



Proximity and Topicality – Discourse World Features and their Grammatical Marking

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1. Introduction

We investigate **proximity** and **topicality** as relevant cognitive relationships between language users and their discourse worlds. These concepts allow for an integrated explanation for phenomena at the grammar-reference interface. We especially account for demonstrative reference and concentrate on data from German, Russian and English.

2. Proximity

2.1 Physical Proximity

In many languages there are grammatical means (pronouns as well as determiners) of marking proximity (sometimes contrasting with distance, as *this* vs. *that*) as opposed to unmarked referential means (cf. Diessel 1999).

Tab.1 Determiners and pronouns marking proximity

demonstrativity	DEM		non-DEM
proximity marking	near	[distant not systematically lexicalised]	unmarked
German	<i>dieser</i>	(<i>jener</i>)	<i>der</i> +N, personal pronoun
Russian	ЭТОТ	ТОТ	zero article + N, personal pronoun
English	<i>this</i>	<i>that</i>	<i>the</i> + N, personal pronoun

- (1) a. **Dieses Café₁** (wo wir sind) gefällt mir besser als **das₂ Café** dort drüben.
 b. **Это кафе₁** (где мы сейчас) мне больше нравится, чем **кафе₂** напротив / **то кафе₂** напротив.
 c. I like **this café₁** (where we are) better than **the café₂** over there / **that café₂** over there.

Anaphoric demonstratives (or ACCENTED personal pronouns) are assumed to point to the most recent entity in the flow of the text (Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997, Šeljakin 2001). In German, the distribution is just like with spatial-deictic pointing to a near referent; in Russian there is a contrast merely between DEM (marking near referents) and non-DEM.

- (2) a. Peter₁ traf gestern **Paul₂**. **Dieser₂/DER₂** lud ihn₁ / Er₁ lud ihn₂ zum Kaffee ein.
 b. Петя₁ вчера встретил **Пашу₂**. **Тот₂** его₁ / Он₁ его₂ пригласил выпить чашечку кофе.
 c. Yesterday, Peter₁ met **Paul₂**. **HE₂** invited him₁ / He₁ invited him₂ to a cup of coffee.

2.2 Cognitive Proximity

We argue for a notion of proximity as a cover term for several instances of specific 'non-default' relationships (physical as well as mental ones) between referents and the speaker's world (the physical world as well as the world of discourse). We distinguish between **physical proximity** as introduced in 2.1, and **cognitive proximity** describing specific mental relationships between speakers and referents (Averintseva-Klisch/Consten 2007). 'Cognitive proximity' is meant to cover the following phenomena:

- **Epistemic Levels**

Indirect anaphors (NPs anchored by the pretext, but without explicit antecedents, Schwarz 2000) can be demonstrative only if anaphor and anchoring text refer to propositions at the same epistemic level (Averintseva-Klisch/Consten 2007):

real within the world of narration vs. **hypothetical**

(3) [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.

a. Aus **dem / *diesem improvisierten Fallschirmabsprung** wurde nichts.

(Stanisław Lem, *Der Planet des Todes*, 83, German translation)

b. Из **(*этого) импровизированного прыжка с парашютом** ничего не вышло.

c. Nothing came out of **the / *this improvised parachute jump**.

(4) I managed to get ab big, old umbrella and hide in an airplane without being seen.

a. Wegen **dieses Fallschirmabsprungs** verbrachte ich den ganzen Sommer im Krankenhaus.

b. Из-за **этого прыжка с парашютом** я всё лето провёл в больнице.

c. Because of **this parachute jump** I spend the whole summer in the hospital.

• Emotive Attitude

By using demonstratives, speakers can express a special emotive attitude against the referent (Erben 1980, Švedova 1998, and many others) with a noun lexically marked for emotive content (like in (5)) or without such noun through mere demonstrativity (like in (9)).

(5) a. Unser \Freund\ αp_i ist ein ganz widerlicher Kerl, bah! [...] Soviel Geld kann der_i im ganzen Leben nicht verdienen, wie er_i als Entschädigung zu zahlen hat, **dieser Blödmann $_i$** . Statt etwas ordentliches auf die Beine zu stellen, müllt er_i die Postfächer zu wie eine Horde Tauben ein frisch gewaschenes Auto. **Dieser Dreckskerl $_i$** . (similar Internet-chat *Beepworld.de*, 4.4.2006.

Speaker complains about someone who flooded the chat participants with spam)

b. Но Колосников $_i$! Депутат $_i$ – убийца! Савелий вдруг вспомнил $его_i$ мясистые пальцы, обвислый живот и двойной подбородок. И **этот подонок $_i$** лез к беззащитной девочке [...] Савелий сжал кулаки и мысленно поклялся, что **эта сволочь $_i$** , больше никогда не будет никого лапать. (Tübinger Russ. Korpora, detective stories of the 20th century corpus)

c. And I have a major aversion to going to the dentist. This is the product of the childhood dentist $_i$ I was subjected to. The guy $_i$ was a sadist. Or maybe just some random madman who claimed to be a dentist. [...] When I needed filling **this bastard $_i$** would drill without using any anaesthetic. [...] He $_i$ would even pretend the drill wasn't going to hurt.

(similar: <http://angryaussie.wordpress.com/2008/05/24/dentistry-is-gross>)

• Doubtful Familiarity in Discourse

Demonstratives may indicate that the corresponding referent is not part of the non-episodical long-term knowledge (Bisle-Müller 1991). This phenomenon has been referred to as 'anamnesic use' (Bühler 1934), 'recognitional use' (Himmelman 1997), and 'indexical use' (Auer 1981).

(6) a. Ich komme mit **diesen Kindern** (von denen ich schon mal erzählt habe), erinnerst du dich? / Ich komme mit ***diesen/ den Kindern** (meinen eigenen).

b. Я приду с **этими детьми**, о которых я тебе рассказывал, помнишь? / Я приду с (моими) **детьми** / *с **этими моими детьми**.

c. I'm going to come with **those children** (who I already talked about), do you remember? / I'm going to come with ***those / the children** (my own ones).

3. Topicality

Topicality is another cognitive relationship between speakers and referents in their discourse world, which can be (as well as proximity) defined along the status of a referent within the discourse world.

Topicality is the temporarily especially prominent status of a referent within the discourse world (Averintseva-Klisch/Consten 2007). Unlike proximity, the notion of topicality implies a ranking among referents: there is only one topic within a discourse segment.

Accordingly, **Topic** is the referent that is most stably activated in the mental representation of each discourse segment; as such, the topic is the default goal of coherence relations.

Topicality requires anaphoric maintenance of the same referent (see μ -referents in (5)). Therefore, topicality should match together with marking of proximity in the anaphoric reference mode.

But: demonstratives are said to be ruled out for topics (Comrie 1997, Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997, Bosch/Katz/Umbach 2007, cf. Consten/Schwarz-Friesel 2008). In view of the data like in (5) this does not seem to be empirically adequate.

As a solution, we claim that both kinds of proximity as well as topicality are discourse world features that to different extents take influence on the grammatical marking of the referent status. Proximity and topicality interact in a hierarchic way (see (7)).

4. Hierarchy of Discourse World Features and Demonstratives as their Grammatical Expression

(7) Hierarchy of discourse world features evoking demonstrativity



In order to test this hierarchy, we investigated the acceptance of demonstratives in a special construction in German called **right dislocation (RD)**. An RD consists of an NP at the right end of a clause and a coreferent pronoun inside the clause. It explicitly marks the discourse topic (Averintseva-Klisch 2008), cf. (8):

(8) Context: The speaker tells about her female boss, who often behaves strangely: „And then she goes completely off the rails.“

Sie ist halt so, die Frau.
 „She_i's just like this, the woman_i.“

In a questionnaire decision study, we found that demonstrative determiners are accepted in RD-NPs if the cotext makes cognitive proximity (instantiated as the **negative evaluation** of the corresponding referent) plausible, cf. in (9) as opposed to neutral (10)).

(9) „Wir haben 'nen neuen Lehrer. Er ist Spezialist für mongolische Sprachen. **Aber didaktisch ist er eine Niete, *dieser / der Lehrer*.** Im Unterricht ist er einfach unmöglich.“

“Well, we have got a new teacher. He is specialised in Mongolian languages. **But when it comes to didactics, he is a duffer, *this / the teacher*.** During lessons, he is simply obnoxious.”

(10) „Vorhin hab ich den Pfarrer gesehen. Er ist ja schon seit den 60er Jahren im Dienst. Aber er scheint noch ziemlich fit zu sein, ***dieser / der Pfarrer*.** Jedes Jahr pilgert er zu Fuß über die Alpen.“

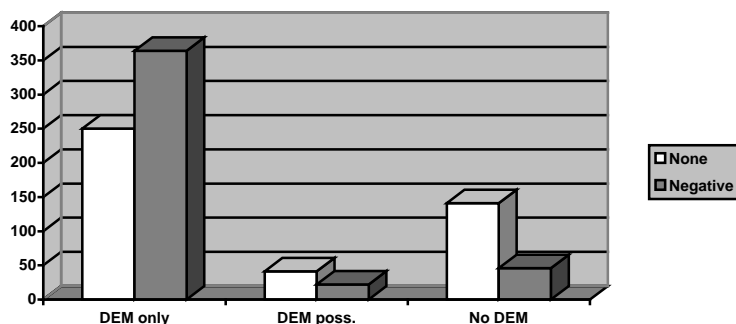
“I saw the pastor earlier. He has been on duty since the 1960s. But he still seems to be quite fit, ***this / the pastor*.** Every year, he pilgrimages across the Alps.”

Tab. 2: Emotive marking facilitating demonstrative reference on discourse topics

emotive marking	DEM only	DEM possible	no DEM	
none	250	41	141	432
neg. eval.	364	22	46	432
	614	63	187	864

$\chi^2 = 75.2$ (critical value with $p = 0.05$: 5.99)

Fig. 1 adapted from tab. 2



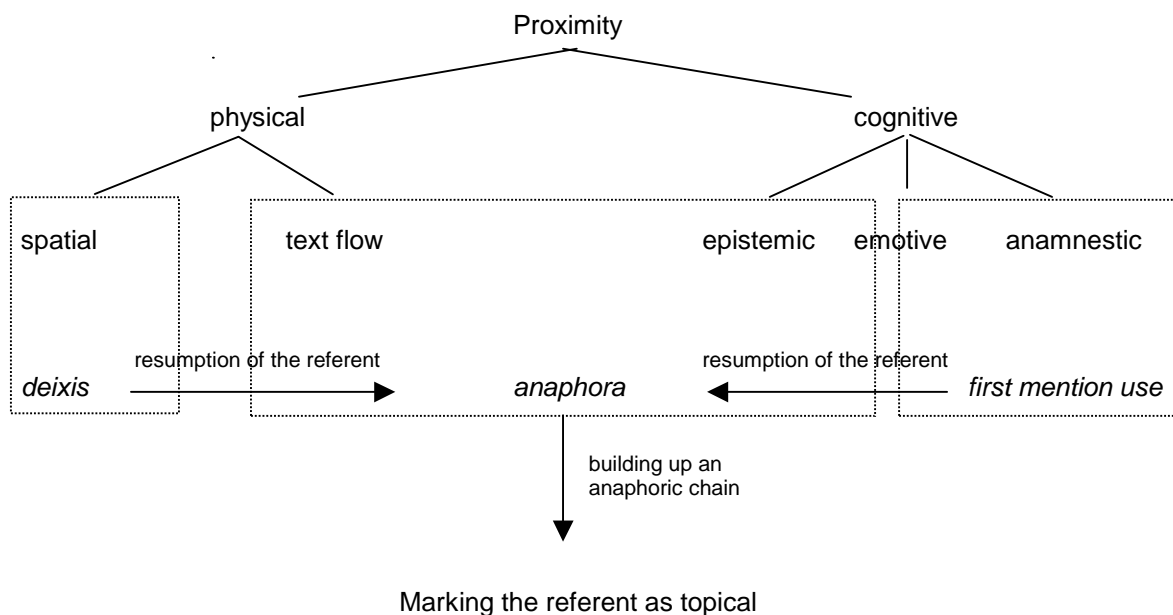
Results: 1) Emotive marking (as an instance of cognitive proximity) is a discourse world feature that is preferably expressed by demonstrativity. It allows for demonstrative reference even in case of topical referents; i.e. emotive marking overrules the impact of topicality with respect to the use of demonstratives. This confirms the hierarchy of discourse world features given in (7).

2) But the dispreference of demonstrative reference on topics is in our data not as strong as suggested in literature. This might be a characteristic of the RD as a specific construction: we expect RD to have an affinity to demonstrative marking due to a focussing effect RD has.

5. Conclusions

Proximity is a concept applicable for discourse world features on physical, textual and cognitive levels. Topicality and proximity are different although often interplaying statuses of a referent within the discourse world. They correspond to specific grammatical means.

Fig. 2: Topicality, proximity and references modes they occur with



6. References

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