

Depiction in communication
Herbert H. Clark
Stanford University

When we communicate, we rely on three cognitively distinct methods of signaling: description (as with the conventional forms of language); indication (as with pointing); and depiction (as with iconic gestures). Ordinarily, we combine these methods in composite signals, as when you point at a nearby car and say “That’s mine,” using both description and indication. Depiction may not be as common as description or indication in everyday conversation, but it requires a view of communication that is broader than simply establishing what speakers mean. I will examine depictions in a range of activities and draw out the challenges it poses for theories of communication and cognition.