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# A cross-linguistic questionnaire on “demonstratives”

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*This is a fairly involved questionnaire for those interested in how demonstratives (and similar spatial deixis forms) function in their research language. To follow this questionnaire allow considerable time to read this in full before meeting with language consultants. Then allow for some hours to be spent with the consultants.*

## 0. Introduction

Our more immediate goal is to develop a questionnaire which will explore the cross-linguistic variation and similarities for (grammaticalised) systems which specify/indicate which referent is being denoted through reference to the spatial location of the speech participants / deictic center (i.e. through use of local deixis). As a familiar example, this cup in English specifies that the referent cup is the one more proximal (or more topical, etc.) than other possible referent cups. We will loosely refer to items which make such distinctions as ‘demonstratives’ (independent of whether they are free or bound, or stems or affixes). It must be borne in mind that we do not intend for researchers to only focus narrowly on the one class which may have been traditionally labelled demonstratives in the language (typically, demonstrative pronouns, or demonstrative adjectives, or demonstrative adverbs, or demonstrative determiners), but instead intend that researchers should attempt to explore the full range of items (and classes of items) which establish reference via recourse to spatially deictic (local deictic) information.

It should also be stated at the outset that our main concern is to try to uncover sufficient comparative data to enable us to establish whether (and what type of) linguistic relativity investigations are feasible. As such, we are very concerned with (i) having a fairly high degree of certainty concerning the range and nature of semantic demarcations of contrast; (ii) the range of different classes (grammatical categories) in which the same semantic dimensions and distinctions are manifested; (iii) the formal criteria establishing membership in classes; and (iv) whether, and under what grammatical or contextual conditions, the forms/distinctions are obligatory.

## 1. Background Reading

To get a crosslinguistic perspective on the types of distinctions that systems of demonstratives can make, we suggest that researchers read Anderson and Keenan 1985 ‘Deixis’ in Shopen ed. *Language Typology and Syntactic Description III* pages 259-308 (make sure to pay special attention to the section on ‘Spatial deixis’, pages 277-295).

Hanks (in press) ‘Language form and Communicative Practice’ is of interest because it argues “that specific features of the syntax and morphology of Maya demonstratives can be traced to routine patterns of speaking which involve habitual bodily and conceptual orientations.” [Hanks’ (1990) book, *Referential practice: Language and lived space among the Maya*, may well be the most extensive examination of (spatial and social) deixis undertaken for a non-Indo-European language, and it is undertaken from an interesting theoretical perspective. The above mentioned paper stands as an interesting crystallization and extension of that work.]

Levinson’s (1983) chapter on ‘Deixis’ [in *Pragmatics*, pages 54-96] remains a good readable outline of philosophical and descriptive approaches to deixis (introducing the main terms and distinctions that get used). [The section on ‘Place deixis’ is on pages 79-85.]

Fillmore’s (1974) *Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis* endures as a classic which situates discussions of non-deictic aspects of space and time within the general discussion of space and temporal deixis. His observations primarily center on English, but remain important for showing the types of subtle linguistic and contextual factors that need to be attended to for an adequate description of deictic distinctions. Moreover, he also integrates these observations

into discussion of discourse deixis and social deixis. [see also Fillmore 1982 in Klein & Jarvella]

In Appendix 1 we have placed two other questionnaires which deal with issues of demonstratives and local deixis. The first is extracted from 'QUESTIONNAIRE: Space in Australian Languages, ALI', and the second is extracted from the 'Lingua Descriptive Studies: Questionnaire' by Comrie and Smith (1977).

### **WARNING:**

*Informant reports on spatial deixis are not reliable indicators of use. An informant questionnaire alone is inadequate. Try to collect much of your information from natural (situated) discourse, preferably with a minimum of 3 participants.*

## **2. The Questions**

### *2.1 Morphology and Syntax*

[Note - This first part of the questionnaire on morphology and syntax is *not* designed to give specific ideas for elicitation in the field. Instead, we recommend that you attempt to address these questions *before* you go to the field, by examining the data you already have on the language.]

#### *2.1.1 Grammatical class*

We are assuming that all the elements of the same grammatical class (at least potentially) form a contrastive set. Elements from other grammatical classes may also be used to semantically contrast with the "demonstratives" (or various 'demonstrative classes') as well, but we have less of a guarantee that their semantic values are rejected in favor of the values expressed by the demonstratives. The other forms may not be selected for non-semantic reasons (prosody, grammatical construction, etc.) even though they would potentially provide the exact reference desired.

[answer each question for each potential class in the language]

Q. What are the formally distinguishable 'demonstratives' in your research language(s)?

Q. What are the formal criteria that can be employed to define the class of 'demonstratives'?

Q. What is the complete membership of the class? [i.e. what are all the items that meet these criteria?]

Q. How would you characterize this class? E.g. a type of predicate, an article, adjectival, adverbial, nominal?

Q. Are the forms bound or free? Mono-morphemic or polymorphemic?

Q. Do they take obligatory inflections/derivations?

#### *2.1.2 Combinatorial possibilities with other classes*

Q. What do the demonstrative enter into construction with, and what grammatical units do these constructions form? [i.e. do they only combine with nouns within NPs? Do they occur with verbs and adverbs?]

#### *2.1.3 Combinatorial possibilities within the class*

Q. Does each demonstrative element exactly contrast with all the others (i.e. are they in true paradigmatic opposition, so that no co-occurrence is possible)? Or can some be "stacked", suggesting that the semantic values can be added?

Q. Similarly, can the demonstratives co-occur/combine with other elements in roughly the same morpho-syntactic slot? For example, in English, the *and* that cannot both occur with a single N (\*the that dog; \*that the dog). In other languages (like Arrernte), however, the definite article and the demonstratives can combine with the same noun.

#### *2.1.4 Obligatoriness and frequency*

Q. Are the demonstrative elements obligatory or optional in the language? Under what conditions are they obligatory? [e.g. do NPs always contain a 'demonstrative' element?; or when quantifying with classifiers, does the demonstrative element have to show up?, etc.]

Q. Can you gauge the rough frequency with which the 'demonstrative' terms are used? [Almost every utterance?; Every couple of utterances?; Only when discussing certain topics?]

Q. Many languages have one or more special 'ostensive constructions' in which 'demonstrative' elements play a central role. Such 'constructions' are typically used to point out what and/or where something is, and in the canonical situation of utterance such an ostensive structure would be accompanied by a paralinguistic deictic gesture (e.g. This is a cup.; There is where John lives). Does the language under investigation have such a construction, and, if so, what is its form? [How does one point out what or where something is?]

#### *2.1.5 Functional and Morphological relations to other areas of grammar*

Q. In many languages, 'demonstratives' (or forms which are built from demonstratives) fulfill the function of 3rd person pronouns. Is there reason to say this for the language under investigation?

Q. Are there any or morphological or syntactic properties which would suggest a close relation between the 'demonstratives' and 3rd person marking in the language?

Q. Can the 'demonstratives' be used for 1st or 2nd person reference?

Q. Are there any formal relationships between 'where' and/or 'what' questions on the one hand, and 'demonstratives' on the other?

Q. If the language has switch-reference or logophoric marking, does this in any way involve demonstratives?

#### *2.2 Semantic dimensions*

This is, of course, the crux of the matter. For any hope at developing sensible hypotheses about the possible relation between language and cognition in this domain, we must be absolutely clear about the nature of the semantic dimensions that 'demonstrative' forms encode. While there is a fairly clear picture of the general range of semantic dimensions that 'demonstrative' forms can encode, the precise character of the dimensions and the nature of specific distinctions within a dimension are very poorly understood for most languages.

Hyslop (1993) lists the following standard set of parameters that may be found in demonstrative systems [listed basically in order of cross-linguistic typological prevalence].

1. distance - close/not close to: -
  - speaker
  - addressee
  - speaker and addressee
  - other participants in the speech act
  - equidistant from speaker and addressee
  - nearest/most distant to speaker
2. visibility
  - visible/not visible to speaker (and addressee)
3. height - up/down/level from speaker
4. outside/inside (on the other side of some intervening surface)
5. on this/that side
6. in front of or opposite speaker
7. behind speaker/addressee
8. environmental parameters
  - inland/out to sea
  - up/downhill
  - up/down river
  - up/down the coast

Such lists are useful, but they have often inspired laziness among researchers. For instance, claims of visibility distinctions are often not explored sufficiently, and turn out to have more to do with evidentiality (based on various modes of perception) and/or knowledge. [Thus, it can turn out that supposed visible forms will be able to be used under conditions of invisibility, simply because a person knows where something is, and supposed invisible forms will be used under conditions of visibility because of uncertainty of what the thing is. In languages like Inuktitut, visibility is truly a defining dimension, independent of knowledge or evidence.

So, for each contrastive dimension, try to determine the number and precise nature of contrasts made on that dimension. For example, for the distal dimension, Anderson and Keenan (1985) cite "a [Malagasy] series of seven deictics distinguished along the primary spatial dimension of distance from [S]" (292). However, we are not clear what the precise nature of these distinctions really are or even if they are really all along the single dimension of distance from speaker only. Be certain that in use these really are the primary semantic distinctions across the forms.

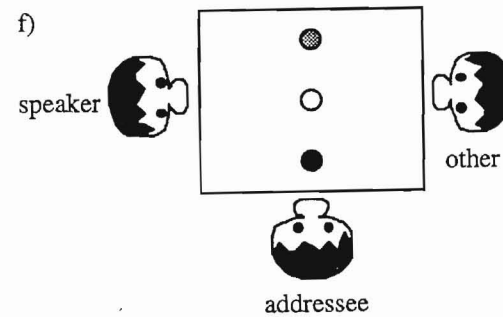
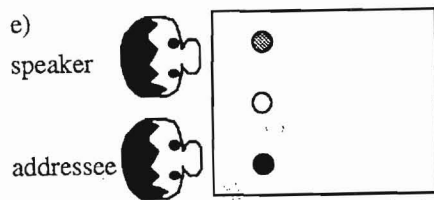
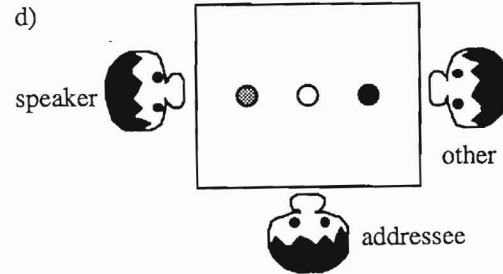
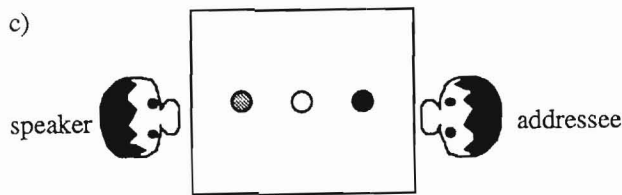
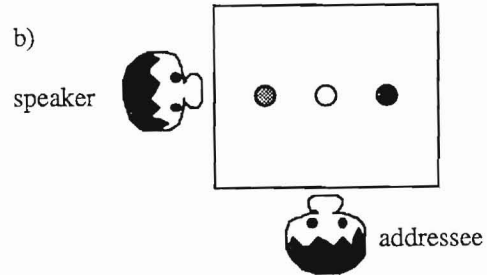
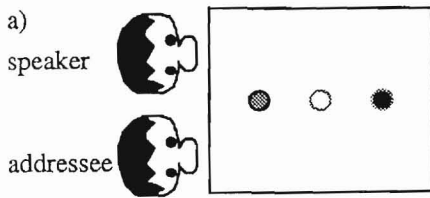
Remember, also, that we have an eye towards developing cognitive tasks which parallel situations of productive language use. Thus, when undertaking elicitation, be careful to record all the relevant parameters of the situation.

2.2.1 Distance-based vs. participant-based demonstratives

Q. To what extent is the 'demonstrative' system based on '(relative) distance from speaker (only)', and to what extent is it based on the position of other participants in the speech situation ('near addressee')?

Q. How many distinctions are made?

To determine whether demonstrative distinctions are sensitive to person (participant) need to vary dyadic and triadic positional arrangements. [i.e. vary different participants with respect to objects in a spatial array ]

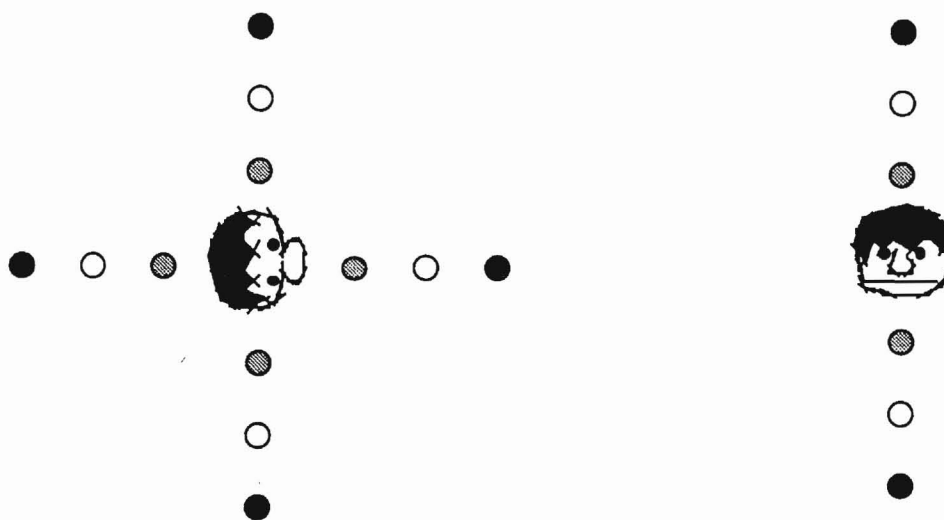


etc., etc., etc.

Q. Are the same set of distinctions maintained in all axes, or do new distinctions emerge? [Is something that's behind you and close or distant, referred to by the same demonstrative, as something that's in front of you and close or distant? What about things below or above? etc.]

Are the same set of 'demonstrative' distinctions made on all sides in the horizontal plane? [F-B-L-R]

Are the same distinctions also preserved in the vertical dimension?



Q. Are any of the following participant-based distinctions relevant? [If so, how? If not, can they be made in any other way?]

- proximal to/distal to speaker
- proximal to/distal to addressee
- proximal to/distal to other
- proximal to/distal to speaker and addressee (the situated discourse)
- equidistant from speaker and addressee

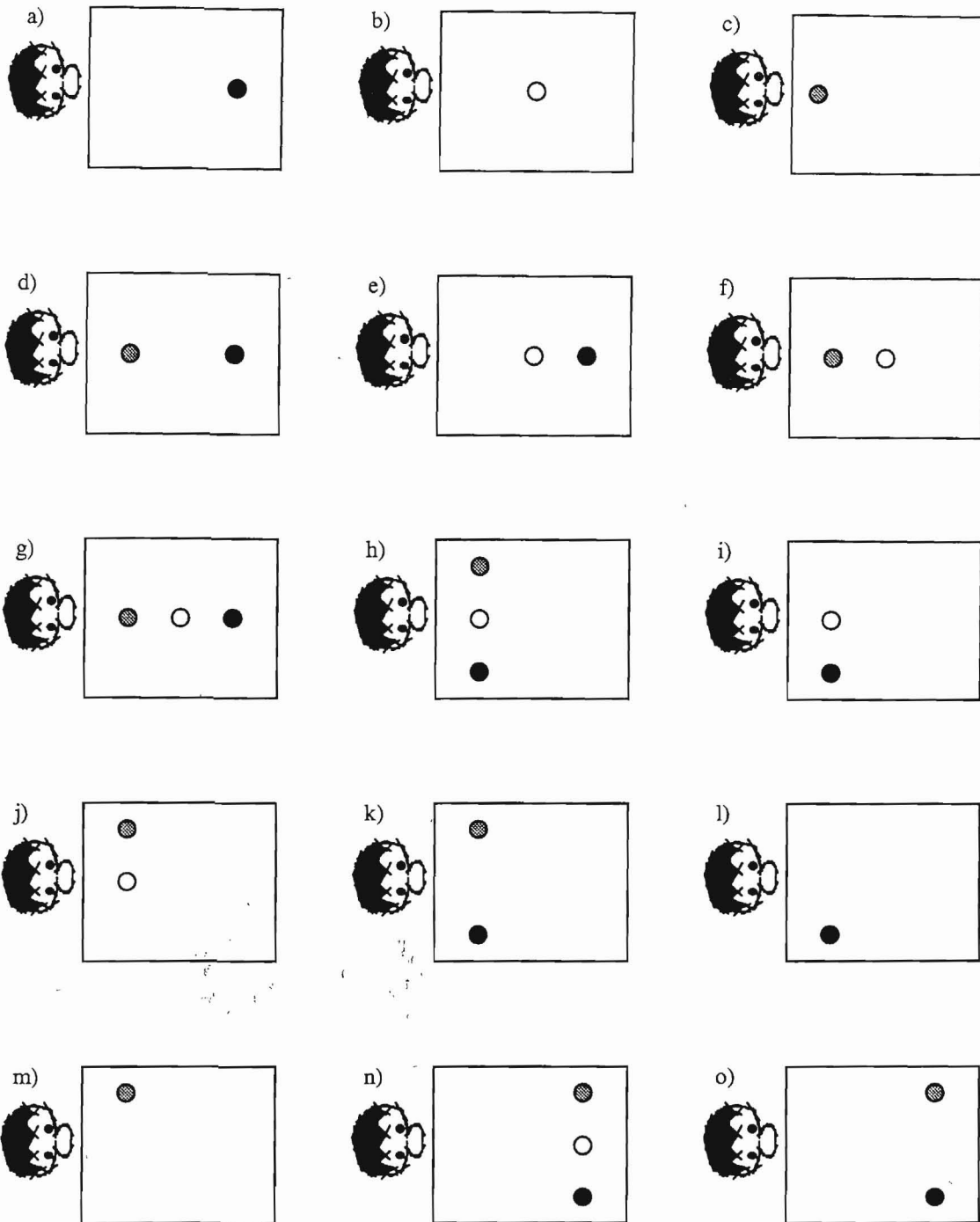
...

Recently, Levinson (to appear) has suggested that, just as 'go' verbs crosslinguistically tend to be unmarked for deictic distinctions, and only by opposition to the deictically specified 'come' verbs pick up a conversational implicature of 'motion' away (cf. Wilkins and Hill 1995), perhaps "distal deictics like 'that' and 'there' are in fact similarly unmarked, and it is for this reason that their usage is notoriously difficult to pin down.

Q. To what extent are the demonstratives used simply for 'contrastive' function, independent of actual distance or participant parameters?

Q. In English a person can point at one of his front teeth, and then another, and say "This tooth here hurts, but that tooth there is fine." Similarly, one can speak of both hands saying "This is my right hand and that is my left hand". In Arrernte these locutions are impossible, one can only ever use the proximal demonstrative to refer to body parts and the Arrernte versions of such sentences could only be "This tooth hurts, but this other tooth is fine" or "here is my right hand and here is my left hand". So, how would such things be described in the language under investigation. ?

We need to determine the extent to which "demonstrative" forms are selected strictly calculated with respect to speaker/deictic center/other participant, and to what extent is induced relative to the presence of other similar referents in the spatial frame. Thus we manipulate the positions and number of objects within the frame. FOR EXAMPLE:



Conversely, test how the various demonstrative forms can be construed by asking what would be they were to be used for the other positions. E.g., Could one say "This cup" while indicating the one? If so, when could one say this and with what meaning?



### 2.2.2 Other semantic/usage contrasts

Some demonstrative systems make use of contrasts other than relative distance from deictic center or proximity/association with the participants of the speech situation. The demonstratives should be checked to see what (other) dimensions are relevant. Candidates to check include (but are not limited to):

Environmental reference

Upstream/downstream ...

Degrees of Perceptual access

Visible/non-visible

Known/inferred/unknown

Audible ...

Combinations

Q: Do some/all demonstratives express evaluations on more than a single semantic dimension? (e.g. Distal from S/H and non-visible)

Q: Number of degrees of distinction

Q: Also, are the number of degrees of distinction always present. In the Malagasy case, if there are four whiskey bottles at four distances from the S, is it set which of the seven deictics would apply to each?

Q: Similarly, do the degrees of distinction require a pre-established scale of maximum extent?

### 2.2.3 Other considerations to the demonstrative usage

Axial topology

Q: What spatial axes do the demonstratives apply to? (e.g. vertical only; in front of, but not behind S, ...)

Q: Does the demonstrative refer to a part or a region of space (or...)

Q: this side/that side; here inside of/here outside of

Directionals (stasis versus motion)

Q: Can directionals (and other deictic markers of motion) be handled in parallel with the other (presumably mostly static) demonstratives?

Entity Classification

Q: Are the same demonstrative forms that are used for things also used for people? places?

### 2.3 Different classes with similar semantic contrasts

For the relativity question, it is important to know how 'deeply' the distinctions made in a semantic dimension are embedded within the fabric of the language. Thus, if the same set of distinctions recurs across a number of distinct grammatical classes, it seems more likely that it could relate strongly to non-linguistic aspects of cognition. However, if, for instance, the distance parameter makes three distinctions for 'demonstratives' and five distinctions for 'adverbs', it would be hard to know what the cognitive claims would be.

**Q:** What different classes manifest similar semantic contrasts  
E.g., locational adverbials (here/there) vs. article-like forms (this/that). Do these make the same semantic distinctions? Do they even mark the same number of distinctions (e.g. three-way vs. two-way)?

**Q:** Do the semantically related classes use (some of) the same roots or morphology?

**Q:** Is there presentational local deictics, e.g. *voilà!*? Are there the same (number of) semantic contrasts made in this class?

#### *2.4 Register differences, etc.*

For example, Tamil has an archaic “middle” demonstrative, but the modern language only has a two way (proximal/distal) distinction. Some pundits may still use the older demonstrative as well, so it’s worth noting. However, it shouldn’t be described as used in current colloquial Tamil. Cf. *hither* in English...

Similarly, some uses of a form may be restricted to certain dialects, etc. Since we are ultimately interested in what contrasts exist in the minds of the individual speakers, be careful not to mix different speakers’ systems.

#### *2.5 Applications of the forms*

##### *Markedness*

**Q:** Do the forms have differing degrees of semantic markedness? E.g., is one form an emphatic version of the other?

##### *Use with shifted deictic center*

**Q:** Can they be used with respect to an imagined third person in a different “here” (and maybe even a different “now”)?

##### **Q:** *Non-spatial uses of the same demonstratives*

- Social uses (high/low status, ...)
- temporal deixis (can you use the same complete set of demonstratives with temporal nominals to refer to past and/or future times ?) (e.g. *this-day = today; that-past.time = yesterday*)
- topicality
- endophoric uses (reference to a participant within a narrative “space”, not to a participant currently located in space).
- Anaphoric/cataphoric reference. E.g., “This guy walks up to me...”

##### **Q:** *Non-spatial uses of other forms in the same grammatical class*

Ditto...

##### *Sensitivities to scale*

**Q:** Can the scale be collapsed or expanded indefinitely (this speck of dirt/that galaxy)?  
Or are some forms inherently metrical (distant by at least a day’s walk)?

##### *Quotational uses*

**Q:** Are they used to present quoted gesture or speech? E.g., “He said like this: ‘Get outa here fella!’”

**Q:** Are they used to present illustrations? “He walked like this [limps]”

##### *Answering questions*

**Q:** What question forms can be felicitously answered by a single demonstrative word on its own (perhaps with the paralinguistic support)? [Q. Where? A. Here] (In Arrernte: where?, what?, how many?, how? - and under certain circumstances, who? can all be answered with a single demonstrative word on its own, while when? and why? cannot)

## 2.6 Co-occurring gesture

Q: Do certain deictic utterances with demonstratives demand an accompanying gesture? What form or forms can these take?

Q: Are there specific deictic gestures which are used with specific demonstrative forms? Are these gestures obligatory or optional with the speech?

Q: Are the same semantic distinctions made in both conventionalized gestures (e.g. pointing conventions) and in the verbal demonstrative system(s)?

## ATTACHMENT

Nikolaus Himmelmann has done extensive crosslinguistic comparison of demonstrative systems on the basis of grammar comparisons. We asked him if there were any specific questions he would ask regarding demonstratives, and, in particular, whether he felt there were things that were typically missing from grammatical descriptions which made the task of systemic comparison particularly difficult. As it turns out, he had already started compiling a list of questions which he has kindly provided to us.

### Questions on deictics - Nikolaus Himmelmann

[NB: English examples are translations from German!]

starting point for questionnaire. Fillmore 1982 in Jarvella & Klein

General:

Keep different syntactic functions (adverbial, adnominal demonstrative, pronominal demonstrative, predicative, sentential) distinct, even if the same stem is involved - usage conditions seem to be fairly different (e.g. usage conditions for this vs here are not the same in situational use (at least for their German equivalents))

- record gestures and intonation

- cooccurrence of deictic elements: of same syntactic category (this that house)? of different syntactic category (this house here)?

- cooccurrence of deictic elements with personal pronouns and identity pronoun (this king himself — in Sardinian and some Catalan dialects articles have been grammaticalized from the Latin identity pronoun *ipse*; often new deictics are formed by the fusion of a deictic stem and an identity pronoun)

Non-situational uses

- always check for all Deictic elements (is a given kind of used restricted to one deictic (i.e. may only the PROX-demonstrative be used anaphorically but not the DIST-demonstrative nor the PROX- adverbial)?) - If two or more deictic elements may be used in a broad usage category (such as discourse-deixis, anaphoric, recognitiona): what are the distinguishing subparameters? Is distance in any sense a relevant parameter?

- Is recognitional use possible? for which Deictic elements?

Be careful to distinguish this from new-this uses (introduction of a participant unknown to the hearer (then we met this guy ...))

- New-this: Possible at all (to date apparently only attested for English)? Distinguish from recognitional! If possible, how is it related to situational use (similar gestures? intonation? similar constraints?)

- Is a distinction between discourse-deixis (DD) and text-deixis (TD) useful/possible? DD = reference to a proposition via textsegment (this fact ...), TD = 3D literal reference to a text segment (he said this; the traitors were these: JudasMelchior, ...)

#### Situational use

- Use of gestures obligatory - with demonstratives (pronominal, adnominal?)? with adverbials? Constraints by politeness?: n.o. pointing to people

- Difference between a 'here' which includes the speaker (*here in this village/the present situation* etc.) and one in which S is not included in the space referred to (*Here is where I usually put my bike overnight* (pointing to a space in front of the communicating parties))

Can you say: *In this room we ...* - referring to the room in which the communicating parties are located; or do you have to say: *Here in this room ...*

- collocations between deictic adverbials and adpositional phrases (there on the hill, here next to the cupboard etc.): What is the difference between: *Es tut da im Knie weh?* vs. *Es tut im Knie weh*; *Was hast Du denn da auf der Nase?* vs. *Was hast Du denn auf der Nase?*

- Deictic center: automatically given by position of communicating parties/speaker? Other unmarked centers imaginable? (cf. Ebert, Karen H., 1985, "Wo ist 'da' in Papua", *Zeitschrift fuer Sprachwissenschaft* 4:259-278 (review of Weissenborn & Klein 1982) who suggests that "Um Deixis im Eipo und Yale zu beschreiben, muesste man wohl Buehlers Origo-Modell modifizieren. Nicht das Ich/Jetzt/Hier (wo ich stehe), sondern das Wir/Immer/HIER (wo wir leben) scheint der Ausgangspunkt der raeumlichen Orientierung zu sein." (Ebert 1985:265))

How is shift of deictic center established in situation and in narrative? Any explicit means or primarily by implicature, i.e. use of here/there, come/go etc.?

- Similarities/differences between **real** situational use and Deixis am Phantasma uses:

Gestures? Intonation?

What about talking about a distantly visible place (say a mountain ridge) in terms of PROX and MED.