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REGULATIONS ON USE

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Background

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2. Eliciting Contrastive Use of Demonstratives for Objects Within Close Personal Space (all objects well within arm's reach)¹

David P. Wilkins

Purpose: It has become clear from our prior research that languages seem to differ as to whether they can use more than one of their demonstrative terms for contrastive reference within close space or not. In particular, two-term demonstrative systems seem to differ dramatically on this dimension. That is to say, some two-term systems appear to allow both of the equivalents of 'this' and 'that' to be used to establish contrastive reference in almost any context, thereby over-riding any 'distance' specifications that might otherwise be attributed to the terms, while other two-term languages seem to adhere more strictly to a 'distance' criterion for application. In another elicitation tool (The 1999 Demonstrative Questionnaire: "THIS" and "THAT" in comparative perspective), we have avoided contrastive reference, and instead explored how demonstrative terms are used to pick out unique referents without any competitors or alternates. Kita (p.c.) has suggested that demonstrative usage might best be treated within a constraint-based (Optimality Theory-style) approach, and we could hypothesize that differently ranked constraints might operate in different languages with respect to "contrastiveness" versus "simple referring". In other words, languages could look very similar in terms of "simple referring", but very different in terms of "contrastiveness" because of differential weighting of constraints. The purpose of the current instruments, therefore, is to compare languages in one context of contrastive reference: namely, contrastive reference to objects which are within the personal space of the speaker (i.e. within arms reach). In this context, when simple (non-contrastive) reference is being made, a single unique object at any of the locations identified in the personal space would tend to (universally) draw a "proximal" demonstrative term. The question, then, is whether contrastive reference will allow other demonstrative terms to be used to distinguish objects, and, if so, is there a consistent pattern of application.

Method:

Objects needed:

a note-pad or piece of rectangular cardboard (around about 30 cm x 20 cm)
 3 post-it notes, with a distinct colour or figure on the sticky side of each
 [e.g. a circle, square or triangle; or a rock, a tree, a person; or a black square; a green square and red square]
 (N.B. - figure should not be visible through to other side, since the figure needs to be hidden)

Procedure:

Basically treat the task as a type of memory game. Start by selecting two of the (post-it note) figures, show them to the consultant, and ask them to remember them and then stick them face down on the board (for interest, you can 'mix' the objects up to make it harder to remember, as a type of variant of the "Walnut Game"). The board will essentially be held in the lap of the consultant and should be held horizontal. The researcher will be seated beside the consultant. The initial placement of "objects" should be on the away axis (i.e one figure technically closer and one technically farther from the speaker - although both in easy reach, and easily touchable by speaker). The consultant is asked to say which post-it note hides which figure. You can encourage them to use a demonstrative frame to answer with (e.g. by pointing to the closer one and saying something like "this is the circle, but ___ is the square"). This is an elicitation task, and there is no harm in making it clear you want to know what demonstrative terms are appropriate under different conditions. Natural responses from Dutch subjects in trials were things like: *Dit is het rondje en dat is het*

¹ For their help and advice with the design of this task, I would like to thank Felix Ameka, Michael Dunn, Jürgen Bohnemeyer, Raquel Guirardello, Sotaro Kita, Steve Levinson, Asli Ozyurek, Angela Terrill, and Barbara Villanova.

driehoekje ('This is the circle and that is the triangle'), and, in answer to a question like "Which is the circle?", *Ik denk dat het deze is, maar misschien is het die* ('I think it is this one, but maybe it is that one.') or *Deze wel, maar die niet* ('This one, but not that one.').

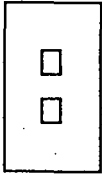

The main things you want to find out in this two object, away-axis condition are:

- (1) What is the most natural response pattern when referring to both objects? Is it most common to refer first to the "closest" object and then contrastively the "further" object, or is there no pattern of preference? [You may need to ask speaker to consult intuitions as to what feels most natural. Record 1st responses and most frequent responses as well as consultant's own preference ranking to see if they align.]
- (2) Is there a consistent selection of demonstrative terms for reference to each object?
- (3) Can one initiate beginning reference anywhere? (i.e. Can one start by referring to the "further" object, then the "closer" object?) To test this, you can explicitly ask the consultant to, for instance, start by mentioning "the circle", when you know that "the circle" is the "further" of the two?
- (4) Does pointing (without touching) versus pointing with touching versus no pointing affect the terms that can be used? [What is the preferential indexical accompaniment in this context?] (Note: Some times reference strategies are mixed - e.g. touching close object and merely pointing to further object - so you'll need to try to elicit the speaker's intuitions about conditions where the same accompaniment is used for each object.)
- (5) Does demonstrative choice in negative (and emphatic) contrast differ from mere alternate listing of the different choices. [i.e. "This is the circle not THAT one" vs. "This is the circle and that is the square."]

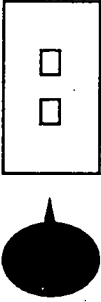
Some Preliminary Findings:

A clearer idea of what is intended by this elicitation task might be gained from looking at some very preliminary results (based on limited data). In the following tables, each column represents one contrastive response in which each object is referred to with a demonstrative phrase. The rows are supposed to be iconic with the object placement on the table (i.e. upper term in column refers to "further" object; lower term refers to "closer" object.). The number beside a demonstrative indicates which object was mentioned first (1.) in the contrastive pair, and which second (2.) [i.e. order of successive reference in the contrast].

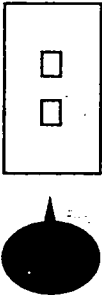
ITALIAN: When just pointing (but not touching)

	Most Natural	Good		Less Natural (but perhaps)		Bad
	2/1 questo	2. quello	1. quello	1. questo	2/1 quello	2. questo
	1/2 questo	1. questo	2. questo	2. quello	1/2 quello	1. quello

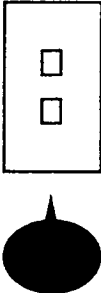
ITALIAN: When touching each object successively with pointing finger

	Most Natural	Less Natural (but perhaps)		Bad		
	2/1 questo	2. quello	1. quello	2/1 quello	1. questo	2. questo
	1/2 questo	1. questo	2. questo	1/2 quello	2. quello	1. quello

ENGLISH (Need some indexical accompaniment, but pointing with touch, versus pointing without touch seems to make little if any difference):

	Most Natural		Good (roughly ordered according to preference)			
	2. that	1. this	2./1. this	2./1. that	1. that	2. this
	1. this	2. that	1./2. this	1./2. that	2. this	1. that

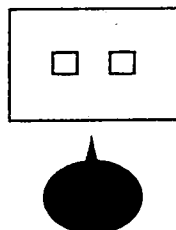
DUTCH (Need some indexical accompaniment, but pointing with touch, versus pointing without touch seems to make little if any difference):

	Most Natural	Good (roughly ordered according to preference)			Less Natural or Bad	
	2. die	1. deze	1. die	2./1. die	2./1. deze	2. deze
	1. deze	2. die	2. deze	1./2. die	1./2. deze	1. die

Other manipulations:

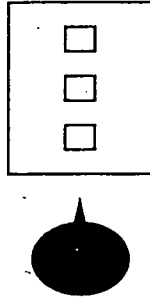
If the task appears to work nicely and easily in the above condition, then try to perform the same task in the following configurations.

(1) Two objects on the across axis.

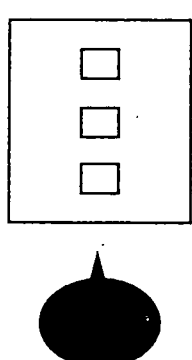


The obvious question in this manipulation, is whether 'equidistance' effects demonstrative choice in contrastive reference (as compared with preceding manipulation).

(2) Three objects on the away axis.



The obvious question in this second manipulation is whether further demonstrative terms are added to make contrasts. If there are only two demonstrative terms, how are they distributed across three objects? In this manipulation, you may wish to only consider looking at the potential description of referents as they ordered away from the speaker (i.e. utterances in which the "closest" object is referred to first; the middle object second; and the "furthest" object third). That is to say, to save time, do not worry so much about varying the starting point, there are too many permutations. An example of preliminary Dutch responses to this manipulation is given in the following table:



	Best	Acceptable - variable judgements, ordered				Decidedly Odd if not plain bad		
3	die	deze	die	die	deze	die	deze	deze
2	die	die	deze	die	deze	deze	deze	die
1	deze	deze	deze	die	deze	die	die	die

Method of recording:

There is no strict recommendation here. While one would ideally like to get everything on videotape, especially given the importance of accompanying indexical gestures, it may sometimes be more practical to take pen and paper notes. The elicitation also seems to provoke considerable self-correction. Still, pen and paper recording is sufficient. No matter which method of recording you choose, it would be wise to go to a session prepared with a 'grid' of manipulations already organized for yourself so that you can easily work through them and so that you can record the results concisely. The various tables given above will give you insight into what such a grid may look like, but we are not being prescriptive here since you will know best what to expect within the system you are researching.

Number of Consultants:

Minimally three (3), preferably five (5), and ideally ten (10).