in line 10 in his speech is considered non-deictic since he used go straight until you... (line 4) in his written equivalent. In other words, down was replaceable by straight, therefore, it could be assumed that he used these phrases rather idiomatically. The same idiomatic style can be seen in continue straight down in line 7 in his written description. However, if takes you right up to in line 23 of his speech is compared with its equivalent in written line 14 continue up the hill, one can surmise that the speaker used the expression right up to not idiomatically, but deictically. That is, there was actually a hill, and the speaker was somewhere down the hill and projected going up the hill.
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A similar example would be in go straight up in line 16 in speech and go up the hill in line 9 in his written description. From looking at both his spoken and written descriptions, it can be argued that the participant in data #1 was more specific about geographic description about hills in his written description. I would assume that the specificity in his written description was generated to avoid any mistakes that can be caused by one-way communication.

Similar expressions of up, down, along with the verb ‘go’ are found in data #4. In his dialogue, in line 4, he said go down, but down was not used in his written data for the equivalent place of the direction giving. Due to the fact that the area mentioned in his direction is quite flat, I would assume down in line 4 was an idiomatic expression which he preferred to use. Same argument can be made about line 8 (go straight) and line 15 (go down). In his written description, in line 4, he used up the main hill, while he stated in line 11 in his spoken description, come to the top of the hill. These two expressions are obviously spatial deixis because of the hill. This participant seems to be very specific both in spoken and written in relation to the location of the hill. In data #5, these rather idiomatic phrases (e.g. go down to..) were found in her speech much more often than the written data.

In sum, one can conclude that idiomatic phrases regarding spatial location tended to occur more in speech. It is suggested that frequent use of idiomatic phrases can be explained by the fact that these phrases are more colloquial and, therefore, they tend to occur more in speech. Because speech is repairable and interruptable, as opposed to written texts, these rather ambiguous phrases were more freely used.

3. This and that -spatial proximal and distal

The usage of this and that — proximal and distal spatial deixis respectively — was examined. Either this or that or both of them appeared in all the data. This is used to identify nearness of the location to the speakers, while that signifies the remoteness of the location in relation to that of the speakers. That was used more in spoken data than in written descriptions of directions. For example, data #3 has six thats in the speech, while it did not occur in his written description. In this data #3, I am not certain about the usage of that’s as in (line 10: That’s heading north, and line 24: That’s heading west.) Both of these that can be referring to the antecedent utterances. That is, that in line 10 refers to ‘taking a right onto main street’ (line 8), and that in line 24 refers to ‘taking a left onto Bulla road’ (line 23). In that sense, that can be interpreted as an anaphora. However, it can still be argued that is
a distal spatial deixis because the speaker and the addressee are not at the point of ‘taking the right onto main street’ (line 8) yet. The participant #4 used that three times in his dialogue and once in his written narrative. It was interesting that the participant #4 stressed the word that in line 17 (THAT is Notre Dame avenue). Notre Dame (ND) Avenue is the most prominent road on campus, and you have almost reached ND once you get to ND Ave. Thus, it could be used as a landmark. It is assumed that is why he put a major stress on the word, that. This premise can be supported by his choice of word, come rather than go in line 21 (and you’ll come to the guard shack) in his speech. This indicates that he shifted his ‘homebase’ from his house to ND campus, where the guard shack was. In fact, in written description, he gave only a few words after mentioning ND Ave. since it would be very difficult to get lost once you get that far. Overall, regarding the use of that, based on the above mentioned facts, it seems that there is a positive correlation between spoken discourse and occurrence of the distal deixis that. Concerning the use of this and that, quite interesting phenomenon was also observed in data #5. That was used four times in the speech in the data #5. Interestingly, on the other hand, in her written data, she started using this first in line 9, shifted to that from line 15, and ended with that in line 20. Each line that deals with these words in connection with their adjacent sentences was examined. In her written description, in line 9, she said, ‘Follow this road until you come to US 12’. Since she used the verb come, I would assume that her ‘home-base’ was already placed in US 12 at the Coding Time (CT). Therefore, I feel that she used this (i.e. proximal deixis) to stress her proximity to US 12. She used this again in line 11– ‘This will take you to Niles’. The verb take here shows that the speaker’s ‘home base’ is on US 12, and Niles is the destination. Then she continued, ‘After several miles you go over a bridge and pass a gas station,’ (line 12 and 13). Go shows the action proceeds away from the space of the speaker. So she used the distal type of spatial deixis. As for the verb, pass, it can be interpreted as a verb phrase. However, it is also possible to explain pass as a prepositional phrase if ‘ellipsis’ is taken into account (i.e. go pass a gas station). It seems that this distal deixis, go, explains the shift from this to that in line 15 well. In line 18, she used the verb go again. Furthermore, the future tense, will, was used in line 19. Since it is a distal temporal deixis, it is possible to interpret that the speaker perceives the time the house will be noticed is rather remote from the CT. In other words, she gave the addressee temporal distance from the house. To me her use of proximal and distal deixis was quite logical as her ending
A preliminary investigation of the differing use of deixis between spoken and written discourse line indicates (line 20: ‘That is the house!’ instead of ‘This is the house!’). Due to the fact that the spatial deixis, that and there, mainly occurred in spoken texts, it can be concluded that speakers give directions as if they are following the path as they speak. Therefore, these spatial deixis were used to determine locations by reference to that of the speakers.

**Person Deixis: I and you**

From here, the usage of person deixis will be discussed. First and second person pronouns are generally considered deictic. However, it is possible for you to be treated as ‘impersonal’ -therefore, non-deictic, especially in written description since the direction can be written for general public, not for a specific person. On the other hand, if the speaker’s direction were interpreted as if he perceived that the addressee was following the direction, you would be more directed to the addressee — therefore, you has no other reading than being deixis in spoken descriptions.

It seems to me that there is a general preference of using either imperative sentence or I as a theme of a sentence in writing. For example, the participant in data #1 often used you in his spoken direction; however, he mainly used imperative sentences in his written texts. In data #2, I was used both in spoken and written direction. I was used as a theme of sentences throughout the written directions both in data #3 and #4. In a spoken data from #3, there was an interesting shift from I to you in line 15. In line 15, he mentioned ‘Don Pablos’, one of the most popular Mexican restaurant in town, and used it as a landmark. I feel that he needed to utter this sentence to give a landmark since it is fairly long drive from after turning left onto Edison road to get to Ironwood Drive. In this utterance (line 15), he used the verb past tense ‘went’, looking back on the past event as opposed to now, therefore, the past tense has a (temporal) deictic characteristic. Obviously, the speaker himself would not go as far as ‘Don Pablos’ since he knows his way, that is why he switched from first person ‘I’ to second person ‘you’. By starting a sentence with now, he tried to bring the hearer’s attention back to proximal time from distal time (past tense). Therefore, this now could be interpreted as a temporal deixis and discourse deixis. He also shifted deixis center from ‘Don Pablos’ back to Ironwood Drive by the use of discourse deixis, now. Once there was a shift from I to you, in line 15, the speaker continued with you after line 18 on. As was mentioned earlier, in his written description, he only used I. The Mexican restaurant — the landmark — was not mentioned in the written description.
In data #4, there was also a shift from I to you in the spoken description. In giving direction, the speaker started talking about where he lives. Therefore the use of first person pronoun was essential in that context. As can be seen in line 6 in his speech, he stressed the word, well, and then he shifted from I to you. This phenomenon is worth mentioning since it appeared that he shifted his deictic center from himself to the addressee here. Therefore, he needed to use well to ‘re-start’ direction giving, projecting deictic center around the addressee. (I will discuss more on well when I refer to discourse deixis.) The reason why I am rather convinced about what went on in his mind is that I know for a fact that Michigan St. is a primary route into and out of South Bend, Indiana. Therefore, people from that area would know where it is. So it appears that he used the major road as a divider of his ‘home base’ and the destination, therefore, he shifted from I to you after providing an ‘re-opening ceremony’ of a new event.

In data #5, the participant used second person all the way to the end in her spoken description, while she used I and then switched to you in her written description. I consider this data set unique since there was no shift of personal pronouns in all the other written data. In line 4 of her written description, she wrote ‘To your right is a cemetery...’ and that is when second person pronoun appeared first in her written data. She continued using you since then. I wonder if she had used existential sentence structure, the shift might not have occurred. That is, if she had said ‘There is a cemetery on the right....’, then she might well have kept I after line 6 in her written data.

The shifts from the first person pronoun to the second person pronoun were very intriguing since they seemed to have occurred naturally. At the same time, these shifts could be interpreted quite logically by the role of various types of deixis, and as a result, the dialogues were coherent.

Overall, the dominant use of imperative structure as well as the first person pronoun in written text seems to indicate less involvement of the addressee in writing. On the other hand, by the use of you, the speaker placed deictic center around the addressee in spoken directions. This shows collaboration on speaker’s part and this premise can be supported by some of the utterances that express speaker’s reassurance (line 26: you are almost there! in #3 spoken data and line 37: you can’t miss it in #5 spoken data).
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**Temporal Deixis: Then**

Throughout the spoken texts, *then* and *and then* were used quite frequently. *And* has many discourse functions and one of them displays ‘continued actions’ (Schiffrin 1986). *And then* expresses transitions from one place to another. It is a temporal deixis, but it also expresses ‘change in path’, therefore, it can also be interpreted as a discourse deixis. Specific example will be given from the data in spoken directions. In data #2, the participant started the new sentence with *and then* in line 10 (and then from the Braddick metro...). Before that, she had talked about Braddick metro station and she also commented about how easy the route is and how short a train ride is to get there from her house. Then she went on to line 10, getting back to telling me how to get to campus. By inserting a few comments about the route, she somewhat interrupted the flaw of continuity of actions herself. Therefore, it seems that by the use of *and then*, she ‘reopened her directional path’. At that time, I had to interrupt the participant to clarify her mistake as can be seen in line 11 (*you mean, Rosslyn?*), and she repaired the utterance in line 12 (*Oh yeah, Rosslyn, that’s what I meant*). Interestingly, she re-started her sentence, using *and then* in line 13 after the interruption, in order to take herself and the listener back to the direction giving/receiving mode.

According to Schiffrin (1986), “*and then* displays an upcoming utterance as part of a not yet completed interactional unit.” The use of *and then* in lines 10 and 13 of Speaker #2 is supported by Schiffin’s analysis of *and then*, as it seemed to facilitate a smooth transition back to the unfinished direction giving activity after the interruption.

**Discourse Deixis: Okay and well**

Quite a few discourse markers were found in all data. In this section, I will analyze two discourse deixis, *okay* and *well*. In line 1 of data #1, *okay* was used as a starter of his direction giving. This usage of *okay* is a discourse deixis that separates the circumstance the speaker and the addressee were in before from the beginning of the ‘direction giving ceremony’, as the occurrence of *okay* was not found after this use. Once the speaker started giving the direction, he treated the whole direction as one event or theme, and put the addressee into the sphere that he put himself in, that is, ‘getting to Georgetown campus from his home’. The similar phenomenon was found in the speaker #4. The only difference between these two speakers in the usage of *okay* is that it appeared at the very beginning of his direc-
tion in #1, while well preceded okay in #4. The speaker #3 also began his speech with well. These two discourse deixis did not occur in their written directions. Though they are rather limited data sets we are dealing with, based on these data, one would argue that these types of discourse deixis tend to occur more in speech. Due to the fact that “well is used to evoke a conversational mode or narrative” (McCarthy and Carter 1994), and these conversational modes were not seen in written, it can be concluded that the lack of discourse markers, well and okay, added uncollaborative monologic mode to the written texts.

Summary of the findings:

Following is the summary of the main findings regarding the use of deixis in direction giving.

1) Distal spatial deixis, there occurred in most of the data (especially in spoken), while proximal deixis, here was not used at all.
2) Idiomatic expressions (e.g. go straight up...) were often found in some spoken data in conjunction with real deictic expressions.
3) Most of the participants used that — distal spatial deixis — in their spoken direction, but not in the written description of the direction.
4) Two participants out of five shifted person deixis from first person pronoun to second person pronoun in their spoken directions, while one participant did the same type of shifting in her written data. It was argued that these shifts denote the psychological shifts that the speakers or the writer suggest from their home base to the destinations.
5) There was a general preference of using either imperative sentence or I as a theme of a sentence in written direction.
6) The temporal and discourse deixis, and then, occurred quite frequently.
7) Discourse deixis, okay, well were used in the beginning of the first utterance in the spoken descriptions, while they were not found in the written descriptions.

On a final note, I hope this preliminary investigation of deixis contributed to better understanding of differing patterns between written and spoken texts. Analysis was limited to deixis use in the context of direction giving this time, but other interesting phenomena such as differences in usage of definite and indefinite article, as well as the use of anaphora in spoken and written modes were also found, and surely deserve further exploration. In addition, since deixis can both be universal
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References
Appendix

Data #1 Spoken Description

1. Okay, um...well, you walk out from my apartment complex and you hang right,
2. and get up to the first intersection,
3. and you see a traffic light there
4. it's 26
5. um... you cross 26
6. and go straight up until you reach L street which is your first intersection.
7. And then from there you go left.
8. (Left on L street?)
9. Yeah, Continue down L street, across the bridge
10. and continue walking about half mile or so where L street intersects with M
11. (Uh huh)
12. And you take M street to the left, all the way down to 34th
13. and you pass all the shops in Georgetown.
14. (Uh huh)
15. and you go straight up to the first intersection, which I think, is Prospect
16. (Uh huh)
17. You cross 34th and continue down Prospect until you hit 36th,
18. and then you turn right on 36th.
19. Continue straight up 36th until you hit O street.
20. (Uh huh)
21. And then um..once you reach O street, you go right..left, left,
22. and that that takes you right up to the main gate in Georgetown.

Data #1 Written description

1. You walk out of my apartment building
2. and go right to the first traffic light.
3. Once you reach the light cross the street
4. go straight until you reach L st. which is the first street.
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5. Make a left on L st.
6. and about a half mile up the street L merge with M St.
7. Continue straight down M St. until you reach 34th.
8. Cross the street
9. and go up the hill until you get to the first intersection, Prospect (I think).
10. Go left on prospect
11. and continue until you reach 36th
12. go right on 36th until you reach O St.
13. Make a left on O st.
14. and continue up the hill until you reach Georgetown main gate.

Data #2  Spoken Description

1. I walk to the Braddock metro station,
2. (Uh huh)
3. uh that’s the number blue, uh the blue line,
4. and on the Braddock metro station on the blue line, I take that directly to
5. Rosslyn where Georgetown University is,
6. um.. at least that’s where the closest metro station is.
7. (Uh huh)
8. It’s a pretty simple route.
9. It takes total about 15 minutes by metro.
10. and then from the Braddick metro station,
11. (You mean, Rosslyn?)
12. Oh yeah, Rosslyn. That’s what I meant. (laugh)
13. and then from the Rosslyn metro station, I catch the Georgetown shuttle,
14. which takes me directly to the Leavy center.

Data #2  Written Description

1. I walk to the Braddock Metro station.
2. (It’s approximately a 10 minute walk from my house to the metro station.)
3. From the Braddock metro station, I take the Blue Line directly to Rosslyn.
4. (the duration of the ride is approximately 15 minutes)
5. From Rosslyn I take the Georgetown shuttle directly to the Leavy center on
6. the Georgetown University Campus.

Data # 3  *Spoken Description*

1. Well, first I go out to my car,
2. and start it up,
3. and then I back out of my parking space,
4. and then I take the main entrance out of the complex,
5. out of Williamsburg apartment complex,
6. (Uh huh)
7. um... then when I get to the end of the complex,
8. I take the right onto main street-
9. (Uh huh).
10. That’s heading north,
11. and north 2 stop lights I take a left onto Edison road.
12. (Okay)
13. and from there,
14. it’s about um... one and half miles to Ironwood Drive.
15. If you pass Don Pablos, you went too far.
16. (Okay)
17. Now on Ironwood Drive.
18. You want to take a right.
19. (Uh huh)
20. and continue on through one stop light,
21. once you’re through that stop light, the second left is a Bulla road,
22. (Uh huh)
23. and you take a left onto Bulla road.
24. That’s heading west.
25. (Uh huh)
26. You are almost there!
27. (Okay)
28. And you follow that till it dead ends.
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29. (Uh huh)
30. Dead ends into Juniper road.
31. At that point, you want to take a right,
32. and at the first light,
33. you go left,
34. and that goes onto campus.

**Data #3 Written description**

1. I drive out the main entrance of Williamsburg Apartments
2. Take a right onto Main St.
3. I go through the first traffic light.
4. At the second light I turn left onto Edison Road.
5. After driving about 1.5 miles I take a right onto Ironwood Drives.
6. I take a left onto Bulla which is the second left past the first traffic light.
7. I take Bulla road until it deadends at Juniper Road,
8. then I go right on Juniper Rd.
9. At the first light I take a left onto Campus.

**Data #4 Spoken Description**

1. Well, okay, um... I live on Eckman drive
2. and what I have to do is I leave my house,
3. and kinda take a immediate left
4. and go down to Michigan St.
5. (Uh huh)
6. WELL, you kinda just hang quick right
7. and you’re onto the main, err.. Michigan Street.
8. And you go straight downtown south Bend,
9. (Uh huh)
10. Through downtown, and you’ll go underneath the viaduct
11. And you come to the top of the hill,
12. and then you hang um...hang right
13. and that’s Angela Blvd.
14. (uh huh),
15. and you kinda go down about, um... a quarter of a mile,
16. (uh huh)
17. THAT is Notre Dame avenue
18. (uh huh)
19. From there, you go left onto Notre dame avenue.
20. And continue down to the end,
21. and you’ll come to the guard shack
22. and you take a left
23. and then you will be on Notre Dame campus.
24. That’s how you get there!

Data #4 Written Description

1. I take Eckman to Michigan St.
2. and hang a right at Michigan
3. then I take Michigan through Downtown South Bend
4. up the main hill to Angela Blvd.
5. I go right on Angela
6. and left at the first stop light
7. that’s Notre Dame Ave.
8. From there it’s just a few blocks to the main gate at Notre Dame.

Data #5 Spoken Description

1. You pull out onto Grape road
2. and you head north towards Michigan
3. (uh huh)
4. and you go down Grape road
5. and there’ll be a shopping mall on the left,
6. Olive garden on the right and the cemetery.
7. You go down to Cleveland road.
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8. There, um you go right,
9. um take a right,
10. (uh huh)
11. and head to the first stop light.
12. and you take a left,
13. that’s Gumwood.
14. (Alright)
15. Follow Gumwood into Michigan.
16. It will cross U.S. 12
17. that’s a highway in Michigan.
18. And there you go left,
19. and you head towards Niles on U.S. 12.
20. When you get over the bridge, which goes over M-60
21. you’ll be going into Niles.
22. (Uh huh)
23. When you pass the city limit of Niles, you see 17 st.
24. take your right there onto 17th.
25. There will be a sign it says Airport.
26. (Alright)
27. You follow the airport sign,
28. that will lead you to schools on your left and right.
29. that’s how you know you are on the right street.
30. At the second block from the high school which is on your left,
31. take a left onto Sheffield.
32. (Uh huh)
33. Follow Sheffield for two blocks,
34. then on your right hand side,
35. 1509 Sheffield.
36. It will be a single story ranch style house.
37. You can’t miss it.
38. It has a planter in the front yard.
1. I pull out in Grape Road heading towards Michigan.
2. I go through several stop lights,
3. University Park Mall is there.
4. To your right is a cemetery, at that intersection, Grape and Cleveland
5. take a right turn there.
6. You’ll be on Cleveland going toward Granger,
7. at Gumwood Road there will be a gas station, so turn left there.
8. On Gumwood Rd. you will pass into Michigan.
9. Follow this road until you come to US 12.
10. Take a left.
11. This will take you to Niles.
12. After several miles you go over a bridge
13. and pass a gas station,
14. look out for an Airport sign.
15. Follow that sign,
16. it will lead you into 17th street.
17. Pass the high school by two blocks will be Sheffield Ave.
18. Turn left and go down two blocks.
19. The second house from the end on the right will be 1509,
20. that is the house.