

# What speakers do and what listeners look at. A comment on visual deixis and mimesis.

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## ABSTRACT

In a previous study (Gullberg & Holmqvist 1999), we have shown that listeners' visual attention is affected by speakers' gaze behaviour such that when speakers look at their own gestures, listeners tend to fixate them as well. Visual deixis has often been offered as an explanation for this phenomenon. In such explanations it often appears to be implicitly assumed that listeners automatically align their gaze with that of the speaker. However, empirical data do not support this assumption. In this study, we therefore propose a different view of visual deixis. We will show that listeners appear to be sensitive to the difference between speakers' fixations of real and imagined objects. Specifically, we suggest that listeners' tendency to fixate the same objects as speakers (i.e. the success of visual deixis) depends crucially on the different narrative levels (McNeill & Levy 1982) at which these objects occur. These narrative levels can also be related to the phenomenon of mimesis.

The present study is based on 40 video recordings of conversational narratives. The listeners' eye movements were recorded using an SMI iView eye tracker. The preliminary results suggest that the listener will only fixate speaker fixated objects that exist in the real world (the paranarrative level). In other words, if the speaker looks directly at her own, real hand, the listener is likely to fixate it as well. If, on the other hand, the speaker fixates an *imagined* object which only exists at the narrative level (an imagined paper held between the hands), but not at the paranarrative level (where space between the hands is empty), the listener will not fixate that object.

## REFERENCES

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