

“...*that* part of the city”: Mental Spaces and Ethnic Neighborhoods

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## 0 Introduction

This paper is about how we interpret locational deictics in discourse processing. Specifically, it addresses a phenomenon referred to by Talmy (1986) as 'decoupling' or 'shifting of the deictic center'. In 'decoupling', a listener must adopt a viewpoint other than one in the actual speech situation in order to interpret a deictic expression used by the speaker. Somewhat informal accounts have been given of this phenomenon in the past (Rauh 1981, Fillmore 1971). The present paper is a preliminary attempt at a more formal account, combining cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987), the theory of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985) and the theory of cognitive models (Lakoff 1987).

The data in (1) give examples of both 'decoupled' and non-'decoupled' uses of locational deictics. I direct the reader's attention to the italicized deictics *this* and *there*.<sup>2</sup>

(1) "...or the same with when I go to, like, a Spanish part of town, you know, see everything in Spanish, and I say, well, you know, *this* is not where I belong, and I suppose, I kind of feel like there's like alienation there, you know, they, you know, it's -- it's, I mean I can be *there*, but I don't belong."

The use of *this* and *there* in this segment is interesting in three ways. First, deictics of opposing values -- proximal *this* and distal *there* -- are used to refer to the same 'objective' location: the Spanish neighborhood, as the suitable paraphrases in (2) show:

(2) ...when I go to, like, a Spanish part of town...and I say, well, you know, a *Spanish neighborhood* is not where I belong...I mean I can be in a *Spanish neighborhood*, but I don't belong.

Second, it appears that the more marked usage is the usage of proximal *this* to pick out a location that was, in fact, at some distance from the interview site. Third, within the context of this particular discourse, it seems incorrect to read *this* as referring to any of a number of candidate locations that could be construed as proximal to the discourse site in some way, as (3) shows.

(3) ??? when I go to, like, a Spanish part of town, see everything in Spanish, and I say, well, you know, *your office* is not where I belong

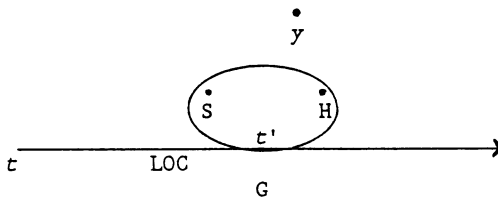
*La Jolla*  
*San Diego*  
*the USA*  
*the universe*

My primary interest is the second of these three points: the use of a proximal deictic to refer to a location which, as the use of *there* a little later shows, can also be construed as distal -- indeed the distal construal seems to be the more appropriate one, given the 'objective' facts of the interview situation. This is where Talmy's 'decoupling', Fillmore's "taking the other fellow's point of view" (1971:41), and Rauh's "shifting the center of orientation" (1981:46) come in.

#### 1 The semantics of deictics

What factors contribute to our interpretation of deictic expressions? One factor is the inherent semantic content of deictics (see e.g. Rauh 1981). In cognitive grammar terms, a deictic picks out or *designates* some entity -- a person, time, location, etc. -- and specifies a relation between that entity and a reference point within the *ground*. *Ground* is an essential concept here; it is to be understood as including "the speech event, its setting, and its participants" (Langacker 1985:113). (4) gives a composite characterization of the semantics of several deictics.

(4) a.



S = speaker H = hearer t = time t' = time of speech  
 G = ground LOC = site of speech event y = element outside of ground

b.	profiling	S	defines	I
		H		you
		t'		now
		LOC		here
		y		that if y is a thing
		y		there if y is a location

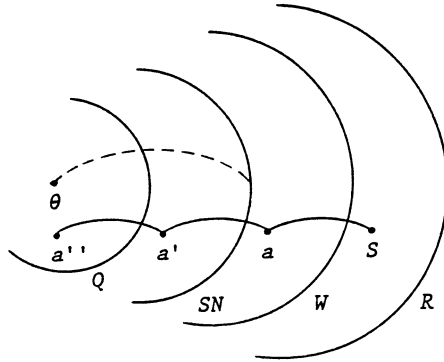
In (4)a., the *ground* comprises the elements within the oval, as well as the discourse location (marked LOC and construed as coextensive with the oval). As (4)b. shows, profiling different elements within or outside of the ground defines different deictic expressions -- at least in what might be considered their prototypical or most basic senses. Each English deictic expresses one of only two relations, proximal or distal. Talmy characterizes these as being "on the speaker-side or non-speaker side of a conceptual partition drawn through space, time, or other qualitative dimension" (1988:168). This characterization will prove significant at a later point in the discussion.

Now, to interpret deictics, we must have in our representation of the import of the discourse entities and relations between those entities and the ground which jive with the meaning of deictics. But as we have just seen in (1), the actual discourse setting cannot be taken as the ground in every case, although it appears to be the default ground (Fillmore 1971:41-42). My claim is that two notions within cognitive linguistics provide *alternate grounds* relative to which deictics can be interpreted: *mental spaces* and *cognitive models*.

## 2 Mental spaces as alternate grounds

Cognitive linguistics conceives of understanding discourse as an active process of constructing a representation of the speaker's intended meaning, through language the speaker uses as well as the exploitation of other knowledge structures. A major strategy employed in constructing this representation is what Dinsmore calls "knowledge partitioning" (1988). In knowledge partitioning, "the information conveyed in a natural language discourse is distributed appropriately over multiple *spaces*, which function as small, distinct, logically coherent knowledge bases within which objects and relations can be represented, and reasoning processes can be performed" (Dinsmore 1988:1). These are Fauconnier's *mental spaces* (1985). A central claim of my analysis is that by virtue of local reasoning within a space, and by cues which maintain our focus on a particular space (Dinsmore 1987:13-15), we can use a mental space as an alternate ground. Rauh gives a similar accounting, but without the formal apparatus of mental space theory set up by Fauconnier: (from the speaker's point of view) "The encoder gives up his real center of orientation and imagines himself located within an imagined space...He establishes a center of orientation to which he relates objects of the imagined space" (Rauh 1981:45). To illustrate, let us return to the data in (1). A partial, drastically simplified mental space diagram is given in (5) for the segment from the words *when I go* up to the first occurrence of the word *belong*.

(5)



The space marked R is the origin space, the speaker's conception of reality (Fauconnier 1985:17). This would include the interview situation and hence the immediate ground for her utterances. S, the speaker, is the only element shown in this space, although of course others would be present, for instance myself as her interlocutor. Now the word *when* is a space-builder, instructing the listener to construct a space, marked W in the diagram, in which some event or other circumstance may be portrayed by the following clauses. The *I* of *when I go* sets up element a, which, by details which must be neglected here, corresponds (by the arc) to the speaker S. Within W, the location nominal *a Spanish neighborhood* sets up another space, marked SN; the relation *go to* implicitly places the element a', corresponding to a (hence to S) in space SN. Then within SN we have yet another space. This is a quote space, marked Q, set up by the phrase *I say*. The quoted phrase *This is not where I belong* sets up elements a' (via the pronoun *I*) and the element marked  $\theta$ , set up by the nominal *This*. Now the quote portrays an utterance event; as such it will have a ground; the ground for this utterance event is the space SN. In other words, as we follow the discourse, we conceive of a person in the Spanish neighborhood uttering the quoted phrase. The speaker is able to exploit SN as the ground for the utterance event of Q so long as the *when*-space remains in focus. This it will do by default until some cue or a different space-building expression switches the focus to some other space: "all else being equal, the most recent focus space will continue to be in focus" (Dinsmore 1988:19). Such a switch does occur later on with the space-builder *can*. *Can* sets up a different space within which other deictics may occur and receive interpretations according to other grounds. The correspondence of  $\theta$  to SN -- represented by the dashed line in the diagram -- is arrived at by the space construction process depicted in (5) and by local reasoning within the focus space.

So we see how a mental space can provide an alternate ground:

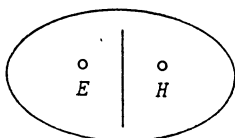
in the *when-space*, states of affairs may hold which do not hold in *R* (for example, the interviewee is in the Spanish neighborhood in space *W*, but in space *R*, she is in my office doing the interview); these states of affairs may offer a basis for interpreting deictics which do not jive with the actual ground. In this case, within *W*, *SN* is construed as proximal to the speaker of an utterance event (*Q*), providing a ground as well as entities bearing relations to it. A reading for the deictic *this* can be obtained by operating *locally* within *W*. We do not have to refer to relations in *R* to find a reading for *this*.

### 3 Cognitive Models as a source of alternate grounds

Let us turn now to another example in which similar circumstances are set up, but with quite different results. This example illustrates how *cognitive models* can supply alternate grounds. A cognitive model, unlike a mental space, is an enduring representation within which we store our knowledge of some domain. While mental spaces serve an ephemeral function in constructing interpretations of discourse, cognitive models serve a longer-term function of storing and organizing knowledge. Cognitive models are what 'fill up' the origin space *R* -- the speaker's conception of reality. They are very likely to be *invoked* in discourse, but less likely to be *created* in discourse, as mental spaces are. Many definite and deictic expressions exploit cognitive models which the speaker assumes to be shared. For example, reference to *the sun* or *the moon* without previous discourse mention is possible because the speaker may safely assume that her interlocutor shares a particular idealized model in which there is only one sun and one moon, and these are known to everyone. It would be left to a pedant, an astronomer, or an alien visitor from another solar system to remind her that her idealized model does not correspond to current scientific wisdom. Similarly, expressions like *1066 and all that* require shared models of various domains, in this case the history of Western Civilization, to be of communicative value: an interlocutor must know the significance of the events of 1066 in order to find a referent for *that*.

The particular cognitive model I invoke here is a cultural map of San Diego, shown in highly schematic form in (6).

(6)



In this model, the territory of San Diego (represented by the ellipse) is subdivided into smaller subterritories, each of which is associated with a particular cultural group (as well as being distinguished in other ways). Some people reserve the term 'ethnic neighborhood' (*E* in (6)) for areas ascribed to non-mainstream cultural groups. Other areas are ascribed to the cultural mainstream (marked *H* in (6)). The reason for the *H* is that this cultural map is oriented; that is, the speaker identifies with the mainstream group and therefore with the territory ascribed to them -- her *home* territory (*H* for *home*). Ethnic neighborhoods are construed as *distal* from this home viewpoint -- on the other, 'non-speaker' side of a conceptual partition, to refer again to Talmy's characterization, which in this case is a cultural partition. This partition manifests itself in the implicit boundaries urban dwellers recognize between ethnic and mainstream neighborhoods.

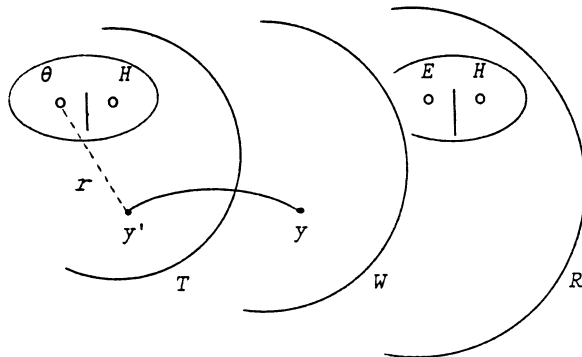
Let us look at a segment from the interview in which this model is invoked. It features in the title of this paper, taken from the segment in (7):

(7) Q: "... you know, you walk down certain streets in a city, 'n you see most of the shop signs in Asian characters or something; I wonder, how do you feel when you encounter things like that? You know, what are your own -- your own personal gut reactions? When you see a [??] sign in Spanish or..."

A: [starting over my finish]: "Well -- well the fir -- I guess the firs -- the first thing you think is, um, you know, that you're in *that* part of the city, and I -- I think usually you see that kind of stuff usually in the older part of the city..."

(8) gives a partial space diagram for this segment.

(8)



In my question, I set up a *when*-space *W*, in which she remains in her reply. For the speaker, we assume, this *W* has as its origin space *R*, her view of reality. *R* would include the cultural map shown in (6) and again in *R* in (8). In *W*, she sets up the element *y* with the word *you*, which invokes a role roughly paraphrasable as 'someone' or 'anyone' who shares her world-view.<sup>4</sup> She sets up an additional daughter-space with the word *think* -- a *thought*-space, marked *T*, attributable to the element *y*.<sup>5</sup> The phrase *part of the city* sets up a location given as  $\theta$ . By the relation *be in*, marked *r*, *y* is placed in  $\theta$ . So we have a circumstance similar to that set up by the discourse segment shown in (1): a potential alternate ground is set up, complete with a thought event, which, like a speech event, takes place within a ground and in which deictic expressions might be used. Indeed in this situation proximal deictics could be used, as shown in (9):

- (9) a. ...the first thing you think is, you're *here* in *this* old part of the city  
 b. ...the first thing you think is, you have to be careful *here* in *this* part of the city

But, in fact, distal *that* appears. Now a ground for *that* is available via the mechanism of *inheritance* from a parent space to a daughter space, given as the Space Optimization Principle in (10) (to see how this principle applies in this case, substitute *T* for *M*):

- (10) Space Optimization Principle: "When a daughter space *M* is set up within a parent space *R*, structure *M* implicitly so as to maximize similarity with *R*. In particular, in the absence of *explicit* contrary stipulation, assume that
- a. elements in *R* have counterparts in *M*,
  - b. the relations holding in *R* hold for the counterparts in *M*, and
  - c. background assumptions in *R* hold in *M*." (Fauconnier 1985:91)

By this principle, the cultural map is inherited, providing entities and relations which the speaker can use to interpret *that*, while operating locally within *T*. Inheritance of the cultural map allows one to find a state of affairs which jives with the distal deictic *that*: the construal of the ethnic neighborhood  $\theta$  as distal to the home territory, which serves as reference point within the inherited cognitive model. This cognitive model, present within the focus space *T*, serves as the ground for *that*.

#### 4 Conclusion

I have made here an elementary proposal as to how we can give a formal account of decoupling or shifted reference-point phenomena, using constructs from cognitive linguistics that are strongly motivated by other aspects of language and language use. Many details of the specific application of the mental space formalism have been neglected due to constraints on the scope of this paper; also, in the course of in-depth analysis of a number of examples from the same discourse segment, it has become clear that as many questions are raised as are answered by applying cognitive linguistic notions to this problem. Nonetheless, it should be apparent that this approach would have much to say about well-known phenomena such as the historical or narrative present and literary devices such as *stil indirect libre*, all of which fall within the realm of linguistic usage and therefore within the limits of linguistic theory (as viewed from the cognitivist perspective). In related work (see note 1), I have used this technique to consider uses of other deictic expressions such as generic *you* and exclusive *they*. Much work remains to be done before the full promise of this sort of analysis is realized, and numerous questions, such as constraints on inheritance or on the use of alternate grounds, remain to be explored. But I hope to have demonstrated, with these first steps, the potential of an approach combining various threads in cognitive linguistics, as well as the importance of the links among semantics, pragmatics, and cultural knowledge to our understanding of discourse processing.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper pursues in greater detail one facet of a project studying the role of cognitive models in reasoning on a sociolinguistic issue, the passage of California Proposition 63 (English as Official Language), reported in Rubba 1988. A lengthier version of the present work was presented in the Cognitive Science 200 seminar at UCSD in November 1988.

I owe thanks to a number of individuals for help with the analysis and the presentation, foremost to Gilles Fauconnier, whose guidance in understanding the mental space framework was invaluable, and to Ron Langacker, who afforded me opportunities to discuss and present the work to others in a research group. My thanks also to Jeff Lansing, Teenie Matlock, Eve Sweetser, and Karen van Hoek, for helpful discussion, and to conferees Paul Kay, Gisa Rauh and Rob Wilensky for insights and corrections. Errors or infelicities which persist despite this excellent help are entirely mine.

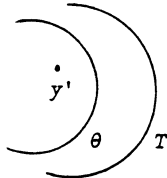
<sup>2</sup> The data are from a personal interview session with an informant who was being questioned about her personal feelings upon

finding herself in an ethnic neighborhood. The speaker was linguistically naive, and, at the time the interview was done, neither the speaker nor myself was aware that the data would be linguistically interesting.

Of course, other factors not dealt with here are also necessary to the interpretation of deictics. For example, the discourse domain (topic of conversation) will significantly narrow the inventory of candidate interpretations (Fauconnier p.c.). For locational deictics, for instance, whether the topic is neighborhoods or galaxies will have significant impact on 'where' a listener is likely to 'look' for the referent of a given deictic expression.

This is one of the numerous uses of generic you. These uses are amenable to a cognitive model accounting; see Lansing (1989) and Rubba (1988).

This could be shown with  $\theta$  as a space, with an element  $y'$  within that space:



This representation is equivalent to (8), but makes it easier to see how  $\theta$  could be an alternate ground.

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