"Hello. This is Sally's answering machine." : Deixis in answerphone messages

"Hello. This is Sally's answering machine."
Deixis in answerphone messages.

Silvia DINGWALL

Kurzfassung:

"Grüezi, da spricht der Anrufbeantworter von Sally."
Deixis in Texten auf Telefonanrufbeantwortern.

Ein Text auf einem Telefonanrufbeanworter (TAMM) ist ein Beispiel eines Diskurstyps, der nicht *face-to-face* stattfindet. Trotzdem werden viele deiktische Sprachelemente wie *ich, da, später, dieses* usw. sehr häufig in solchen Texte verwendet. Die phylogenetische und ontogenetische Entwicklung solcher Sprachelemente sind am besten in einer *face-to-face* Situation zu verstehen, und deiktische Vieldeutigkeiten sind meistens einfacher in diesem Kontext zu klären. Deiktische Sprachelemente in Texten auf verschiedenen Telefonanrufbeantwortern in der Schweiz werden im Hinblick auf mögliche Unklarheiten analysiert. Traditionelle Erklärungen für Deixis erweisen sich auf Grund dieser Analyse als unzulänglich. Ich plädiere deshalb für eine dynamischere und subjektivere Vorstellung von Kontext, um Deixis sowohl in TAMMs wie auch in anderen Diskurstypen zu erklären, weil traditionelle Betrachtungen mehr kommunikative Missverständnisse voraussagen würden, als in der Praxis tatsächlich stattfinden.

1. Introduction[1]

As a fairly new form of technical communication, telephone answering machine (or answerphone) messages (henceforth TAMMs) have provoked a spate of recent studies and commentaries (e.g. ALVAREZ-CACCAMO & KNOBLAUCH 1992, DINGWALL 1992, DUBIN 1987, GOLD 1991, MILLER 1994, NAUMANN 1994, ROOS 1994, ROSEN 1994). They are examples of "strange discourse types" which mix aspects of spoken and written channels, and, as they require the modification of accustomed telephone habits, they have been met with resistance by many people (STADELMAN and HENGARTER 1994: 89, NAUMANN 1994: 438). Although answerphones have been around in Switzerland in some form or other since 1946 (STADELMAN and HENGARTER 1994: 88), it is only recently that they have become quite widespread. This means that the linguistic conventions for leaving TAMMs are still evolving.

Despite the variety of messages one could, in principle, leave on an answerphone, there do appear to be typical structures to both callers' and receivers'

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messages which are somehow constrained by the medium itself (some of these constraints are described in DINGWALL 1992).

In the first part of this article, I consider the typical structure of TAMMs and some of their characteristics. This is followed by a discussion first of deixis generally and then of deictic expressions in telephoning and in TAMMs. Since the referents of these expressions change according to context, there is, under traditional accounts of deixis, considerable potential for misunderstandings when they are used in TAMMs. The final part will examine how deixis is achieved in practice and try to explain why fewer miscommunications occur then one might expect. Such an account requires a more dynamic notion of context than that commonly used in explaining deixis.

2. Leaving a Telephone Answering Machine Message: the typical structure

Leaving messages on telephone answering machines necessarily involves four distinct time slots and two types of message :

t_0,   the time when the owner of the machine records their original message, the R-TAMM;

t_r,   the time when the caller rings the receiver, and listens to the R-TAMM;

t_{r+1},   the time when the caller leaves their message, the C-TAMM;

t_{pbx},   when the receiver plays back the caller's message. The "x" in t_{pbx} indicates that the taped message (the C-TAMM) may, in principle, be played back as often as the receiver wants.

The R-TAMM at t_r is generally immediately followed by the C-TAMM, the caller's message, at time t_{r+1}, which I treat as a separate time slot since the caller may put the phone down and ring again to leave their message, or just hang up. According to my informants, many callers do, in fact, ring twice, especially if the message they wish to leave is complicated and they need time to consider exactly what they want to say, possibly even writing the message down to read out or making some notes.

Each message, the R-TAMM and the C-TAMM, is temporally split in that the times of production of the messages (t_0 and t_{r+1} respectively) are quite distinct from the playback times (t_r for the R-TAMM and t_{pbx} for the C-TAMM). This temporal delay is unusual in spoken language, but the norm for written language[2]. Figures 1 and 2 provide sketches of the temporal sequence and the

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[2] Oral text types with a marked gap between production and reception include the taped letter, film and television (with the exception of "live" programmes). Where the written channel is concerned, modern

different individuals (caller and receiver) involved in leaving and listening to an R-TAMM and a C-TAMM. For a C-TAMM, the temporal delay between production and reception is usually quite brief if the receiver checks the machine regularly. Owners of answerphones vary greatly in how frequently they change the R-TAMM. It may be necessary for some businesses to update their messages often. Among the private owners, young singles in particular seem to enjoy playing with the messages and competing to produce the most original version[3]. So they are likely to change them frequently, while others, like myself, leave the same message on the machine for months, if not years. This means that for R-TAMMs, t_r may occur months after t_o, whereas for C-TAMMs, the delay is usually only a matter of hours, or at most days.

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forms of communication such as e-mail and faxes are breaking down the time barrier. Exchanging written notes during a lecture is an example of written communication occurring face to face.

[3] Besides the R-TAMMs from Swiss data listed in the Appendix, NAUMANN (1994: 437) has an amusing example:

> *Der Anrufbeantworter ist kaputt – hier is* (sic) *der Kühlschrank – sagns* (sic)
> *was wollen – ich schreibs auf und klemms mir an die Tür.*

A colleague answers the telephone with the message:

> *Da spricht de automatische Müller ...*
> *Here speaks the automatic Müller (name changed)*

where he fully identifies with the machine. This is followed by a frequently changed, and mostly totally irrelevant message, such as "read the instructions."

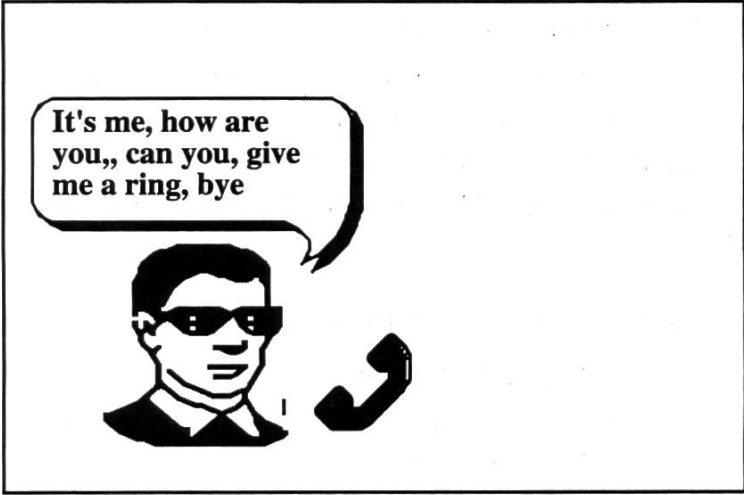Figure 1: Recording and Play-back of the Receiver's Message
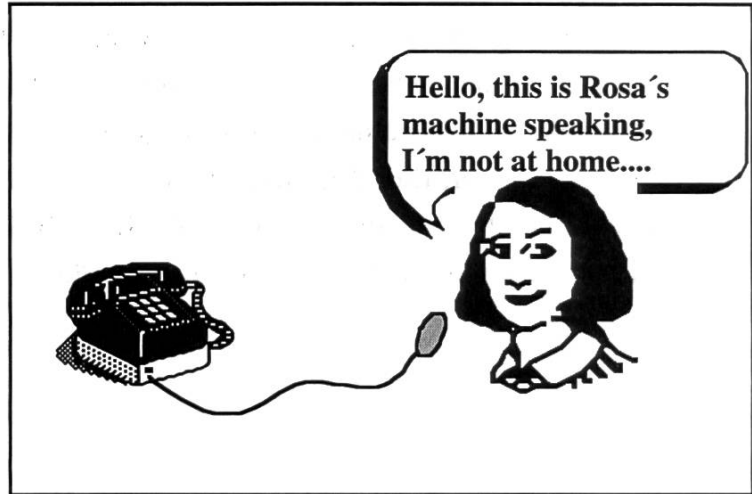
Figure 2: Recording and Play-back of the Caller's Message

THE C-TAMM

t_{r+1}= recording time of C-TAMM

t_{pbx}= playback time of C-TAMM

Figure 3 focuses on the time slot, t_r to t_{r+1}, which is when the caller tries to ring the receiver, is greeted by the R-TAMM, and, in perhaps one out of six cases (STADELMAN and HENGARTER 1994: 90), leaves a C-TAMM. Adapting SCHEGLOFF's 1968 analysis (in SCHEGLOFF 1972) of the typical telephone call, the ring of the telephone acts as a summons to the receiver to answer the phone (a summons is a way of getting someone's attention, like calling someone's name when you see them on the street). The receiver, here in real time the answerphone, responds to the summons by playing the recorded message[4], e.g. :

> *Hello.* **This is Paul and Paula's answering machine. Please**
> **leave your name and message after the beep and we'll call you** (1)
> **back as soon as possible.** *Beep.* [5]

Often the receiver does not have very much time to leave a message (on my machine I'm limited to 16 sec. which is not very long for a message in 2 languages), so R-TAMMs tend to be very brief. A Swiss German example is :

> *Hallo,* **hinderlaschmer e nachricht** *- ciao.* (2)
> "Hello, leave me a message - bye."

Further, the caller is usually paying for the call and will not generally be keen on listening to a long message. Nevertheless, some are lengthier, even going as far as to include music, e.g. :

> (Music: Beatles song "hello hello")
> **This is a machine which loves to talk to people who love** (3)
> **to talk, so talk to the tape and tape your talk** *– after the tone.*

As examples 1 to 3 demonstrate, R-TAMMs vary tremendously[6]. However, a common pattern is to be found in most :

- an opening consisting of an optional greeting (found in 1. and 2., but only via the music in 3), and optional explicit self-identification as in 1. or via voice probes as in 2. and 3 (see section 5 for further discussion of these examples)[7];

- a message encouraging callers to leave a C-TAMM (indicated in bold in examples 1 to 3);

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[4] We find it very difficult to ignore a ringing phone (see the discussion of *summons, cue* and the "hegemony of the caller" below).

[5] In the examples quoted, speakers' names and telephone numbers have been changed in order to ensure they remain anonymous.

[6] See also footnote 2.

[7] Increasingly, private owners of answerphones are giving their telephone numbers rather than their names, but for business people, it is clearly important that the business should be identified explicitly.

- and an optional closing (in 1. the speaker actually says the beep, whereas example 3 includes no hint of a closing, unless falling intonation can be counted as such).

Figure 3: Sequence of Turns/Slots in Calling an Answerphone[8].

Turns or slots:	Filled by:
SUMMONS	*Ring*
RESPONSE	**R-TAMM:**
(Greeting) **Opening**	*Hi /Guten Tag / Sali / (music)*
(Self-identification)	*This is Silvia / Da isch d Lena /* (Voice Probe)
Message	*Please leave your name and phone number and I'll call you back.*
(Closing)	*Thanks; Bye; Tchüss.*
"SUMMONS"/ Cue	*Beep*
RESPONSE	**C-TAMM / (Hang up)**
(Greeting) **Opening**	*Hello Steve / Ja / Aeh, ciao Maria*
(Self-identification)	*It's Nancy / Da isch Widmer Daniel / co è R.P. / c'est M. /* (Voice Probe)
Message	*Could you ring me back some time/*
(Closing)	*OK? bye bye/ merci vielmol Tschüss/ ciao / (Hang up)*

( ) indicates that the slot is optionally filled linguistically.

In fact, from the caller's point of view, it may not be the contents of the R-TAMM as such which are important, but rather the kind of whirring noise before

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[8] In this article, only a brief description of the main elements is given. For more detailed discussion of the structure and contents of the C-TAMM, see ALVAREZ-CACCAMO and KNOBLAUCH (1992: 499-500) and MILLER (1994: 269 ff).

the message is played, which may well be enough to tell callers familiar with the answerphone "schema" or "frame"[9] that they are about to hear a recorded message. Once the caller has identified the frame and realised that they have been answered by a tape, a whole set of expectations and assumptions connected with the frame of answerphone may be triggered, such as waiting for the beep signal to leave their message. They may not even listen to key elements of the R-TAMM to check they have the right number, but start preparing their reply while listening out for the beep which tells them they can now speak and be recorded. I have received several messages from people I do not know and which were obviously not intended for my machine, and my informants have reported similarly. It appears, too (STADELMAN and HENGARTER 1994: 90), that using apparently more friendly and inviting R-TAMMs does not lead to fewer callers hanging up without leaving a message. In practice, then, the contents of the R-TAMM may not be very important as they are often not listened to carefully.

After the R-TAMM, the machine's beep (most answerphones have some sort of signal like this to show that the tape is running) acts as a kind of summons to the caller, although it does not have the attention-getting function of a normal summons. Thus *cue* could be a better term. Most people find it difficult to refuse to respond to a summons and will always pick up a ringing phone. This is part of what Robert HOPPER (1992) in his book on telephone conversations calls the "hegemony of the caller". Many people will interrupt the most important of meetings or even emergency situations to answer the phone. The answerphone is a way for the receiver to strike back and actually screen calls. Just because, as a caller, you hear a tape does not necessarily mean that there is no one there. The person called may wait to see who is on the phone before responding. According to HOPPER, answerphones upset the power relationship between receiver and caller, giving the receiver more choice about whether to answer calls or not. However, most callers do not treat the *beep* as a summons, which requires a response, but rather as an optional *cue*. Thus many callers do not leave messages, so the balance of power between callers and receivers is perhaps not as upset by answerphones as HOPPER implies.

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9 BROWN and YULE (1989: 236ff) has a useful discussion of frames, schema and the various ways in which we store background knowledge about discourse types and situations, and how we activitate this knowledge in communication.

Becoming more accustomed to the answerphone has meant not just learning a "schema" or "frame" for this speech event but also realising that it can have advantages for both the receiver <u>and</u> the caller. The result is that callers familiar with the frame are now less likely to hang up when answered by a TAMM, even if the object of their call is mainly social chitchat. Such callers will not usually have to plan what to say to the same extent as someone unfamiliar with the frame. However, the decision whether to leave a C-TAMM or not is still seen by most people as a matter of choice, whereas picking up a ringing phone tends to have priority over other activities.

Like the R-TAMM, the caller's message consists typically of :
- an opening, which may optionally contain explicit self-identification and a greeting;
- a message, which very often includes a request to call back (as discussed in DINGWALL 1993);
- and a closing, which may include pre-closing elements such okay, thanking and saying goodbye.

Example 4 illustrates a rather minimalist message :
- Opening   *It's me, how are you*
- Message   *Can you give me a ring*   (4)
- Closing   *Bye*

Here there is no greeting or naming of the person called and self-identification relies on a voice probe, which, one hopes, is sufficient for the receiver to identify the caller (in this case the husband was calling his wife). The message is a call-back request, and the closing consists of a one syllable leave-taking word, *bye* . Contrast this with a Swiss German example (Swiss German messages are not, of course, necessarily longer than English ones) :
- Opening   *Ja da isch Widmer Daniel, Tschau Jürg,,*   (5)
              "Ja, here's Widmer, Daniel. Hi Jürg."
- Message   *Du, ich (äh) sötti wüsse, jetzt uf d'GV,, (äh) di zwei*
              Revisore,, Da wär ich froh wenn Du mir chönntisch säge
              ,wie de zweiti heisst und Du chönntsch mir aalüüte uf
              d'Nummere XXX XX XX XX,
              "You, I should know now, for the AGM, the two
              auditors. I'd be glad if you could tell me what the

	second is called and you could ring me on number
	XXXX. "
- Closing	*Merci vielmol, Tschüss*
	"Thanks a lot. Bye."

In this message, self identification is explicit (the order surname, then first name is more common in Swiss German than in English, but is still unusual in my data). Here the self-identification precedes the greeting (with first name), but the message is opened by what one could call an acknowledging particle, perhaps meaning something like "I heard and understood your message."[10] The main message explains the reason for the call and a call-back request (the opening with *Du* is again fairly common in Swiss German, but would be very marked in English). Finally the closing consists of a thanking move (which partly serves to type the call-back request) and a leave-taking.

Further examples are given below and in the Appendix, showing that this basic pattern is followed not only in English and Swiss German R- and C-TAMMs, but also in French and Romansch messages too. ALVAREZ-CACCAMO and KNOBLAUCH (1992) discuss examples from other languages as well. In section 5, where deixis in TAMMs is described, the basic structure of answerphone messages, and the sequence of events and individuals involved will be referred to again.

3. A Brief Word about the Data

Over the past five years, I have collected and transcribed roughly 150 messages on 7 different answerphones in the German part of Switzerland, and have carried out informal interviews with owners and users. It would have been easy to collect more messages, but time-consuming to transcribe them. Besides these examples, I have transcriptions collected by colleagues in Britain and the States, but I will not be referring to these here. For the receivers' messages in English and German, and for the messages in French and Romansch, I have used data collected by the students[11] cited in the bibliography (see also the Appendix for examples, with further background information and the transcription

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[10] *Ja* seems to be more common in German and Swiss German telephone calls than it is in English ones, although an informant in Singapore told me that "yes" is very common as an opening to English business C-TAMMs.

[11] I'd like to say thank you here to the students and colleagues who let me use their TAMMS. Since I only have the students' transcriptions and not their tapes, I have just copied the messages as they were given to me, without checking the transcriptions or trying to use standard transcription conventions.

conventions). For the first conference of ASLA/VALS, I would have liked to provide examples in the four Swiss national languages, but unfortunately I was unable to put my hands on data from the Italian part of Switzerland. As it is, most of my data is in the unofficial 5th national Swiss language, namely English. Unless otherwise indicated, the messages are by native speakers, generally expatriates living in Switzerland.

I have concentrated on obtaining messages from private telephone answering machines, by which I mean those in people's private homes. My data does not include messages left on business answerphones such as language schools, doctors, etc. However, some of the messages left on private phones are definitely businessy in nature. For my data, knowing the owners of the answerphones and many of the callers has enabled me to characterise the calls as business or non-business. As much background as possible to the examples cited is given in the Appendix.

4. Defining Deixis

My three year old son was playing in one room, I was in another. At one point he called out: "Mummy, where are you?" "I'm here" I replied. "No, you're not," he said. "You're there." Who was right? We both were, of course, and not just both _partly_ right, but both _wholly_ right, because the locus of "here" changes according to who is speaking, and where they are speaking. Words whose referents change according to who is speaking, when and where, are known as _deictic expressions_ and the phenomenon generally as _deixis_[12]. Expressions such as _here, I,_ and _you_ serve to point to extralinguistic features of the speech event (the term _deixis_ comes from a Greek verb meaning "to point"). In this article, I will focus on lexical expressions of deixis, mainly pronouns and adverbs. This is not to deny that other features of language, such as tense and intonation, may function indexically (where deixis is treated as a special form of indexicality)[13],

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[12] Deixis is sometimes known as "demonstrative reference" and deictical expressions correspond to what some have called "shifters" or "referential indexicals" (see HANKS 1992 for a discussion of these terms).

[13] In some ways, establishing the referential meaning of an utterance may be seen to be require similar interpretive work to that necessary in identifying the referents of deictic expressions, in that both involve an analysis of the relevant context(s) of utterance. This is what is often meant by saying that language use is indexical. LEVINSON (1983) and others sometimes use the terms _deictic_ and _indexical_ interchangeably, but it would be a mistake to claim that all language is structured deictically. Rather it makes more sense to restrict the use of the term _deixis_ to cases where the referent of the deictic expression is identified relative to the origo (see HANKS 1992 for futher discussion), and use _indexicality_ to describe the interaction between the activated context(s) of utterance of an expression and the interpretation(s) of that expression.

but a detailed discussion of these aspects would go beyond the scope of this paper.

In the dialogue with my son, the speakers change. Usually in face-to-face interaction, the **deictic centre** or **origo** ("pivot or zero-point relative to which the referent is identified", HANKS 1992: 51) is associated with the person speaking, and the interpretation of *here* in the utterance "I am here" would normally be taken to refer to a space close to the speaker. My son, however, interpreted my utterance of "here" egocentrically to mean the space close to him. Deixis poses interpretive problems for children, who are often confused by this world of shifting referents. Their difficulties highlight the interpretive work speakers must do to identify the referents of deictic expressions and the context in which they are embedded. In section 6, I will explore this relationship between referent, context and deictic expression further. The aim of this section is to distinguish different types of deictic expressions so as to provide a framework for looking at their use in TAMMs in section 5.

A convenient starting point for exemplifying some deictic categories is LEVINSON's (1983) hypothetical example of a message found in a bottle pulled out of the sea :

Meet me here a week from now with a stick about this big.

We don't know who, when or where to meet or anything about the size of the stick, and it is not even clear who the message is intended for. *Me, here, now,* and *this* are deictic expressions in this message. Following the usual classification, we can say :

- *me* is a marker of **person deixis**, which concerns the role of the different participants in a speech event; the first person pronoun here must refer to the writer of the message;
- *here* is an example of **place** or **spatial deixis**, referring to the location of the interaction, in this case presumably somewhere in the vicinity of where the message was written[14];

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[14] Various writers have noted the range of uses of *here* . HANKS (1992: 48-49), for example, compares these two utterances (among others) :

    a. *Oh, it´s just beautiful here.* (sweeping arm gesture to countryside)
    b. *I´m over here.* (shouted to companion through the woods)
where "the region referred to in (a.) is of broad extent and includes both interlocutors, whereas the one in (b.) is restricted to the speaker´s place and excludes that of the addressee." (Ibid: 49. Compare also the example dialogue with my son).

- *now* is a marker of **time or temporal deixis**, where the temporal reference is related to the time of the interaction[15];
- *this* does not fit neatly into this categorisation system, and for the sake of simplicity will not be discussed further here. HANKS (1992) provides a much more detailed framework for describing subtle differences in deixis.

These three types: person, place and time, are the most basic forms of deixis. LEVINSON (1983) discusses another type, namely **social deixis**, which indicates the social identity or role of participants in some manner. Some linguists (e.g. AUER (forthcoming) and HANKS 1992) are reluctant to treat this as a form of deixis since "social role" cannot really be considered an object of reference. Further, the range of linguistic devices which can mark social role are extensive, including intonation and accent. Unfortunately space does not permit discussion of social deixis here, although TAMMs do present delicate decisions in choosing, say, the appropriate second person pronoun in languages with Tu/Vous forms.

The problem deictic expressions pose for linguists who favour a context-free analysis of language is that these expressions cannot, as Lyons in his 1977 book on semantics said, in principle, be interpreted without referring to context (LYONS, 1977: 639-46). Further, Lyons claims they are best understood in relation to what he calls the "canonical situation of utterance" where all participants in a conversation are present and taking it in turns to speak. I prefer to call this the "unmarked form of communication". One of the problems with the message in the bottle is that we know nothing about the context in which it was written, the context of production and coding time. We don't know who wrote the message, when they wrote it, under what physical circumstances, etc. These features of the context of production are usually clear in a face-to-face situation where speakers and listeners share a common physical, temporal and perceptual space, so that the deictic terms: *me, here, now* and *this* could probably be disambiguated in a straightforward fashion. I say probably, because my discussion of context later will show that this notion of a given context shared between speaker and listener in face-to-face interaction is not without its problems.

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15 As with *here, now* can also be used to refer to widely differing time dimensions including "today", "this year" and "the last thousand years" (see EHLICH 1992: 208).

5. Deixis in telephone calls and TAMMs

If we take face-to-face interaction to be the unmarked form of communication, where the potential for speakers to share a common perception of the relevant context is greatest, telephone calls are then communicatively marked since participants are usually separated by distance and cannot see each other (sitting next to children and playing at telephoning is an exception). The phenomenon of the videophone suggests that technological innovators feel this lack of shared physical and perceptual space to be a drawback in communication, and have developed the videophone to mimic the unmarked communicative situation as closely as possible, even when there is in reality considerable physical distance between caller and receiver. Young children also find telephoning difficult to deal with as it is not face-to-face. At the age of two, my children were saying things like *Make this* (="I made this") or earlier just *dis* ("look at this") holding up some object or picture they had made or been given to "show" the telephone. The fact that communicative competence on the telephone is developed relatively late (Holmes 1981) is indicative of its markedness as a form of communication, and a (rather trivial) example of ontogeny recapitulating phyolgeny.

The communicative markedness of telephoning is not only shown socially (among telecommunication engineers) and developmentally (by children), but it is also reflected linguistically in the forms of deixis used for introducing speakers on the telephone. In face-to-face interaction, introducing oneself to people one does not know usually requires the first person :

"Hi, I'm Silvia (Dingwall)."

Introducing someone else involves a third person form:

"This is Jane Baker."

So too does pointing out, but not addressing, someone else present :

"It's/That's Jane Baker."

In introducing oneself in real-time phone calls, the first person form is never used, but rather :

"This is / Here is Silvia (Dingwall)."

"It's Silvia." seems to be restricted to contexts where caller and receiver know each other well.

The use of the third person , a demonstrative or place adverb (all of which require the third person form of the verb), rather than the first person, reflects the

markedness of the telephoning situation and the fact that there is distance and no shared perceptual space between participants. To my knowledge, this pattern is used in all Indo-European languages, albeit with subtle differences which will not be discussed here, e.g. :

"Da isch dVreni." (Swiss German)

"Hier ist Thomas Müller." (High German)

"C'est/Ici est Victoria."   (French)

"Co è Rico." (Romansch)

Unfortunately, I do not have enough data to claim that the use of the third person to identify oneself in a phone-call is a universal[16], but the fact that it is used at all is indicative of the linguistically-reflected distancing effect of not being in a face-to-face situation.

In telephone calls, the caller and receiver share a more-or-less common time frame, whereas in TAMMs, as in letters, temporal commonality no longer exists, so the form of communication is even more marked. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the temporal "stretching" in answerphone communication. With both R-TAMMs and C-TAMMs, the time of production of the message is different from the time of reception (as described in section 2), so that TAMMs are even more deviant from the unmarked form of communication than telephone calls. Let us now look at the different types of deictic expressions used in TAMMs and what they seem to be assuming about the context of utterance.

Person deixis:

Referring to Figure 3 again, the self-identification slot in R-TAMMs and C-TAMMs sometimes occurs through voice display alone, as in Examples 2, 3, and 4 or fairly explicitly as in Examples 1 and 5 (5. *da isch Widmer Daniel*). What is interesting about 1 and is the way the speakers identify with the machine :

This is Paul and Paula's machine.   (1)

This is a machine which ...   (3)

In truth semantics terms, both of these statements are blatantly false at the time of initial utterance[17], although when they are replayed the recorded

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16 HOPPER 1992 gives some examples in Pingyin and other languages where self-identification, if it does occur explicitly, uses third person forms.

17 Imagine a corresponding face-to-face situation where someone introduced themselves to you, saying, "I'm a car.". Unless it was a rather special speech situation, you would probably be extremely

message is often interpreted as meaning that "a machine is speaking" (in truth semantic terms, whether one admits (1) to be true at t_r or not will depend on what one understands a recorded message to be). The speakers (at t_o) in these R-TAMMs seem to be projecting forward to the time when someone rings the phone and the recording of their voice is played at t_r. Rather than treating the deictic centre of their utterance as being located at t_o, they shift it to a future t_r (=t_{r1}, t_{r2} .... t_{rx}), i.e. all the times when the recording is played at unknown moments in the future. I develop this point about shift of deictic centre below.

This orientation towards the caller (a further case of the caller's hegemony in telephoning?) is made more explicit in messages where the number is given as in 6 :

> *You have reached number XXX XXX. Please leave a*   (6)
> *message.*

Here, the R-TAMM adopts the perspective of the future caller completely, and tells them what has just happened to them (note the use of the present perfect) in cryptic form, but without providing any potentially false information ("we are not at home") or identifying with the machine. At the time when the message was originally recorded, the caller had not, of course, reached the number. Nor had the referent of *you* , which is normally the addressee(s) in face-to-face interaction, become apparent, but such non-specific referential uses of *you* are familiar in written texts ("Dear reader .. you") and in the language used on radio and television to address the anonymous listeners or viewers.

Callers may also orient to the receiver as a machine. Example 7 is an atypical C-TAMM in that presumably the speakers did not intend to be recorded. Speaker A, a young woman, possibly a secretary, was trying to ring the owner of the machine and was so disconcerted to hear an R-TAMM that she discussed the situation with B :

> A. *Es isch de Automat. De Automat hat gredt.*
> (A. It's the machine. The machine spoke.)
> B. *Also sie isch niet daheim im moment.*   (7)
> (B. So she is not at home at the Moment.)
> A. *Ja (...) vo vorne aafaa.*
> (A. ja ... start at the beginning.).

---

disconcerted. This example may not be as far-fetched as it seems, however, in the light of NUNBERG's (1993: 39ff) discussion of the phrase *I am parked out the back.*, where *I* seems to refer to a car.

In fact there seems to be an inherent ambiguity as to who one is addressing on leaving a C-TAMM. Some callers talk as if they were addressing someone on the phone, whereas others seem very conscious of "the machine".

Temporal and spatial deixis :

In the R-TAMM examples 8 and 9, we find temporal and spatial deictic expressions which cannot refer to the situation at the time of original recording, but rather to the situation pertaining when the caller rings. In this, they are similar to the instances of personal deixis discussed above.

> *Guete Tag. De Paul und d Paula chönd Ine im Momänt*
> *leider nöd persönlich antworte.*
> (Good day. (The) Paul and Paula cannot at the moment   (8)
> answer you personally:)
> *Iri Nachricht drum nachem Piepston - merci fürs Aalüte.*
> (Your message after the beep. Thank you for ringing.)

> *I'm not at home. You know what to do.*   (9)

(8) uses a temporal deictic expression *im Momänt* , which in unmarked communicative situations is normally taken to refer to the time of speaking, t_0. Similarly 9 uses a spatial deictic form "at home", which, like the more explicit "here" can only be understood in relation to the person speaking[18]. However, 9 only shows a temporal shift to the caller's origo. Spatially the origo is still centred around the owner of the answerphone, the most relevant aspect of which, in 9, is their home[19]. These deictic expressions make it clear that, when recording R-TAMMs, speakers orient themselves to the time when the caller listens to the message, t_r, i.e. they put themselves in the shoes of the caller.

When producing C-TAMMs, do callers orient towards t_{r+1}, the time of production, or towards t_{pbx}, the time when the receiver listens to the C-TAMM (see Figure 2)? In principle, the choice is theirs, but in practice, they invariably treat t_{r+1} as the deictic centre, as a French example illustrates :

> *Salut c'est Marie. il est six heures et demi à Cudrefin*
> (Hello. It's Marie. It's half past six at Cudrefin.)   (10)
> *ben ma foi tu n'es pa là si tu veux venir skier à l'occasion*

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[18] But see footnotes 13 and 14 for a range of interpretations of *here* and *now* .

[19] If someone were to say in a face-to-face situation "I'm not at home.", when in fact they were at home, the most usual implicature would be that they did not want to communicate. In TAMMs, however, saying "I'm not at home" acts as invitation to leave a message, i.e. to communicate.

(well, you are not there, if you want to come skiing sometime)

téléphone-moi sinon à tout bientôt ciao

(telephone me, if not - see you soon - bye)

The caller identifies herself using the third person verb form and demonstrative as in a "same-time" telephone call, and then goes on to give the time and place of her call. She notes that person she is calling is not there. The use of *là*, a spatial deictic expression, refers to a place (in this case where the answerphone is) outside the deictic space of the speaker[20], and emphasises the way in which she treats the time and place of utterance of the C-TAMM as the deictic centre in selecting linguistic expressions.

A brief examination of the deixis in TAMMs has shown that answerphone communication involves various deictic shifts where the speaker or listener is required to give up their real centre of orientation and imagine themselves as being located within an imagined space or origo. The shifts are systematic in that the receiver adopts the perspective of the caller at time t_r not only when recording the R-TAMM at time t_o, but also when interpreting the message left by the caller at time t_{pbx}. Two factors may influence this shift. First, as HOPPER (1992) notes, the act of telephoning centres on the needs of the caller (*the hegemony of the caller*). Secondly, the times t_r and $t_r +1$ come closest to mimicking the turn-taking of a dialogue where participants share the same temporal origo, and may be in some sense less marked than the times t_o and t_{pbx}. In summary, R-TAMMs appear to be listener-friendly, whereas C-TAMMs are listener-unfriendly.

6. Conclusions: Deixis in Context

TAMMs are unusual in having so many shifts of deictic centre. What is not so unusual, especially in written language, is for a writer or speaker to give up their centre of orientation in particular types of discourse (RAUH 1983 describes various examples of such deictic use, e.g. the narrative present or various literary devices, and EHLICH (1992) focusses in particular on the deictic disorientation of the reader (and writer) in scientific texts). Traditionally, deixis has been seen as a way of encoding or grammaticalizing *features of the context*

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[20] Elisabeth COUPER-KUHLEN points out (personal communication) that *là*, does not function deictically like "there" in English, since if a caller asks for someone not present, one says "elle n'est pas *là* " where one would say "She's not here" in English. This means the example does not support my argument as well as I had expected, but it is not a counterexample.

of utterance or speech event (LEVINSON 1983: 54), where the context is treated very much as given. However, the shifts in deictic centres which take place in TAMMs and other text types, illustrate how deictic expressions themselves can be invoked in creating context. Deixis does not just single out referents in a given context, but requires us first to establish what the relevant context is, and then to pick out the referents of the deictic expressions.

Deixis forces linguists to deal with context and face up to the fact that a truth-based semantics cannot account for all aspects of reference and meaning. Since deixis is so basic in human language, context-free approaches to linguistics along Chomskean lines ignore it at their peril. Many linguists who pay lip-service to the importance of context still tend to treat it as something rather rigid, and as given. Halliday, for instance, says (HALLIDAY & HASAN1989:5): "in real life, contexts precede texts. The situation is prior to the discourse that relates to it.", and even LEVINSON (1983: 54) talks about: "the analysis of that context of utterance" as if it was independent of linguistic activities. I should like to argue here that participants in a communication exchange actually select and even create contexts, and their views of context may be be altered as they work to interpret messages or texts.

Even in face-to-face interaction, the canonical situation of utterance or unmarked form of communication, it cannot be assumed that participants share the same perceptual space or perceive their environment in the same way, as any non-blind person who has tried to give directions to a blind person will know. But even if none of the participants are blind or deaf, they still respond to their environment in different ways, select different aspects as meaningful, and interpret them personally according to their own background knowledge and individual histories. SPERBER and WILSON (1986) in their work on "Relevance" ask what determines the selection of a particular context out of a range of possible contexts? Their answer is the search for relevance. We take relevance for granted, as given, rather than context. In interpreting an utterance or a text, we select the best possible context which "fits", which makes it relevant.

I see some parallels between their psychological view of context and ethno-methodologists more sociological approach (WATSON and SEILER 1992). The latter see context as something which is probably never wholly shared by participants, but which has to be jointly "achieved" during interaction. Having achieved context :

participants then tend to orient towards it as if it had an
objective existence prior to & independent of their discourse.
(WATSON 1992: xx).

This tendency for participants to objectify context also effects how linguists understand context: it is hard work not to treat context as something externally given.

Another reason why we tend to objectify context is that all too often it is thought of just in terms of the physical surroundings and physical presence of participants. While this aspect of context is fundamental, which features we attend to and treat as relevant will depend on many other contextual factors including what linguistically has gone on before and on our social and cultural values and beliefs, our individual histories, knowledge and make-up. Thus appealing to context to clarify deictic referents is by no means a straightforward activity even face-to-face. But as HANKS (1992: 69) puts it:

> *the more information participants already share in the indexical origo, the more precisely they can individuate referents. When they are face to face, engaged, mutually oriented, and share detailed background knowledge of referents, they can mobilize potentially any shifter in the language. ... The less they share, on the other hand, ... the ... more difficult (it is) to succeed at deictic reference without further lexical description or collaborative work.*

The potential for misunderstanding deictic reference is always there, albeit in face-to-face interaction the chances that it will occur are smaller than in more marked communicative situations. Further, if deictic misunderstandings do arise face-to-face, they can very often be cleared up on the spot, for example, by using a pointing gesture to identify who or what a pronoun refers to.

As I have shown in this paper, telephoning is communicatively more marked than face-to-face interaction, and TAMMs are more marked than telephoning. Thus one would expect it to be more difficult to establish deictic reference in TAMMs, especially given the deictic shifts which occur in dealing with answerphones. This should lead message-leavers to be as explicit as possible in giving details of person, time and place[21], rather than relying on contextual features to disambiguate denotation (as is the case with deictic reference). Such explicitness is a feature of some messages (e.g. example 10) and is routinely

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[21] IVANIC (1992: 184) maintains that in any communication where the physical context is not shared, reference to people, things, time and place "must be explicit in the language".

prompted by some R-TAMMs. However, it is by no means obligatory, as example 4 illustrates. Various informants have assured me that, provided the speaker can be identified from the voice display, such cryptic C-TAMMs rarely cause misunderstandings. In section 2, I claimed that callers seldom pay much attention to the details of an R-TAMM, so again it appears that explictness here is not usually necessary.

Further research is needed to establish how frequent miscommunications are and how "effecient" communication via TAMMs tends to be. If lack of deictic clarity really does pose few communicative problems in TAMMs as my data suggests, then several explanations are possible :

1. the contents of TAMMs may be rather uninformative, in which case communication does not hinge crucially on identifying deictic referents.
2. the structure of TAMMs described in section 2, which largely follows from the physical and temporal constraints of the medium, helps to disambiguate deictic expressions.
3. as people have become more accustomed to TAMMs, conventions for dealing with potential deictic problems have been established.
4. we are, in fact, more accustomed to struggling to identify deictic referents than standard accounts of deixis (which assume context to be static and somehow objective) would lead us to believe.

Space does not permit me to discuss these suggestions in detail. While all four factors may play a role, I will focus here just on the last one.

What I hope to have shown is the comparative ease with which telephone users have adapted their use of deixis to the new technology of TAMMs, despite the deictic shifts which the medium entails. The fact that most of us can adapt without specific training (albeit with some practice) lends support to the view that we are used to negotiating contexts in creating and understanding different kinds of texts. Traditional accounts of deixis, which presuppose a given context prior to text equally accessible to all participants, are patently inadequate not just in explaining deixis in TAMMs, but in explaining how we establish the context for deictic reference in all types of language use, including face-to-face interaction. Only a more dynamic theory of context (perhaps relying on features of relevance theory or, like HANKS (1992) on ethnomethodogy, or some

combination of the two[22]) can begin to account for all aspects of deictic use and abuse.

In addition to providing support for a dynamic theory of context, this exploration of deixis in TAMMs has also highlighted the way in which, as LEVINSON (1983: 54) says :

natural languages are primarily designed, so to speak,

for use in face-to-face interaction

Children acquire the features of deixis largely face-to-face and then have to learn to use them in more marked communicative situations such as telephoning. As we have more practice in adapting features of deixis to different text types and in shifting deictic centres, it is possible that we become more adept at it. Nevertheless, face-to-face interaction seems to be the unmarked form of communication to which we orient ourselves in using deictic expressions. Thus we create imaginary deictic spaces which mimic the face-to-face situation when recording R-TAMMs and interpreting C-TAMMs. Perhaps, despite enormous advances in communication technology, we still aspire to recreate face-to-face communication wherever possible.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions
In 1, the transcription systems used by the students have been followed. For my data, short pauses are marked , and longer pauses ,, . Numbers in brackets indicate examples cited in the body of the paper. (...) indicates an unclear bit of text.

R-TAMMs

1. From Eric Altorfer (1994)

> *Hello. This is Paul and Paula's answering machine. Please leave*
> *your name and message after the beep and we'll call you*   (1)
> *back as soon as possible. Beep.*

> *Hallo, hinderlaschmer e nachricht - ciao.*   (2)
> "Hello, leave me a message - bye."

> (Music: Beatles song "hello hello")
> *This is a machine which loves to talk to people who love*   (3)
> *to talk, so talk to the tape and tape your talk − after the tone.*

> *Guete Tag. De Paul und d Paula chönd Ine im Momänt*
> *leider nöd persönlich antworte.*
> "Good day. (The) Paul and Paula cannot at the moment   (8)
> answer you personally"
> *Iri Nachricht drum nachem Piepston - merci fürs Aalüte.*
> "Your message after the beep. Thank you for ringing."

> *I'm not at home. You know what to do.*   (9)

2. My data.

Receiver is a multilingual (Russian, Swiss German, ...) family of threeliving near Baden

> *You have reached number XXX XXX. Please leave a message.*   (6)

Receiver is a British translator living alone in Zürich

> (Music). *Salu, da isch d Paul Jones, , ich bi niet ummer im Moment, aber Du*
> *chaasch eNachricht nach dPiepston hinterlaa und ich tue Di gern zrugglüüte ,,*
> *merci , tschau*
> "Hi, this is Paul Jones I'm not available at present, but you can leave a message
> after the pip and I'll call you back. Thanks. Bye."

C-TAMMs

1. From Eva Roos (1994)

Salut c'est Marie. il est six heures et demi à Cudrefin
"Hello. It's Marie. It's half past six at Cudrefin."   (10)
ben ma foi tu n'es pa là si tu veux venir skier à l'occasion
"well, you are not there, if you want to come skiing sometime"
téléphone-moi sinon à tout bientôt ciao
"telephone me, if not - see you soon - bye"

2. From Daniela Derungs

Aeh, ciao Maria, co è Rico Minelli.
"Ah hi Maria, here's Rico Minelli"
Tu i stuess veir unbedingt tè chgl vot deir ena risposta.
"You, I really (German) must see you, that means have an answer from you"
Te stüesses telefonar x-zacura tar la nossa numera co XXXXX
"You should ring our number XXXXXX sometime"
pervia dil program dalla festa da diplom . Ciao.
"about the program me for the Diploma party."

3. My data

Caller is Swiss German calling his British wife
It's me, how are you ,, can you give me a ring ,, bye   (4)

Caller is Swiss German calling a Swiss German colleague (an English teacher)
Ja da isch Widmer Daniel, Tschau Jürg,,   (5)
"Ja, here's Widmer, Daniel. Tschau Jürg."
Du, ich (äh) sötti wüsse, jetzt uf d'GV,, (äh) di zwei Revisore,, da wär
ich froh wenn Du mir chönntisch säge wie de zweiti heisst und Du
chönntsch mir aalüüte uf d'Nummere XXX XX XX XX,
"You, I should know now, for the AGM, the two auditors. I'd be glad
if you could tell me what the second is called and you could ring me
on number XXXX. "
Merci vielmol, Tschüss
"Thanks a lot. Bye."

Caller (A) is a Swiss German woman making a business call to a British woman. (B) is a
female colleague of A's.

    A. *Es isch de Automat.,, de Automat hat gredt.*
      "It's the machine. The machine spoke."
    B. *Also sie isch niet daheim im moment.*   (7)
      "So she is not at home at the moment."
    A. *Ja (...) vo vorne aafaa.*
      "ja ... start at the beginning."

Caller is British phoning a British colleague

Hi John Paul Jones here from Winterthur,, John, on the first of October,
(Association) Winterthur has its meeting and we'd be very interested in having
you in the afternoon to do something on music, um ,, you can get me in the
evening , normally , and , er ,, say whether it's too short notice or whether you'd er
,, be interested, thanks a lot, hear from you, Paul