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Verbal and nonverbal deixis: the pointed lip gesture among the San Blas Cuna

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ABSTRACT

The pointed lip gesture is a facial gesture in use among the Cuna Indians of San Blas, Panama. It occurs in various contexts with meanings which at first appear to be unrelated. An analysis of the contexts reveals, however, that the meaning 'pointing' is always present and that further meanings are derived from the discourse structures in which the pointed lip gesture is found.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I investigate the meaning of a facial gesture used by the Cuna Indians of San Blas, Panama.¹ The gesture consists of looking in a particular direction and raising the head; during the raising of the head, the mouth is first opened and then closed. The gesture is completed by a lowering of the head to its original position. It is the constellation of raising head and opening and closing



[1] Data for this paper were gathered on the islands of *Sasardi-Mulatupo* and *Niatupo-Tikantiki*, at opposite ends of the Comarca of San Blas, in Panama. The research was

of lips which gives the impression of pointing lips. Some Cuna call the gesture *kaya sui sae* 'to make a long or pointed face'; others have no name for it.

What is striking about the Cuna pointed lip gesture is that it is used in several situations and for several purposes which at first seem unrelated. That is, it appears that there might be gestural homonymy – the same physical gesture having several totally different meanings. The analysis presented here, however, attempts to show that all uses of the gesture are related and furthermore that they are linked with the Cuna linguistic or sociolinguistic system of pointing or deixis. In fact an adequate description of Cuna deixis requires consideration of both verbal and nonverbal means of pointing. Focusing on the integration of the nonverbal pointed lip gesture with the discourse structure of speech acts and speech events brings out the relationship of all the uses of this gesture.

It seems useful to place this analysis within the context of four basic approaches that have been taken toward gesture or nonverbal communication.

1. Gesture is considered to be a system or modality separate from verbal language and is therefore to be studied independently of language. Linguistic units or models may be called upon, however. Much of the work of Birdwhistell, Hall, McQuown, Smith, and Trager in nonverbal communication seems to belong here. (See Sebeok, Hayes, and Bateson 1964).

2. Verbal (language) and nonverbal (gesture) communication are first separately studied as independent systems and then matched up in order to see if they interrelate. Birdwhistell (1966) adopts this approach; a more recent paper and one which also makes use of the generative-transformational model of language is Lindenfeld (1971).

3. Gesture is seen as part of a general strategy or structure involved in communicative activity. The relationship between the verbal and nonverbal modalities, linguistic structure and gesture, is not a central issue. Studies by Goffman and Schefflen are often along these lines.

4. For certain aspects of linguistic and sociolinguistic structure, verbal and nonverbal communication are viewed as a single, integrated system. Ekman and Friesen (1969) suggest this approach; their argument is programmatic, however; and there is no detailed analysis of specific data. Schegloff (1968) studies verbal and nonverbal 'summons' within a single system.

My analysis of the Cuna pointed lip gesture falls within the fourth approach discussed above. The point of departure is linguistic in that I am concerned with

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a problem of description within the Cuna language system – deixis or pointing. The pointed lip gesture must be included in the description, however, since it is used along with verbal language as a means of pointing. To limit my description to either the verbal or the nonverbal would be of necessity arbitrary and would fail to capture the native Cuna system.

The traditional linguistic notions – *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* – will be basic to the analysis.² Cuna syntagmatic or discourse structure will be discussed in terms of speech acts and events rather than sentences, the unit most often focused on by linguists.³ That is, the pointed lip gesture is used in questions, answers, statements of information, commands, directions, comments on previous acts and interaction, and greetings; these acts must appear in the analysis. Furthermore, the concept of *presupposition* enters into the analysis. Presuppositions involve facts known to participants in Cuna interactions and drawn on in the structured use of the pointed lip gesture. Some examples of the gesture are impossible to account for without consideration of these presuppositions.⁴

Thus, I begin with a problem in Cuna linguistics – deixis or pointing. My analysis requires, however, a framework that in some ways goes beyond that common to most linguistic work – description of the nonverbal pointed lip gesture, speech acts and events (but see note 3), and presuppositions (but see note 4).

USES OF THE GESTURE

I will deal with nine distinct cases of the pointed lip gesture, each one of which was observed many times during the course of my research.

[2] Hymes (1968) and Ervin-Tripp (1964, 1969) discuss the applicability of these notions to the study of patterns of speaking.

[3] Note, however, that an interest in the analysis of speech acts and speech events (as more basic than the sentence) has developed recently within three distinct but increasingly related traditions – sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication, ordinary language philosophy, and generative-transformational grammar. For sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication, see Hymes (1964, 1967, 1968), Ervin-Tripp (1964, 1969), and Labov (1970: 54–9); for ordinary language philosophy, see Austin (1962) and Searle (1969); and for generative-transformational grammar, see Boyd and Thorne (1969), Sadock (1970), and Gordon and Lakoff (1971). It is ironic that the same linguists who for years argued against anthropological and sociological approaches to linguistic data are now turning to them, usually without acknowledging the few pioneering scholars who had all along claimed that language was multifunctional, that speech acts and events were part of linguistic behavior, and that certain social information must be included in a grammar. Hymes (1964: 10), for example, cites Susan Ervin-Tripp's pointing out that a command may be expressed not only in the imperative form, 'Get me my coat', but also as a question, 'Would you get me my coat?' or even, 'Don't you think its getting cold?' See also Ervin-Tripp (1964: 91). Seven years later, Gordon and Lakoff (1971: 63) have discovered that 'it's cold in here' and 'close the window' can both serve as commands to close a window.

[4] For applications of the notion of presupposition in recent work in linguistic theory, see Morgan (1969), Kiparsky (1970) and Hutchinson (1971).

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(1) *As part of a question involving direction or location, with or without verbal accompaniment*

(a)⁵ One woman says to another 'What's that cloth?' and makes the *plg*⁶ toward the cloth which is in the second woman's hand.

(b) The first woman might have simply made the *plg* toward the cloth and the second woman would have interpreted the action to mean 'What's that cloth; where did you get it?'

(c) A group of men are in a boat on the sea. Another boat passes in the other direction. One of the men in the first boat asks a second 'Who was that?' and makes the *plg* toward the passing boat.

(d) One man says to another (both are standing in the street) 'What work are you doing?' and makes the *plg* to the house in which the second man has been working.

(e) An assistant is working with the investigator on the translation of a text, written in a notebook. The assistant has never heard the tape of the text. At one point he asks the investigator 'Do you have the tape?' and makes the *plg* toward the notebook.

These examples show that there is a paradigm of Cuna questions involving direction or location; the paradigm consists of four possibilities.

(1.1) Purely verbal utterance without the use of the pointed lip gesture, direction or location being specified verbally.

(1.2) Verbal utterance in which direction or location is expressed both verbally and by means of the pointed lip gesture. Example (a) above illustrates this possibility, since the verbal 'that cloth' as well as the physical gesture both point to the cloth in the woman's hand. The pointed lip gesture seems to reinforce or stress that it is the cloth that is being talked about, similar in English, for example, to a more heavily stressed accent on the word 'cloth' than on the other words. Of course eye contact between the two participants is necessary so that the receiver of the message can see that the sender is making the gesture towards the cloth. In example (c), the pointed lip gesture specifies that 'that' refers to the passing boat.

(1.3) Verbal utterance in which direction or location is expressed by means of the pointed lip gesture only. Examples (d) and (e) above illustrate this possibility. In (d) the gesture signifies 'in your house'; in (e), 'corresponding to that notebook there'. In these examples the pointed lip gesture serves as a sort of pro- or anaphoric deictic in that it replaces a deictic that might also have been expressed verbally (as in (a)). Eye contact is of course also necessary here. In example (e) a presupposition is involved, namely that my assistant and I both know that

[5] The following notational conventions will be used throughout this paper: numbers (1), (2), (3), etc., will be used to refer to cases or categories of the pointed lip gesture. Letters (a), (b), (c), etc., will be used to specify particular, observed examples.

[6] In all examples, *plg* will be written as an abbreviation for 'pointed lip gesture'.

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corresponding to every text transcribed in a notebook is a tape on which the text was originally recorded. This presupposition is not a community-wide one but is shared by the two individuals taking part in the interaction – my assistant and myself. This is one of the two types of presuppositions which I make use of in this analysis. The other is a community-wide presupposition – a presupposition shared by every member of the community. It should be clear that example (e) is not understandable without consideration of the two-person shared presupposition.

(1.4) No verbal utterance; the pointed lip gesture is used alone. Example (b) illustrates this possibility. In this example, a community-wide presupposition is involved – that all women are constantly interested in where other women obtain certain useful and valuable objects (for example, cloth, to be used in making *molos* ‘reverse-applique blouses’). It is expected and repeatedly occurs that if one woman publicly holds a new piece of cloth, cooking utensil, etc., other women will ask her where she got it. Women frequently hide such recently purchased items as they walk across the island in order to avoid having to reveal their source. Thus the use of the pointed lip gesture by itself in (b) is sufficient to stand for the question: ‘Where did you get that?’.

The four possibilities for Cuna questions involving direction or location should demonstrate that the pointed lip gesture must be included in a linguistic description of Cuna deictics or pointing. A restriction to verbal expression of direction and location would arbitrarily cut up the paradigm. This argument remains valid in the other eight cases of the pointed lip gesture.

(2) *As part of an answer to a question involving direction or location, with or without verbal accompaniment.*

(a) A boy asks his mother where his father is and the mother replies ‘at the point’, making the *plg* in the direction of the spot in question, where the father is making a canoe.

(b) One man questions another about a third who is not present: ‘Where is Julio?’ The second makes the *plg* towards a house and says, ‘Julio is eating’.

(c) One man asks another ‘where is my son?’ and the second responds by making the *plg* in the direction in which the son had gone.

Thus, analogous to questions, Cuna answers to questions involving direction or location can be studied in terms of a paradigm consisting of four possibilities.

(2.1) Purely verbal utterance without the use of the pointed lip gesture, direction or location being specified verbally.

(2.2) Verbal utterance in which direction or location is expressed both verbally and by means of the pointed lip gesture, as in example (a).

(2.3) Verbal utterance in which direction or location is expressed by means of the pointed lip gesture only, as in example (b) in which the notion ‘in his house’ is specified by the gesture.

(2.4) No verbal utterance; the pointed lip gesture is used alone, as in example (c).

The pointed lip gesture is a pro- or anaphoric deictic in possibilities (2.3) and (2.4). In both, the gesture stands for or replaces a locative that was expressed in interrogative form in the preceding question. That is, the meaning of the pointed lip gesture in these answers is derived from the fact that a specification of direction or location is required by the preceding question.

Cases (1) and (2) of the pointed lip gesture have the following in common. In both the pointed lip gesture is an essential element in a communicative event which consists of two acts – a question and an answer. In case (1) the pointed lip gesture is used as part of the question and in (2) as part of the answer.

(3) *As a demonstrative element in a statement of information, a direction, or a command.*

(a) An old woman says to a young girl, 'You know how to speak Spanish' and makes the *plg* to her.

(b) Two men are sitting on a bench in the large congress or meeting hall in the center of the village when a third man walks in through a distant door. The first man says to the second, 'Your friend' and makes the *plg* toward the third.

(c) One man says to a second, 'He came back today', and makes the *plg* to a third man who is present.

(d) A group of men are gathered talking about a famous Cuna individual who is no longer living. One of the men states that the individual in question was his grandfather. Then he makes the *plg* toward one of the other men present and says, 'He was his grandfather also.'

(e) During the drinking festival associated with girls' puberty rites, a man who has had too much to drink is being carried off by his female relatives, as is the custom. Another man, who is standing near the investigator, turns to him and says, 'My nephew', making the *plg* toward the drunk who is being carried off.

(f) After a rain, one man, who has just returned to the island from the mainland, passes another and says to him, 'The river is rising' and at the same time makes the *plg* toward the mainland river.

(g) A man asks a young girl if a Panamanian official, due to arrive by plane from Panama, has indeed arrived. She replies 'ask' and makes the *plg* toward a man who is standing at some distance from the couple. This man is the village 'postmaster' who goes everyday to the airport to meet the plane.

(h) A man in the congress house is making a hammock, a traditional ability which few men still know. He announces to the group of men watching him that 'Tiolikinya [an elderly man not present at the moment] also knows' and makes the *plg* toward the bench in the congress house on which *Tiolikinya* always sits.

(i) Two chiefs are chanting the traditional Cuna greeting to one another in the presence of a group of men. A few women are serving drinks to the men.

The women are supposed to take the empty cups back from the men when they finish drinking. One man finishes his cup and raises it. The woman who gave it to him doesn't see it. One of the chiefs then says 'cup' and makes the *plg* toward the man who is holding the empty cup.

(*j*) Two very young boys inadvertently knock over a small fence in the presence of an adult. The adult says to one of them, 'You will be punished'. The boy, thus labelled as the guilty one, turns to his young friend and makes the *plg* towards him, as if to say, 'He did it, not me.'

These examples illustrate that Cuna statements, directions, and commands about direction or location form a paradigm consisting of the same four possibilities discussed for questions and answers.

(3.1) Purely verbal utterance; no use of the pointed lip gesture.

(3.2) Verbal utterance in which direction or location is expressed both verbally and by means of the pointed lip gesture, illustrated by examples (*a*), (*b*), (*c*), (*d*), and (*e*). In these examples, the gesture may be directed toward either a person or a place. The person may be either second or third. Example (*a*) illustrates the use of the gesture to point to a second person. In example (*d*), although pointing occurs both verbally and nonverbally, the pointed lip gesture specifies which of the men present 'his' refers to.

(3.3) Verbal utterance in which direction or location is expressed by means of the pointed lip gesture only, as in examples (*f*), (*g*), (*h*), and (*i*). Cuna community-wide presuppositions are involved in (*g*) and (*h*). With respect to (*g*), it is known by all members of the community who the village 'postmaster' is; it is therefore understandable why the girl points toward this man when saying 'ask'. With respect to (*h*), all Cuna men and women always sit in the same spot in the congress hall. These reserved seats are known to all members of the community. Thus all persons present understand why the gesture is made to a particular seat along with the statement '*Tiolikinya* also knows', in spite of the fact that the individual in question is not at the moment present. That this use of the gesture is anaphoric depends thus on a community-wide presupposition about seating arrangements in the congress hall.

(3.4) No verbal utterance: the pointed lip gesture is used alone, as in example (*j*).

Cases (1), (2), and (3) of the pointed lip gesture are similar in that in all of them the gesture is used as a pure deictic or pointer. It indicates direction or location, either together with an accompanying verbal utterance or alone. In case (1) this pointing occurs as part of a question, i.e. as part of the initiation of a discourse structure (which consists of a question followed by an answer). In case (2) the pointing occurs as part of an answer to a question and is often dependent on the question for part of its meaning, i.e. it is often anaphoric to an interrogative locative expressed in the question. In case (2), then, the gesture occurs in direct response to a previous unit of discourse – a question – which

requires another – an answer. Examination of the examples in case (3) reveals that the pointed lip gesture here also occurs in response to something that preceded it. What preceded it is not so obvious and demanding of a response as is a question, however. It may be an utterance, an action, or even a presupposition. It is an utterance in examples (d), (g), and (j). Notice that (g), though a response to a question, is not an answer. Rather it is a direction to ask someone else who does know the answer. The pointed lip gesture occurs as a response to an action in (a) (the young girl's speaking Spanish), (b) (the man walking through the door), (e) (the carrying off of the drunk), (h) (the making of the hammock), and (i) (the raising of the cup). It occurs as a response to a presupposition or presupposed interest in (c) and (f). In (c), there is the two-participant presupposition that one of the men had been asking the other for several days about the whereabouts of the third who had just arrived. The presupposition involved in (f) is the community-wide concern of all Cuna about the state of the river, since it is intimately related to their daily round of economic activity. After a rain, it is expected that everyone wants to know whether or not the river has overflowed.

The specification of the syntactic characteristics of cases (1), (2), and (3) will enable me to relate case (4) to them. In case (4) the pointed lip gesture does more than merely point; it also mocks or makes fun of its recipient.

(4) *During an event of any kind involving two individuals, one individual makes the pointed lip gesture toward the other. It seems as though the second individual is being made fun of or mocked by the first.*

(a) A man and a woman are conversing during the drinking festival associated with girls' puberty rites. Both are slightly drunk and are joking, as is customary on this occasion. The woman says something which the man considers funny. He then makes the *plg* toward her, as if to say 'got you' or 'you're something'.

(b) Two women and one of their husbands are standing at the dock talking. A Panamanian police boat pulls up to the dock. One of the women says to the other (the one whose husband is standing there with them), 'They've come to get your husband.' At this point the husband, laughing, looks up at the woman who has just spoken. When they make eye contact, she makes the *plg* to him.

(c) The investigator buys an item in a store. The store owner is not there and his wife, who doesn't know the prices of things, is tending shop. She guesses at the price and the investigator gives her the money saying, 'Is that enough?' She responds by making the *plg* to him, as if to say 'wise guy'.

On the surface, case (4) seems quite different from (1), (2), and (3). There is not a paradigm of possibilities but simply one possibility – the pointed lip gesture. The meaning 'pointing' (direction or location) so clear in (1), (2), and (3) is not immediately obvious here. Syntactically, however, (4) is rather similar to (1), (2), and (3); especially to (3). The first three cases of the pointed lip gesture all involve speech events consisting of two acts. In (1) and (2) the event is

a question–answer sequence, the answer being required or in some sense demanded by the question. Thus in case (2) the pointed lip gesture is often used anaphorically, namely to relate back to an interrogative expressed in the question. Its meaning is acquired from both its immediate referent – the object pointed to – and its syntactic context – the interrogative expressed in the preceding question. Case (3) also occurs in two-act events, although the second is not required by the first. Once the second occurs, however, its meaning is related to the first act of the discourse structure which triggered it. This is clearly illustrated in (3) (*j*), in which the pointed lip gesture signifies ‘He did it, not me.’ This meaning is acquired by both the direct receiver of the pointing – the other boy – and the preceding act – the accusation of guilt. The examples in case (4) all involve two-act events similar to those in (3). The pointed lip gesture (the second act in the event) is triggered by the first but not required by it. Case (4) differs from case (3), however, in that the first, triggering act is always humorous or comical in some way. The pointed lip gesture then relates back to the preceding humorous act. But it is also directed to a particular individual. Its meaning is then to relate an individual to the preceding humorous act or interaction. For this reason, it seems to mock or make fun of its recipient, precisely by relating him to what came before.⁷ Thus (4) is not very different from the other cases of the pointed lip gesture investigated above. The meaning of the gesture in all cases derives from both its actual recipient or referent – the thing or person pointed at – and the syntactic or discourse units with which it co-occurs.

- (5) *During an event of any kind involving more than two individuals, one individual makes the pointed lip gesture towards a second, who may or may not be aware of its being made, for the benefit of a third or more. It seems as though the second individual is being made fun of or mocked.*

(a) One afternoon in the congress house one of the ‘chiefs’ spokesmen’ is telling obscene jokes and everyone is laughing. At one point one of the men present makes the *plg* at the joke teller, as if to say ‘how about that guy’.

(b) Three individuals are standing together in a small group and joking. One of them says something funny and the other two laugh. The second makes the *plg* in the direction of the first with the third as the intended receiver but not paying attention to see whether or not the first sees it being made, as if to say ‘he’s funny’ or ‘what a character.’

(c) The investigator tells a woman that she has curly hair. Curly hair is rare in this straight-haired society. Furthermore, physical characteristics such as

[7] Erving Goffman has suggested (personal communication) that the meaning of the pointed lip gesture in case (4) and in fact in cases (4) through (6) is the following: ‘Read everything which came before this gesture and indeed that which provoked it again and this time don’t take it seriously.’

this one are a constant source of discussions and jokes among the Cuna. The curly-haired Cuna woman makes the *plg* towards the investigator's wife, as if to say, 'She's the cause of this.' The curly hair of the investigator's wife had been a source of much joking among the Cuna.

Case (5) differs from (4) in that more than two individuals are involved. The pointed lip gesture is used by one person to signify something about a second to a third. In other words, in (4) the referent and the receiver of the pointed lip gesture are the same. In (5) they are different. The syntactic or discourse properties of (5) are, however, precisely the same as (4). That is, the pointed lip gesture is used to relate a particular individual to a preceding humorous act or interaction. Notice that the gesture both points and mocks. This is most clear in example (c) where the investigator's wife and not the investigator is pointed at. It would also have been possible for the gesture to have been directed at the investigator with a meaning something like 'you character' or 'you're something.' In either instance, mocking would have been involved; the difference lies in which relevant individual is pointed at. Example (c) also involves a presupposition – the community's focus on the investigator's wife's hair as a source of joking.

(6) *During an event of any kind involving more than two individuals, one individual makes the pointed lip gesture toward a second, who is not aware of its being made, for the benefit of a third or more. It seems as though the unknowing individual is being made fun of or mocked.*

(a) Two individuals are joking with a third, at this third's expense. The third walks away. The first individual then makes the *plg* toward the back of the third so that the second (but not the third) can see it being made.

(b) Two individuals are talking about a third's being unpleasant and irritable, in this third's presence. At one point in this discussion, one of the two catches the eye of the second and makes the *plg* toward the subject of their discussion; this subject has his head turned at this moment and thus does not notice the gesture.

(c) Two chiefs (one from *Mulatupo* – the host – and another from another island – the guest) are performing the lengthy, chanted, traditional greeting ceremony in the central congress house in the presence of a group of men. Both chiefs are seated in their hammocks, their faces in the vacant stare characteristic of the performance of this event. During this ceremony, the principal *Mulatupo arkar* 'chiefs' spokesman enters the congress house. In order to get to his seat, he must pass in front of the two chanting chiefs, a perfectly acceptable and reasonable action. But in doing so, he trips slightly on the wires of the investigator's tape recorder, which he had not seen. As he turns to sit down, one of the chanting chiefs – the host – makes the *plg* toward him, so that the investigator can see it being made.

Case (6) is like case (5) in that a relevant individual is specified by means of

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the pointed lip gesture and thereby linked to a preceding humorous act or interaction. It differs from (5) in that deliberate care is taken so that the specified individual is not aware that he is being mocked by the pointed lip gesture. Thus not only are the referent and the receiver of the pointed lip gesture distinct, the referent is furthermore not permitted to know of the making of the gesture. In case (6), then, two individuals use the pointed lip gesture as an expression of *collusion* against a third.⁸

I have thus far characterized six cases of the use of the pointed lip gesture. I have argued that they are all related in that the meaning 'pointing' is present in all. This 'pointing' is most obvious in the first three cases. In cases (4), (5), and (6) the meaning 'mocking' also enters in. 'Mocking' is derived from a humorous act or interaction which immediately precedes and indeed triggers the pointed lip gesture. In the last three cases, then, the gesture both points and mocks. Finally, in case (6), the pointed lip gesture enables two individuals to communicatively collude against a third, by pointing and mocking joined together with the care taken by the participants that the person pointed at and mocked does not know about it. The first six cases of the pointed lip gesture are also similar in that they occur within the bounds of an encounter or social interaction between individuals. It is in this respect that the remaining cases are different.

(7) *The pointed lip gesture is used as a greeting between two individuals.*

(a) Two individuals make the *plg* to one another in passing.

(b) The investigator enters the home of a 'medicine man'. The latter is in the process of chanting to some medicine in order to give it life. He makes the *plg* to the investigator and continues chanting.

(c) One woman calls out to another who is standing at some distance, 'My friend.' This is one of several Cuna ways of getting someone's attention in order to begin an interaction. The second woman replies by making the *plg* to the first.

In case (7) the pointed lip gesture is a greeting, used in a manner similar to a nod of the head in American society. It seems useful to consider this usage of the pointed lip gesture in terms of a paradigm, consisting of the following possibilities.

(7.1) Both individuals use a verbal greeting; the pointed lip gesture is not used.

(7.2) One individual uses the pointed lip gesture to greet a second; the second responds verbally.

(7.3) One individual greets a second verbally; the second responds with the pointed lip gesture.

(7.4) Two individuals greet one another with the pointed lip gesture; no verbal greetings are uttered.

[8] I am grateful to Erving Goffman (personal communication) for pointing out the applicability of the term *collusion* to the strategy of social interaction.

Since the physical gesture in case (7) – the pointed lip gesture – is exactly the same as in cases (1) through (6), it is logical to ask if the meanings are related. It is important to first note that the discourse or syntactic properties of (7) are quite different from those of (1) through (6). In (1) through (6) the pointed lip gesture always occurs within the context of a social interaction or event that has already begun. In (7), on the other hand, it is used in the very opening of an interaction, either as the first act (example (b)), the response to the first act (example (c)), or the total encounter (example (a)). The pointed lip gesture here cannot be interpreted as a question (case (1)) because it is not followed by an answer; it cannot be interpreted as an answer (case (2)) because it does not follow a question; and it cannot be interpreted as a comment on a previous act or interaction (cases (3) through (6)) because it does not follow such an act or interaction. Rather the gesture in case (7) is used in the formal marking of the opening of an encounter between two individuals – it is a greeting. However, it is also used here, as in all other cases, to point – not to a thing but to a person. Thus in case (7) one individual points to another in order to greet him. Just as the humor of the mocking pointed lip gesture (cases (4) through (6)) is derived not from the gesture itself but from its syntactic context – the preceding humorous act or interaction, the meaning ‘greeting’ in (7) is not derived from the physical properties of the gesture but from its syntactic context; i.e. that it begins an interaction between two individuals. Thus the seven uses of the pointed lip gesture discussed so far are all related in that in all the gesture literally points; the differences in meaning involved in the seven cases result from the various syntactic constructions into which it enters.

- (8) *Two individuals make the pointed lip gesture to one another as a greeting. This reciprocal greeting takes on a jokingly insulting or mocking aspect.*

The mocking aspect of this case of the pointed lip gesture is sometimes somewhat difficult to ascertain. One bit of evidence is the relationship between the two individuals involved. Their relationship must be such that semi-insulting joking is possible. This social relationship which makes a mocked greeting possible is probably best viewed as a presupposition shared by two individuals. Other aspects of the event are also significant. Case (8) is often but not always accompanied by smiling, laughing, or arm pointing. Furthermore, it is often made longer or larger than that used in case (7) and individuals often stop moving in order to make it to one another. Thus cases (7) and (8) are alike in that they are both greetings; (8) furthermore involves a mocking which is derived from a social presupposition shared by two individuals.

- (9) *Two individuals in passing exchange a series of pointed lip gestures as mocking greetings.*

Case (9) is a repetition of case (8) and not of (7), which cannot be repeated. Thus

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the presupposition of a joking relationship between two individuals, which enables them to exchange a mocking greeting, also permits the repetition of this greeting.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to study a single facial gesture used among the San Blas Cuna – the pointed lip gesture. In all nine cases of the gesture which were investigated, its physical characteristics are the same.⁹ The problem consists in determining whether or not all cases of the gesture are systematically related, i.e. whether or not gestural homonymy is involved. I argue that all nine cases are indeed related, precisely because pointing or deixis is involved in all. This 'pointing' can be considered the basic meaning of the gesture. To it may be added the meanings 'mocking' and 'greeting'.

According to the analysis there are three basic usages of the pointed lip gesture:

- I. Pure pointing – cases (1) and (2) – questions about direction or location and answers to questions about direction or location.
- II. Comment on a previous act or interaction – cases (3) through (6). Cases (4) through (6) are furthermore 'mocking' in that they respond to a previous act or interaction which was humorous.
- III. Greeting – cases (7) through (9). Cases (8) and (9) are also 'mocking', derived from a joking relationship which exists between the two participants involved.

The relationship among the nine cases of the pointed lip gesture can be represented in the form of a semantic tree. In this tree the following *semantic features* are used:

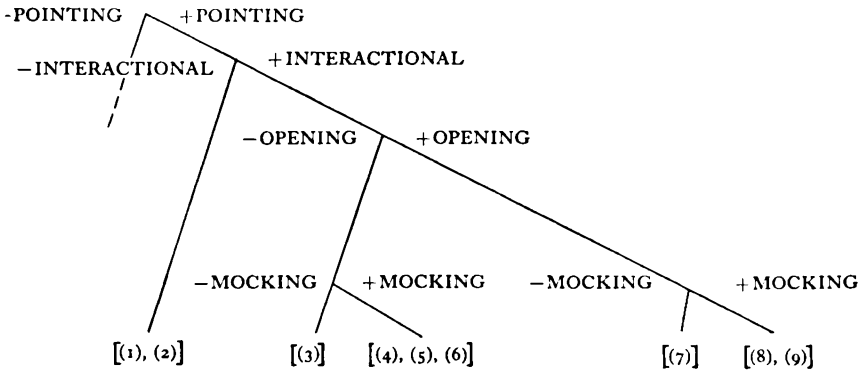
1. *Pointing/Non-Pointing*. Pointing is present in all nine cases.
2. *Interactional/Non-Interactional*. The non-interactional cases are (1) and (2) in which the gesture signifies 'pointing' only.¹⁰ Cases (3) through (9) are interactional in that they either comment on a previous act or interaction or else they are the very interaction which opens a social encounter.
3. *Opening of Encounter/Non-Opening*. Cases (7) through (9) open an encounter; cases (3) through (6) occur within an encounter that has already opened.

[9] Note, however, the slight differences involved in cases (8) and (9).

[10] This is not to imply that questions and answers as speech acts are not part of social interaction; but rather that the pointed lip gesture in cases (1) and (2) does not relate to or depend on the syntax of the interaction, as it does in the other seven cases.

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4. *Mocking/Non-Mocking*. Cases (4) through (6) and cases (8) and (9) involve the mocking of a particular individual. The semantic tree is thus:



This tree clearly shows that 'pointing' is the basic, *unmarked* meaning of the pointed lip gesture. The more *marked* meanings – 'comment on previous act or interaction', 'greeting', and 'mocking' – are successively added on.

The tree also shows that there are essentially five meanings of the pointed lip gesture. This can be demonstrated perhaps even more clearly by means of a chart in which the five meanings are labelled I, IIA, IIB, IIIA, and IIIB; I, II, and III corresponding to the three basic usages of the gesture outlined above.

	I		IIA	IIB			IIIA	IIIB	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Pointing	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Interactional			+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Opening			-	-	-	-	+	+	+
Mocking			-	+	+	+	-	+	+

The tree and the chart are intended as visual summaries of the analysis of the pointed lip gesture, which has been presented case by case above. The problem is essentially one of discourse analysis. I begin with the linguistic analysis of pointing or deixis. I then argue that verbal and nonverbal pointing must be considered together as part of a single system. Finally, the meanings that pointing comes to have can only be understood by means of a careful investigation of both the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic properties of the pointed lip gesture. This involves the discourse structure of Cuna speech acts and events as well as certain presuppositions shared by members of the community.

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