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REGULATIONS ON USE

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Background

The field manuals were originally intended as working documents for internal use only. They were supplemented by verbal instructions and additional guidelines in many cases. If you have questions about using the materials, or comments on the viability in various field situations, feel free to get in touch with the authors.

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Demonstratives in context: Comparative handicrafts

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TASK SPECIFICATIONS

Relevant projects: Space Project (Demonstrative sub-project), relevant to spatial deixis subproject in Gesture Project

Priority with in Space Project: MID

Nature of the task: video-taped semi-structured discussion

EQUIPMENT

(See notes on shooting video in 'Gesture' section)

- a DV video camera (Hi-8 is becoming obsolete and not recommended anymore.)
- a tripod (ask for a light-weight one)
- an external microphone (camera has to be often placed quite far away from the speakers).
- a wide angle lens may be useful in order to capture both participants and objects to be discussed.

Background

The aim of this task is two fold. First, the task establishes cross-linguistically comparable discourse data that contain different demonstrative forms. Such data should stimulate further discussions on "deixis in action", which is a growing interest area in Language and Cognition Group. Second, it facilitates the investigation of whether joint-attention is a factor in the choice of demonstratives in your language. In addition, it may provide a possibility for a comparison of pointing gesture practice in different cultures (Some of these aims are also met by two tasks in the gesture section of the manual: "Locally-anchored narrative" and "Locally-Anchored spatial gestures".)

This task is still at an early stage of development. Thus, the specifications of the task are relatively loose. The task is modeled on natural events originally used by Asli Özyürek to throw light on Turkish demonstratives, where presence or absence of joint-attention proved crucial to their use.

Özyürek video-taped and analyzed the following two situations. The first one is a discussion of the final paintings from an art class, where the instructor and three students discussed the merits of the pictures and the points given. Pictures were placed upright mostly on the ground, all facing the teacher. The students were sitting behind the pictures. The investigator was behind the camera prompting discussions. The theme of the discussion every now and then jumped from one picture to another. In such a case, the speaker had to make exophoric reference to a painting that is not jointly attended. ("Exophoric" reference is making the referent clear in the situational context, for example, by a combination of a demonstrative and a pointing gesture. Exophoric reference contrasts endophoric reference, which reference making within linguistic discourse such as anaphora and cataphora.) This type of context created a test-bed for the investigation of the role of joint attention in Turkish demonstratives.

The second situation is a ceramics class with a teacher and several students. The teacher commented on students' pieces, which were located in different parts of a room (on a table, on a shelf, and etc.). The teacher walked from piece to piece in the room. Sometimes, the discussion jumped from one object to another one, which may be across the room (e.g., "Sir, for example, *that* oval one."). At other times, the teacher indicated a detail of an object that had not been attended by students. These contexts again created a perfect test-bed for the investigation of joint attention as a factor in selection of demonstratives.

In Özyürek's two recordings, people often made a sequence of exophoric reference to the same object with pointing gestures (e.g., “For example, *that* (SU) oval one. *That* (O) could also be done in a similar way”). Such a sequence generated ideal evidence for joint-attention as a factor in the choice of demonstrative forms in Turkish. That is, when an entity was referred to for the first time, the joint attention had usually not been established. In this case, the SU-form was used to indicate the referent with a pointing gesture. In the subsequent reference to the same object (again with a pointing gesture), the speaker typically switched to either proximal (the BU-form) or distal (the O-form), depending on the construed distance of the referent.

Discourse data from natural events were crucial for some researchers, who found it very difficult to investigate the joint-attention factor with “The 1999 Demonstrative Questionnaire” by David Wilkins. For example, Kita found that Japanese informants were not good at imagining presence or absence of joint attention although discourse data indicated that joint-attention influenced the choice of demonstratives in Japanese.

In general, the Özyürek events elicited different forms of demonstratives very frequently. This type of events should provide us a foundation for a discourse database for the use of demonstratives. The following task is constructed to emulate the Özyürek events.

HOW TO COLLECT DATA

Objects

With local advice, collect together a set of local objects that can naturally occasion a discussion of comparative merits – for example: local handicrafts (baskets, weaving, tourist art, hats), or local produce (special varieties of corn, ritual cakes, festival flags, collectors’ shells), or tools of special local importance which may be new fangled imports replacing traditional methods (fishing lures, mouse traps, musical instruments, etc.). Try and get say a dozen different objects – you can also try two different sets of comparable types of object, of half a dozen each.

Note that we want to avoid the situations in which people constantly handle the objects or people constantly reach out very closely to objects in order to point. This may happen when objects are within reach and have the right size for handling, or when objects are very small. In these cases, it is possible that you only get the proximal demonstrative as in the case of Japanese and Lao. In these languages, when the referent is very close to the speaker, only the proximal demonstrative can be used. All other forms of demonstrative, including the attention-drawing use of the Japanese SO-form (the form also used for referents near the addressee), are blocked. However, this is not the case in Turkish. Namely, the joint attention establishing form, SU, in Turkish is used even when the referent is very close to the speaker (even when it is the speaker's body part) as long as there is no joint attention at the moment of reference making.

Arrangement of objects

Arrange the objects in a generous space, on a couple of tables, or mats on the ground, or on a verandah. Ideal would be a space about 3-4 meters by 1-2 meters. Alternatively, the situation in which objects are spread around in a room is also fine.

Participants

Get two or three local people who are in an informal relationship to one another (be wary of having the makers of the objects around in case of criticism!) to discuss the relative merits of the objects, what they would each cost, who makes the best ones, what the best materials to use are, and so on. If you can get them to interact with one another without prompting, so much the better, but you may need to start by getting them to explain what the objects are to the dumb foreigner, but then busy yourself behind the camera, and try to get the locals to talk to each other directly. You can prompt them by asking ‘why is the one you are pointing to (note avoidance of ‘this’ or ‘that’!) so much better?’ and so forth if necessary.

If you have three or more participants at a time, one may be able to observe the effect of how interactionally-created grouping of participants and space may affect the choice of demonstratives. Nick Enfield collected video clips of Lao speakers making market place exchanges, which involved at least three people. Some focused interaction among a subset of the people (e.g., a merchant selling vegetables to a customer) divided people and space. First, the people who are engaged in the interaction (the merchant and the customer) can be distinguished from people who are not (another merchant in the stall who is not dealing with the customer). Second, interaction divides space into two: inside the space where the interaction is taking place and outside of the interactional space. The choice of demonstratives in Lao can be partly accounted for by whether the speaker is part of the current focused interaction of the addressee and whether the referent is located within the relevant interactional space.

How to record

Film the proceedings from the side or from the front of the participants, so we can see where participants are pointing. It is important to get all the participants in a frame. It is okay if you cannot capture all the objects in a frame. If this is the case, you can slowly sweep the camera to capture all the objects once or twice for later reference. The fieldworker as a prompter does not have to be in the frame.

A variant of the task

Sotaro Kita collected similar data in Tokyo. He sat with a student in a courtyard (about 100 meters x 100 meters) of a university, which is surrounded by various buildings. He had the student explain which buildings were used for what. This task elicited a sequence of exophoric demonstrative reference to the same building (e.g., “*That* (SO) is Second Gym. *This* (KO) is for undergraduates.”). This created a very useful situation for identifying the joint-attention establishing function of the SO-form. That is, the speaker often used the SO-form in order to draw Kita's attention to a particular building. Then, the subsequent reference to the same building with a pointing was made by either proximal (the KO-form) or distal (the A-form), depending on the construed distance of the building. However, since the scale of space is very different from the original Özyürek events, this method is not recommended unless the above method does not work.