

The role of discourse topic and proximity for demonstratives in German and Russian

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1. Demonstratives in German and Russian

Demonstratives, like personal pronouns, are textual means of coherence within the manifold field of ‘domain-bound reference’, i.e. referential relations that have to be established dependent on features of the linguistic or extra-linguistic context. In our talk, we discuss the textual functions of Russian and German demonstratives in terms of discourse topicality and proximity, thus covering a broad range of referential phenomena with a unified approach.

1.1 Lexical forms

Demonstratives are a subclass of lexical means of marking definiteness. In both languages, demonstratives can be used either as pronouns or as determiners, while Russian lacks articles in the proper sense like German *der/die/das*. We discuss the pronominal use and the use as determiner analogously, when possible.

(1)

GERMAN				RUSSIAN		
<i>pers. pron.</i>	<i>dem. pron. (weak) determiners</i>	<i>demonstr. pron. (strong) dem. determiners</i>		<i>pers. pron.</i>	<i>demonstr. pron. (strong) dem. determiners</i>	
<i>er/sie/es</i>	<i>der/die/das</i>	<i>dieser/-e/-es</i>	<i>jener/-e/-es</i>	<i>on/ona/ono</i>	<i>éto/ éta /éto</i>	<i>tot/ta/to</i>
he, she, it	this / the	this	that	he, she, it	the / this	the / that

1.2 Present notions of demonstrativity: topicality and proximity

For German, Zifonun / Hoffmann / Strecker (1997: 555ff) assign following functions to demonstratives: 1) demonstratives evoke a ‘new orientation of the addressee’ (in contrast to personal pronouns which serve as means of thematic continuity) and 2) ‘point from right to left’ in the textual space while personal pronouns operate in the text as a whole.

For Russian, demonstratives are traditionally analyzed as having the function of ‘pointing’ to a referent (Švedova 1982) which corresponds primarily to the deictic use of the demonstratives. Besides, additional functions like distinguishing between different ‘points of view’ (e.g. the speaker vs. somebody the speaker is quoting) or signalling ‘empathy’ are proposed (cf. the overview in Weiss (1988)).

Thus, in both languages, demonstratives are assumed to refer to a 1) newly introduced referent 2) spatially nearest referent or 3) emphatically marked referent. Any dependency between these functions is not accounted for.

However, some data (both for Russian and German) cannot be explained by these approaches, e.g.:

- Demonstrative continuation of the reference to an already established thematical referent, that is obviously motivated by emotional emphasis, which Zifonun / Hoffmann / Strecker (1997: 558-560) inconsistently describe as ‘new orientation to the same referent’.

- (2) Wer zweifelt noch an der Schuld der Angeklagten? **Diese Frau** hat einen Mord begangen, damit
Who doubts yet at the guilt of the accused? **This woman** has a murder committed so-that
sie an das Vermögen ihres Gatten kommen konnte. Somit ist **diese Frau** eine habgierige Mörderin!
she the assets of-her husband achieve was-able-to. Thus is **this woman** a greedy murderer!

- very restricted use of demonstratives with indirect deixis and anaphora (see 2.1.2 and 2.2.2)

In order to explain these data, we propose an account that shows the interrelation of different functions of demonstratives. Some preliminaries: we define discourse topicality (DT-ity) as a property of a certain discourse referent a given discourse segment is 'about' (in the sense of Reinhart (1981)). Discourse segment is understood intuitively as a thematically contiguous part of a discourse. We assume that in a given segment there is only one topical referent in the sense of DT-ity, which we call 'discourse topic' (DT).

As for 'proximity', it is first understood in the literal sense of the term as short spatial distance between the speaker and the intended referent, sometimes contrasting with another, more distant referent (especially in the case of deictic reference). Proximity can be applied to anaphora if text / discourse is considered analogous to physical space as suggested by Bühler's (1934), 'Zweifelder-theory'. Then, spatial proximity means a low distance between an anaphor and its antecedent. In section 3. we show how the concept of proximity is extended to cover the cases of emotional emphasis.

2. Phenomena of demonstrative reference

Like other deictically or anaphorically used expressions, demonstratives are a means of domain bound reference, their different discourse functions depend on the domain of reference, deixis operating in a non-textual domain, anaphora in the textual one.

2.1 Deixis

2.1.1 Direct deixis

With direct deixis, demonstratives are used to refer to distant versus near referents (here, proximity is defined in terms of physical space), as the opposition *dieses –jenes*¹ in German and *éto – tot* in Russian shows, cf. (3) and (4):

- (3) **Dieses Café** (wo wir sind) gefällt mir besser als **jenes** dort drüben auf der anderen Straßenseite.
This café (where we are) like I better than **that** there over the road

Here, the use of demonstratives is deictically motivated with respect to the place of utterance (denoted by *dies*+N) in contrast with another place (denoted by *jen*-).

- (4) [...] Dorodnyx vyšel iz-za kustov na **bereg**, k samoj reke.
D came-out from-behind bushes to **shore** to itself river
On vpolgolosa otdaval prikazaniya [...] gotovit'sja k brosku na **tot bereg**.
he in-a-low-voice gave orders prepare to rush to **that shore**
[Tübinger Russische Korpora]

Here, the shore the protagonist is standing upon is referred to with a bare noun, while the other one, i.e. the more distant shore, is referred to with *tot*+N.

2.1.2 Indirect deixis

By indirect deixis we understand deictic reference where the referent cannot be seen directly but can be derived from visual features of the current discourse space.

¹ However, *jenes* has become quite peripheral in German usage, so that the meaning of physical distance is more often lexicalized in some other way, e.g. with *der andere* ('the other one').

While *dies-* in German as well as *étoť/tot* in Russian are the most typical means of direct deixis, they are very constrained with indirect deixis.

- (5) a. Ist **dér** / ***dieser** nicht da? (showing towards an empty office)
 is **hé_{DEM}** / ***this** not there
 b. Netu **ego** / ?**éťogo** / ***togo**?
 is-not-there **he** / ?**this** / ***that**?

2.2 Anaphora

2.2.1 Direct nominal and complex anaphors

Like with deixis, the concept of proximity can be applied in order to explain anaphoric demonstrativity. However, DT-ity is crucial for anaphors as well. As for nominal anaphors, non-DT, but ‘near’ antecedent in textual space prefers demonstratives, while DT with any antecedent position prefers personal pronouns (as stated in 1.2).

- (6) Odnadždy papa privel [...] kakogo-to čeloveka, [...] **éťot čelovek** vse vremja sprašival
 once father₁ brought-home some man₂ [...] **this man₂** all time asked
- (7) Hast du schon das Neueste von SPD-Chef Müntefering gehört?
 have you already the latest about SPD-leader Müntefering₁ heard?
 Er wollte seinen Vertrauten zu seinem Stellvertreter machen.
 He₁ intended his confident₂ to his deputy make.
Dieser Mann / **Dieser** bekam aber keine Mehrheit.
This man₂ / **This₂** obtained however no majority.

In (6), the whole segment is about the speaker’s father₁; the demonstrative NP refers to the non-topical referent₂. Similarly, in (7), the demonstrative full NP as well as the demonstrative pronoun is assigned to the non-topical referent₂. In both (6) and (7) the personal pronoun *er* / *on* (“he”) would be read as coreferent with the discourse topic NP₁.

Complex anaphors are NPs referring to propositionally structured referents by condensing a larger text segment which serves as their antecedent (cf. Consten / Knees 2006). They are a special and clear case of non-DT-ity, since the referent is created not until the act of anaphoric reference. Thus, our claim that demonstratives function as means of non-topical reference explains why demonstratives are preferred for complex anaphora while personal pronouns are ruled out:

- (8) Meine Freundin wird bald vierzig. **Dies** / **Das** / ***Es** deprimiert sie sehr.
Mojej podruge skoro ispolnitsja sorok let. **Éťo** / ***Ono** eje očen’ ugnetajet.
[my friend_{fem} will-be soon forty]_{event} **This_{event}** / ***It_{event}** her very depresses.

2.2.2 Direct versus indirect anaphora

A distinction of direct and indirect reference is made with respect to anaphora like with deixis (see 2.1.1 versus 2.1.2). Thus, indirect anaphors are anaphors without an explicit antecedent (cf. Consten 2004). They are preferably realised by lexical NPs (s.(9)) or (under certain conditions) by personal pronouns.²

- (9) Am Straßenrand stand ein Auto. **Der Motor** / ***Dieser Motor** war noch warm,
 U obočiny stojala mašina. **Motor** / ***Éťot** motor byl ešče těplym

² Pronominal indirect anaphors are possible in case of a close relationship to their anchor, i.e., when the anaphor denotes an argument of an anchoring verb, e.g.: *Do not park at the teacher’s park lot – next time I will have it (*this) towed away* (“car”, Consten 2004). Only for these, resumption through pronominal forms is possible at all.

At-the roadside stood (a) car. (The) engine / *this engine was still warm,
 aber vom Fahrer / *von diesem Fahrer fehlte jede Spur.
 no šofëra / *ëtogo šofëra bylo ne vidat'.
 but (the) driver / *this driver was not to-see

Like with deixis, *dies-* and *ëtot / tot* are very restricted for indirect anaphora. This fact cannot be explained in terms of DT-ity, since indirect reference introduces new (rhematic) referents and, therefore, demonstratives should fit. We offer an explanation in 3.3.3.

With indirect complex anaphors (which are quite rare), the use of demonstrative lexical NPs is possible only when the situations talked about are at the same temporal or epistemic level, unlike (10), where the events referred to in the anchoring text are present and real within the text world, whereas the event denoted by the anaphor is hypothetical:

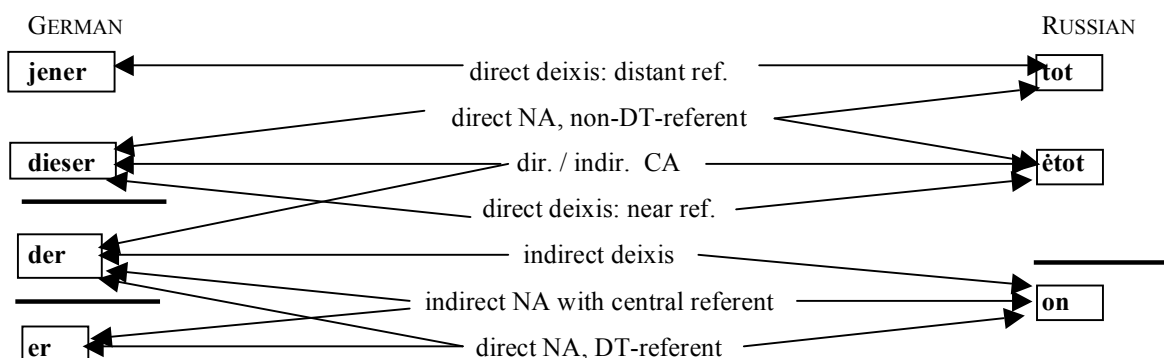
- (10) (Anchoring text, the speaker is a little boy:). I was seen dragging a big, old umbrella and I was caught just in time when I tried to hide in an airplane. [Stanislaw Lem, *Der Planet des Todes*, 83, German translation]
- Aus dem / *diesem improvisierten Fallschirmabsprung wurde nichts.
 Iz Ø / *ëtogo improvizirovannogo pryžka parašytom ničego ne vyšlo.
 From the /*this improvised parachute-jump became nothing

We will show that this change of level is the reason for the inacceptability of demonstratives.

2.3 To sum up

In (11), different means of domain bound reference are assigned to their most typical textual functions. Except for the personal pronouns *er / on*, this overview is intended to be valid for determiners of lexical NPs as well as for pronouns.

(11)



3. Discussion – Towards a unified model of demonstrativity

DT-ity and discourse segmenting and the choice of the referential means are interdependent: Not only the choice of referential means is fixed through the discourse structure, but also discourse structure is defined through the way a referent is referred to. So, e.g. a possible beginning of a new discourse segment might cause ambiguities in the interpretation of a demonstrative reference (cf. ()):

- (12) Ja rasskažu tebe pro Vanju. On sovsem uže spjatil. On každyj večer
 I tell you about Vanja₁ he₁ absolutely already got-mad he₁ every evening
 xodit v novyj klub. Petja včera tože tam byl.
 goes to new club Petja₂ yesterday also there was
 a. On ego srazu uvidel i podošël pozdorovat'sja.
 perspron_{NOM} perspron_{AKK} gleich sah und kam begrüßen

b. **Tot** ego srazu uvidel i podošël pozdorovat'sja.
demonstr_{NOM} perspron_{AKK} gleich sah und kam begrüßen

In (12) a., the personal pronoun *on* has two readings: 1) referring to Vanja who is regarded as the DT within the ongoing discourse segment. 2) referring to Petja if the recipient thinks that the sentence introducing Petja opens a new (sub-)segment with Petja as a DT. However, the function of continuous reference to the most salient referent, which is typical for personal pronouns, remains the same. The different readings are motivated by different kinds of segmenting the discourse.

Analogously, in (12) b. *tot* will be related to Petja as a non-DT referent if the whole text is seen as one discourse segment while it will be related to Vanja if Petja is considered a new DT. Again, the function of indicating a non-DT holds with both readings.

As noticed in 1.2., as yet no relation between DT-ity and proximity as factors determining the form of the reference resumption has been stated. However, the proximity-factor interacts with DT-ity. Basically, demonstrativity indicates proximity. But, firstly, DT-ity overrides proximity in a physical sense of the term as we are dealing with in deictic and textual 'pointing'. For an interaction between deictic pointing and DT-ity think of a case where a referent is physically present and, at the same time, becomes DT (e.g. talking about a cat which is in the same room). Here, it is most plausible to introduce this referent deictically by a demonstrative (combined with a gesture of pointing) and to continue with a chain of personal pronouns.

(13) Look at this cat! **She** has been sleeping for twelve hours and now **she** is crying for food although **she** is too fat already.

However, an anaphoric chain with repeated demonstrative NPs is possible as well if the speaker wishes to give an emotional emphasis to his statement about the discourse referent. In most of the cases a negative evaluation of the referent is given. Here, the use of demonstrative NPs does not result from spatial proximity (which is overridden by DT-ity) but from the speaker's emotional involvement with his topic, which is a common kind of 'cognitive proximity'. Thus, the term of proximity has to be used in a more broader sense as 'cognitive proximity' with respect to emotional attitudes and epistemic levels (cf. indirect complex anaphora). In contrast to the dominance of the DT-factor over physical proximity, cognitive proximity can allow for demonstrativity regardless of DT-status.

As a result, we gain a hierarchy of features matching demonstrativity:

(14) physical proximity (deixis: in space, anaphora: in text) < Non-DT-ity < cognitive proximity

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