



The semantics of the distal/proximal features and the diachronic competition between demonstrative and strong definite interpretations

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Definiteness across domains: Two kinds of definites.

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OUTLINE

Introduction

Distribution: dem vs. strong def

The role of distal/proximal feature

Pragmatics of feature loss

Case studies

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Pragmatics of feature loss

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HOW DO DEFINITES EMERGE?

The most common source: demonstratives¹

(Lyons, 1999, 331):

- ▶ *This process can be described in terms of loss of lexico-semantic features*
- ▶ *and in the case we are concerned with it is essentially the **feature [+Dem] which is affected***
- ▶ *in some languages (like Macedonian) definite articles maintain the deictic distinctions displayed by demonstratives ... It is much more common, however, for articles to have no deictic content, so that their creation involves **loss of deictic features** as well as [+Dem]*
- ▶ *It is likely, though, that in many such cases there has been an **intermediate stage at which the demonstrative concerned has already lost its deictic feature to become a general, deictically unmarked demonstrative.***

¹Lyons (1999, 331) lists some other sources, such as verbs and classifiers. ≡

UNPACKING LYONS' INTUITIONS

He assumes an intermediate evolutionary stage between demonstratives proper and definites “proper” (weak definites):

An element which has retained [+Dem] but lost the deictic feature (proximal, distal etc.)

Candidate for the intermediary stage: strong definite determiner

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Case studies

OUTLINE

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The role of distal/proximal feature

Pragmatics of feature loss

Case studies

LOCI OF CONTRAST

Demonstratives and strong definite determiners contrast (at least) with respect to the following three environments:

- ▶ I. contexts providing an anaphoric antecedent
- ▶ II. NPs with restrictive relative clauses
- ▶ III. NPs denoting uniquely

I. CONTEXTS PROVIDING AN ANAPHORIC ANTECEDENT

Given a Common Ground that is **underspecified wrt the number of individuals in the extension of the NP**:

A strong definite **must** be used (in a language that has them).

- (1) Peetje hee jister **an kü** slaachtet. Jo saai,
Peetje has yesterday a cow slaughtered. may says
det kü wiar äi sünj.
DEF.STRONG cow was not healthy
“Peetje slaughtered a cow yesterday. They say the/that cow
was not healthy.” FEHRING FRISIAN, Ebert (1970, 107)

A demonstrative **may** be used (or a definite).

- (2) A woman_i entered from stage left. **That/the** woman_i was
carrying a basket of flowers. Wolter (2003), adapted from Roberts
(2002)

I. CONTEXTS PROVIDING AN ANAPHORIC ANTECEDENT

Given a Common Ground that is **underspecified wrt the number of individuals in the extension of the NP**:

A demonstrative **may** be used (or a bare NP) also in a language without definites:

- (1) Poruč zi mnoju jihav hlopčyk. **(Toj) hlopčyk** meni skazav,
near with me rode boy (that) boy me told
ščo vin ne rozumije rosijsku.
that he neg understands Russian
“Next to me rode a boy. That/the boy told me that he does not understand Russian.”

UKRAINIAN

I. CONTEXTS PROVIDING AN ANAPHORIC ANTECEDENT

Given a Common Ground that entails that that **the extension of the NP > 1**, a demonstrative **must** be used:

- (2) A woman_i entered from stage left. Another woman_j entered from stage right. **That/#the woman_j** was carrying a basket of flowers. Wolter (2003), adapted from Roberts (2002)

- (3) U kav'jarn'u uvijšla žinočka i zamovyla espresso. Potim in café entered woman and ordered espresso then zajšla šče odna. **#(Ts'a)** žinka ne stala ničogo came more one this woman neg become nothing zamovljaty to.order

“A woman entered the coffee house and ordered an espresso. Then another one came in. This woman did not order anything.”

UKRAINIAN

II. NPs WITH (RESTRICTIVE) RELATIVE CLAUSES

A strong definite **must** be used (Schwarz 2009, Wiltschko 2012 a.o.).

- (4) Rooluf hee **det** klook wechsleden, wat hi faan san
Roluf has the watch lost that he from his
uatlaatj fingen hee.
grandfather received has

“Roluf lost the watch that he had received from his
grandfather.”

FEHRING (Ebert, 1970, 137)

II. NPs WITH (RESTRICTIVE) RELATIVE CLAUSES

A demonstrative **may** be used, with a special interpretation:

a) **affective**:

- (4) What's wrong with Bill? Oh, **that**/the woman he went out with last night was nasty to him. (Based on Hawkins 1978)

b) **recognitional**

- (5) Was isn eigentlich mit **diesem** Haustelephon, was
what be-prs.3sg in_fact with that house.telephone what
mir (wir) immer khabt ham?
I we used.to had have?
"What happened to that house telephone that we used to
have?"

GERMAN (Auer, 1984, 637)

III. NPs DENOTING UNIQUELY

A strong definite **should not** be used.

- (6) **A** eard dräit ham **a** san.
DEF.WEAK earth revolves around DEF.WEAK sun
“The earth revolves around the sun.” FEHRING FRISIAN Ebert
(1970)
- (7) **A** köning kaam tu bischük.
DEF.WEAK king came on visit
“The king came on visit.” FEHRING FRISIAN Ebert (1970)

III. NPs DENOTING UNIQUELY

A demonstrative **may** be used, with an **affective** interpretation.

- (6) You don't deserve to be discouraged and lied to by a con artist. Which is what **this** Arthur Agatston is. (Potts and Schwarz, 2010, 5)
- (7) **This** IBM ThinkPad is amazing! (Potts and Schwarz, 2010, 5)
- (8) Ils sont fous, **ces** Romains !
they are crazy these Romans
"They are crazy, these Romans! FRENCH *Astérix*
- (9) The simple reality is that **this** dog of yours has ruined the house.
- (10) Ščo meni bulo za te, ščo ja posluhav **tu** Lusju!
what to.me was for that comp I listened that Lucie
"Boy did I get punished for listening to this Lucie!"

PATTERNING SUMMARY

Patterning is conditioned on whether the Common Ground (in Stalnaker's sense) entails that the extension of the nominal predicate (plus its adjectival modifiers) is a singleton.

		ANTECEDENT		NP WITH A REL
Common Ground	$ [NP]^s >1$	$ [NP]^s =1$	underspec	
demonstrative	must	affective	may	affective/recog
strong definite	shouldn't	shouldn't	must	must

SOURCE OF THE CONTRASTS

We relate the patterning contrasts to the distal/proximal features of the demonstratives.

In a nutshell: demonstratives involve an “extra” restrictor (distal/proximal), subject to an economy principle. Flouting economy generates affective interpretations.

OUTLINE

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The role of distal/proximal feature

Pragmatics of feature loss

Case studies

DISTAL / PROXIMAL AS RESTRICTORS

CG entails $|\llbracket NP \rrbracket^s| = 1$:

there is only one dog in the household, Barney.

(11) #I have fed **that** dog.

(12) #Ja nagoduvav **c'ogo** sobaku.
I have.fed this dog

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The nature of the infelicity? The sentences do have a truth value.

They improve if an emotive modifier is added:

(13) I have fed **that bloody** dog.

(14) Ja nagoduvav **c'ogo kljatogo** sobaku.
I have.fed this damn dog

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DISTAL / PROXIMAL AS RESTRICTORS

(Paraphrasing) Hawkins (1978): demonstratives identify the denotation of the noun phrase with a perceptually available referent by means of a distal/proximal characteristics, gesture or intonation in *those cases where nominal property alone is not sufficient for reference resolution*. A demonstrative is interchangeable with an adjectival restrictor in cases where a nominal predicate alone is not sufficiently restrictive.

- (15) A woman_i entered from stage left. Another woman_j entered from stage right. **That** woman/the **second** woman/#the woman was carrying a basket of flowers (Roberts, 2002, 110)

DISTAL / PROXIMAL AS RESTRICTORS

Minimize Restrictors! (Schlenker (2005) for adjectival modifiers in definite NPs)

- (15) A definite description *the A B* [where order of *A* and *B* is irrelevant] is deviant if *A* is redundant, i.e. if:
- ▶ a. *the B* is grammatical and had the same denotation as *the AB* (=Referential Irrelevance), and
 - ▶ b. *A* does not serve another purpose (=Pragmatic Irrelevance).

This is a constraint on presuppositional information, can be also labelled Minimize Presupposition! (Or Optimize Presupposition!)

DISTAL / PROXIMAL AS RESTRICTORS

We extend this economy principle:

- ▶ restrictor minimization targets functional projections *within* a morphological item.

We assume that demonstratives contain a (extra) structural layer which plays the role of a restrictor (Simonenko 2014).

DISTAL / PROXIMAL AS RESTRICTORS

Presuppositional information corresponding to the proximal/distal features:

- ▶ *this dog* introduces a presupposition that the **distance** between the Speaker and the dog pointed at is **smaller** than the distance between the Speaker and any other dog in the relevant situation.
- ▶ *that dog* introduces a presupposition that the **distance** between the Speaker and the dog pointed at is **greater** than the distance between the Speaker and any other dog in the relevant situation.

DISTAL / PROXIMAL AS RESTRICTORS


(15) [D [_{RPi} [R NP]]]

- ▶ R: predicate relating the denotations of the NP and the individual pronoun (based on Elbourne 2008).

Presupposition introduced by R_{prox} :²

$P(g(i)) \ \& \ \forall x \neq g(i)[P(x) \rightarrow \max(\lambda d . g(i) \text{ is } d\text{-away-from-Speaker}) < \max(\lambda d . x \text{ is } d\text{-away-from-Speaker})]$

- ▶ P: property denoted by the nominal predicate;
- ▶ max: selects the maximal degree from the set of degrees which hold of an individual on a scale (Heim 2000, Beck 2019);
- ▶ $g(i)$: the individual to which an assignment function g maps the index i of the individual pronoun;

²In Simonenko (2014) I proposed an anti-uniqueness presupposition for R, not making a distinction between demonstratives and strong definites. 

RESTRICTORS IN DIFFERENT DETERMINERS

	identity to $g(i)$ $\lambda y.y=g(i)$	distal/proximal restriction on $g(i)$ $\forall x \neq g(i) \ \& \ \max(\lambda d.g(i) \text{ is } d\text{-awaySp}) > \max(\dots)$
DEM	yes	yes
STRONG DEF	no	yes
WEAK DEF	no	no

Assuming “Minimize Restrictors!”, we will show how the patterns of use emerge from a game-theoretic reasoning of the Speaker and Listener.

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Pragmatics of feature loss

Case studies

OUTLINE

Introduction

Distribution: dem vs. strong def

The role of distal/proximal feature

Pragmatics of feature loss

Case studies

INTERPRETATION SPACE FOR A DEMONSTRATIVE

Listener who assumes an economical Speaker has **four** options:

- ▶ 1. Common Ground entails that the NP does not denote uniquely:
 - ▶ **i.** to give a default interpretation without special effects or inferences.
 - ▶
 - ▶
 - ▶

INTERPRETATION SPACE FOR A DEMONSTRATIVE

Listener who assumes an economical Speaker has **four** options:

- ▶ 1. Common Ground entails that the NP does not denote uniquely:
 - ▶ **i.** to give a default interpretation without special effects or inferences.
- ▶ 2. Common Ground entails that the NP denotes uniquely:
 - ▶
 - ▶
 - ▶

INTERPRETATION SPACE FOR A DEMONSTRATIVE

Listener who assumes an economical Speaker has **four** options:

- ▶ 1. Common Ground entails that the NP does not denote uniquely:
 - ▶ **i.** to give a default interpretation without special effects or inferences.
- ▶ 2. Common Ground entails that the NP denotes uniquely:
 - ▶ **ii.** to give an affective interpretation (to justify the use of an extra restrictor)
 - ▶ **iii.** to give an alternative analysis that does not involve an extra restrictor (proximal/distal)
 - ▶

INTERPRETATION SPACE FOR A DEMONSTRATIVE

Listener who assumes an economical Speaker has **four** options:

- ▶ 1. Common Ground entails that the NP does not denote uniquely:
 - ▶ **i.** to give a default interpretation without special effects or inferences.
- ▶ 2. Common Ground entails that the NP denotes uniquely:
 - ▶ **ii.** to give an affective interpretation (to justify the use of an extra restrictor)
 - ▶ **iii.** to give an **alternative analysis** that does not involve an extra restrictor (proximal/distal)
- ▶ 3. Common Ground is underspecified (i.e. Listener does not have full access to the information about the extension of the nominal predicate):
 - ▶ **iv.** to make a plurality inference (to justify the use of an extra restrictor)

INTERPRETATION SPACE FOR A DEMONSTRATIVE

	COMMON GROUND	LISTENER
SPEAKER: dem NP	1. NP doesn't denote uniquely	(i) default interpretation
	2. NP denotes uniquely	(ii) affective interpretation or (iii) reanalysis as strong definite
	3. underspecified	(iv) plurality inference

INTERIM SUMMARY AND HYPOTHESIS

Proximal/distal features are the source of the affective effects and plurality inferences found with demonstratives.

Hypothesis: the historical passage from demonstratives to strong definites is accompanied by the collapse of a proximal/distal distinction.

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The role of distal/proximal feature

Pragmatics of feature loss

Case studies

CASE STUDY: LATIN

Demonstrative inventory in quasi-formal terms:

DETERMINER	(INFORMAL) MEANING
<i>hic</i>	referent close to the Speaker
<i>iste</i>	referent close to the Hearer
<i>ille</i>	referent far from the Speaker and the Hearer, long-distance anaphoric referent
<i>is</i>	short-distance anaphoric referent
<i>ipse</i>	referent of the subject
<i>idem</i>	short-distance anaphoric referent

ille is the source of a weak definite in French. Simonenko and Carlier (2020) hypothesize (and try to prove) an intermediate stage: **strong definite**.

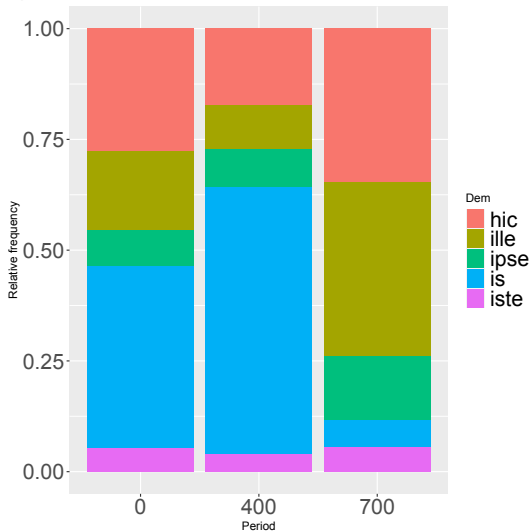
PROXIMAL/DISTAL NEUTRALIZATION SCENARIO

CG	SPEAKER'S INTENTION	FORM USED	LISTENER'S INTERPRETATION
[[NP] ^s] = 1	short-distance anaphora	<i>is</i>	short-distance anaphora
	affective effect	<i>ille</i>	affective effect or else short-distance anaphora

Diachronically, we **predict** that proximal/distal neutralization manifests itself as an increasing relative frequency of *ille* and a decreasing relative frequency of *is*, as the former is being used as the latter.

FROM CLASSICAL TO LATE LATIN

Treebanks of Perseus and PROIEL (until 400 A.D.) and PaLaFra (450–900 A.D).



CASE STUDY: FRENCH

Old French:

- ▶ proximal *cil* (< *ecce illu(m)*)
- ▶ distal *cist* (< *ecce ist(um)*)

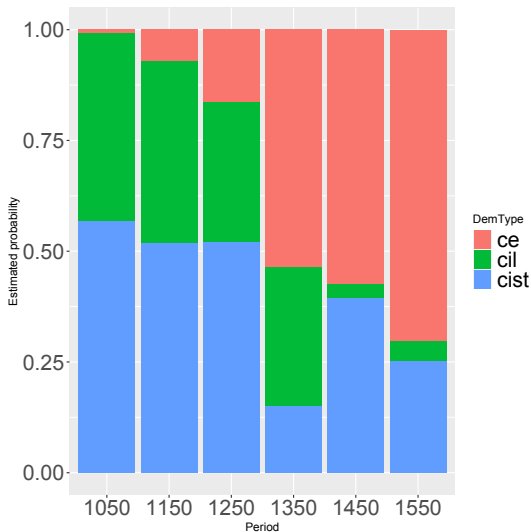
Modern French:

- ▶ strong definite *ce* (De Mulder and Carlier 2006)

Diachronically, we **predict** that proximal/distal neutralization manifests itself as an increasing relative frequency of *ce* and a decreasing relative frequency of *cist* and *cil*.

FROM OLD TO MODERN FRENCH

Treebanks Martineau et al. (2010) and Kroch and Santorini (2021)



CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ Distributional differences between demonstratives and strong definites can be attributed to the presence/absence of the proximal/distal feature via pragmatic reasoning (“Optimize Presupposition!”).
- ▶ The historical passage from the former to the latter can be also equated with the disappearance of the proximal/distal feature.

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