

# Recipient design in spatial reference

Arnulf Deppermann (IDS Mannheim)

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## Abstract

Spatial reference by pointing is probably one of the most researched topics in gesture studies (e.g. Goodwin 2003, Kendon 1970, 2004, Kita 1993, 2000, Schegloff 1984). Stukenbrock (2009, 2015) has shown that successful reference does not only require the coordination of speaker's pointing and the verbal production of its lexical affiliate, but also the coordination of the speaker's actions with the bodily alignment and the gaze of the recipient and their displays of understanding (by nodding, response particles, compliant action, etc.; Stukenbrock i.pr.). Spatial reference thus is joint action. Like other kinds of communicative action, referential practices must be recipient-designed in order to accomplish intersubjectivity.

In my paper I will show how the multimodal design of spatial reference is adapted to the receptive capacities of the recipient in a specific situation. Drawing on a corpus of 70 hours of video-recordings of practical driving lessons in German, I will show that spatial reference in this situation is designed in quite different ways and uses different multimodal resources depending on where the referential target is located with respect to the recipient. The object of study are spatial references which instructors produce for students in the context of instructions (e.g. to look into the interior mirror, to monitor traffic coming from the right, to check the blindspot).

Data-analyses yield that instructors take the following recipient-related conditions into account when referring:

- The participants are seated in a side-by-side position (as opposed to a face-to-face position; cf. Kendon 2004). This has the consequence that the visual field of the recipient is more restricted with respect to the range of gestures of the other participant.
- Referring takes place in a multi-activity situation (cf. Haddington et al. 2014), with driving being the normatively required main attentional focus, while social interaction is only a secondary focus.
- Both participants (increasingly) share knowledge about default referents which matter in the course of (joint) driving actions (i.e. when to look where, what to monitor).

Depending on the spatial location of the target in relation to the spatial position of the driver, instructors use different modal resources. While ordinary vectorial points are used if the car is standing and if the target is in front of the participants, more specific bodily practices are employed if the car is in motion and if targets are located to the sides or in the back of the participants. Points during driving are more expressive and may involve touching the target (e.g. at the interior mirror). Referring to locations on the sides (approx. 90° angle) are performed by knocking at the car's window instead of pointing. Reference to the blindspot (approx. 120°) is made by a fingersnip. More elaborate verbal references are produced for objects which lie outside of the visual field of the recipient.

In sum, limited visual access of the recipient is compensated for by enhanced auditory resources instead of visual resources. The study thus shows how embodied action is recipient-designed. Different multimodal resources are selectively and methodically put into the service of aiding the accomplishment of intersubjectivity efficiently, flexibly taking into account the specific situated