

Deixis acquisition in deaf and hearing children

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The general purpose of this Project is to study the communicative interaction of deaf children during the early childhood and the change that happens with the beginning of the symbolic function and the three following years. Into this general purpose, there are some specific objectives, one of them is the study of the development of the deixis in interactive situations parent/children for analyzing how parents use the deictics in interaction with their children.

Deixis from the greek verb «to indicate», refers to a range of processes in the language that has in common the fact that they have the use of non verbal keys, words or longer expressions to «indicate» or «refer to» other words.

When during a personal interaction we indicate an object, or even we watch to it, we can get a communication and some degree of a shared comprehension if our partner can see and infer the «object» that we indicate. The preverbal foundation of communication include the development of the deictic processes.

In the case of deaf children the deixis plays an important role in the communicative interaction with other people and the same happens with hearing people who use more the indication with deaf children than with hearing children.

In the preverbal stage, the gesture of indication marks an important moment in the development of the communication and language. Early in development, we see how the child extends the arm and hand to get a far away object.

The gesture of indication produces the most elementary relationship that of knowing the object is external and the social interchange or the adult intervention makes this gesture a communicative one (Triadó, 1990) When, during an interaction with other people, we sign an object or event, we can get communication and some degree of shared comprehension if the partner can infer the object of our intended signaling.

The linguistic deixis splits into three categories:

Deixis of person: resources that indicate who is the speaking and who is the hearing person: I, you, he or she.

Deixis of place: linguistic resources that make possible to the speaking person the vision of his situation in relationship with the hearing person and the rest of the context. They are marked with the place adverbs like: here, there.

Deixis of time: resources used to indicate when the locution takes place, the system for temporal deixis distinguishes between: now, after, before.

The indication gesture is a deictic gesture that accomplishes the «personal function», the

child with his forefinger signs himself and signs to other people, in the same way «he locates the objects» and the people «to express time» (in the beginning), he uses a word with the corresponding sign.

In the preverbal stage the deixis is expressed with the gesture of indication, allowing the child to take the adult's attention for sharing it, to establish interaction guides and specific the common reference in the contiguous space. (Triadó, 1995)

The deaf children, in the same way as the hearing one, uses the indication gesture with a deictic function of person, place and time and also in the same age.

What makes the difference is the fact that deaf children, whose linguistic context is oral, keep using the deixis gestural until older ages than the hearing children do.

Deaf children who learn sign language incorporate the pointing gesture into the morphosyntactical structure of this kind of language.

SUBJECTS

Our approach is based on an observational methodology. It consists of the observation of two deaf and two hearing children from the age of 20 to 36 months. The deaf children have hearing parents and receive educational support in oral language.

The observations were carried out in the children's homes, once a month for half an hour.

PROCEDURE

Observations were recorded taped on video, while children were interacting with the parents in a playing situation. For the transcription it was taken into special account the communicative behaviours where the indication gesture has been used so that we could analyse the functions purpose of these gestures.

We make a categorization of all gestures and we include here only the deictic gestures or indication gestures:

- PO to point an object
- PP to point a person
- PS to point himself/herself
- PPL to point a place

Here we categorize different functions of the indicate gesture:

- L Labeling
- DP Deixis person
- DL Deixis place
- DT Deixis time

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

We have observed, children have communicative resources that reinforce the gesture in the

communicative context where it happens. We can say that the first child vocabulary is mainly deictic.

The first deictic resource is the gesture of signaling that we first use for labeling objects, when the child is not able to use referential words. (Bruner, 1975). However, even when he uses these words, he stills uses the gesture of signaling, which marks the relationship of reference child/external object.

We have observed that the deixis of person is used when children are 2 years old, then they use the pronouns I, YOU. Some authors (Ress 1986) argue that children have difficulties using linguistic resources to mark persons, as we can see in the generalized tendency where the adult speak to them using only proper names. In our study, this does not occur, as the adults use I or YOU when they speak of themselves or the children

Our children acquire the deixis of place at two years old or even before. This deixis involves the speaker's perception of his own special position, and for this to occur the deictic resources needed to mark the place in the act of communication, need to be linked with the speaker/hearing system of deixis of person. For this the distinction next/far stays in the linguistic terms of place HERE (next to speaker). THERE (far from the speaker) and THIS (in the same position as the speaker).

The deixis of time appears at 30 months old or even later. As it happens in the other categories of the system, the speaker is the center of the system, and for this the locution time, time of codification is the reference point, where the indication of past or future tense is distributed. Alternatively we can use the distinction near/far as in the case of NOW, to refer to the codification time, and AFTER to refer to a different tense within the temporal codification. Our children have not yet acquired this late deictic mark, the acquisition of the future tense comes later.

Just like hearing children the indication gesture of deaf children develops in a different way if the child have learned to communicate in an oral or a signed context.

If they acquire the sign language the prelinguistical indication takes place into the gramatical structure of this language. (Hoffmeister, 1977).

Our subjects are sons of hearing parents and an oral surrounding. They are not contexted with an oral sign language.

We can see that they use the indication gesture as deictic and also with after functions as: to show, to give, to ask...

In this communication we have only analyzed the indication gesture when works as a deictic one.

We can see that in all the observed sessions the deictic of person I and You are the ones that are used most frequently, followed by the deictic of place, which appears as answers to questions asked by adults like for example «where is de car?. The answer is given with the index HERE, THERE.

No deictics of time are to be found among the study. At those ages the studied children has not achieved any of the verbal deictics and they don't use indication gesture to express concepts of time (now, before, after). On the other hand the deaf children which use sign language use the deictic of time as indication gesture.

To conclude, we can say that deixis establishes relationships of person, place and time, which are important requirements in a communicative situation, and for this the deictic marks, as Ress (1986) says, code a great part of meaning in the conversation. For this, the role of deixis is an integral part of the pragmatic planning that children acquire. This is facilitated through the mediation of the social interaction with adults.

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