Universals and Variation in Spatial Referencing

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Recognitional function of (distal) demonstratives cross-linguistically

In recent years, a growing number of works have appeared which critically analyze deictic markers (e.g. English this and that, Russian etot and tot, Mano tɔ́ɔ̄, ɗḭ̀ā̰, ɓɛ̄, yā . . .) beyond mere spatiality (Hanks 2005, 2011; Enfield 2003; Jarbou 2010, inter alia; for a recent overview, see Peeters & Özyürek 2016). Instead of a linear approach to deictic markers as encoding relative distance, a multimodal approach was suggested, where the psychological proximity (Peeters & Özyürek 2016), or accessibility (Hanks 2011), replaces mere physical proximity. Crucially, according to this theory of deixis, the speaker and the addressee establish referents’ accessibility jointly, through joint attention focus (Clark et al. 1983, Diessel 2006), which is opposed to the widespread egocentric approach to deixis.

That deictic markers often have anaphoric (discourse-referential) function is well known. However, this function is often seen as a metaphorical extension of spatial deixis proper (Anderson & Keenan 1985). On the contrary, Hanks (2011, inter alia) argues that anaphora, being an instance of cognitive access to the referents, functions alongside with perceptual access, which includes, but is not restricted to, spatial (visual) access.

In this paper, I explore the function of recognitional deixis, which has not received much scholarly attention, on a preliminary cross-linguistic sample. Deictic markers in the recognitional function (Schegloff 1972) serve to identify referents which are not immediately accessible on the interactive scene. These referents are rather accessible cognitively. Unlike anaphora, however, they are not directly mentioned in the discourse immediately prior to the utterance in question. The access is enabled via the common ground of the interlocutors, which is constructed in previous interaction experience. Therefore, recognitional function is a primary example of cognitive access to referents, established jointly. See an example of English demonstrative that in the recognitional function:

(1) (A yoga teacher to her students): Widen those collar bones.

“Widening” the collarbones (and opening the chest) is a common element of yoga postures. Without pointing to any of the students’ collar bones, and without mentioning them in the discourse immediately preceding the utterance, the teacher assumes that the students, already familiar with the practice, will recognize and implement the movement.

In what follows, (1) I introduce recognition among other functions of cognitive access to referents (anaphora, and also bridging); (2) I then argue that there is a cross-linguistic tendency for the recognitional function to be expressed by deictic markers which, in the spatial axis, express relative distance from the object (distal deictics); (3) The common
ground being a socially constructed phenomenon, I introduce social-pragmatic usages of recognitional function.

**Cognitive access to referents: recognition, anaphora, bridging**

Recognitional function is a function of cognitive access to the referents, along with the widely-studied function of tracking reference in discourse, or anaphora (Fox 1996), and also bridging (Clark 1975). In case of anaphora, the referent is mentioned in the prior discourse. Thus, in Crow narratives salient characters are often referred to with the use of proximal marker *hinné*:

(2) hinne iisáakshee-sh hinne bacheé-sh dúuxalu-ok bin-nàaske aa-ii-ák

*“this young man dragged this man and brought him to the bank of the stream.”* (Crow; Graczyk 2009: 70)

In the case of bridging, the referent is inferable by proxy: from a frame or other bridging context mentioned in the immediate prior discourse. Consider ex. 3 from Mandarin, where the distal demonstrative *nei* functions as a marker of bridging:

(3) Zuotian wanshang wo shui bu zhao
Gebi de nei tiao gou jiao de lihai

*“I couldn’t sleep last night. The dog next door was barking.”* (Mandarin, Crosthwaite 2014:463).

Both anaphora and bridging involve previous discourse; bridging also involves some broader contextual knowledge shared by the interlocutors. However, as illustrated in ex. 1 and in the forthcoming examples, recognition is based solely on common ground. Scheme 1 illustrates the types of knowledge involved in anaphoric, bridging and recognitional expressions:

**Scheme 1. Types of knowledge involved in cognitive access to referents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anaphora</th>
<th>Bridging</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous discourse</td>
<td>Previous discourse</td>
<td>Common ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common ground</td>
<td>Common ground</td>
<td>(frames, contextual knowledge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recognitional function and distal deictic markers**

Recognitional function, as well as other functions of cognitive access, is in many languages conveyed by the same means as the more straightforward function of demonstratives, namely, visual access. The recognitional function has a chance to be universal: it is possible that in any language at least some (demonstrative) marker will have the recognitional function (possibly, among others). Moreover, medial and distal demonstratives seem to be preferred for the
recognitional function. See example from Crow, where the demonstrative éehk (medial, close to addressee) is used in recognitional function:

A boy is missing, and his mother cannot find him.

(4) bacheeítche bacheé xaxúa bachaahíí-ák óoppii-ak “éehk shikáak-kaata-m

chief man all gather together-SS smoke-SS “that boy-DIMIN-DET

xapii-o-k”

lost-CAUS.PL-DECL

“the chief gathered all the men together,” he smoked, “they lost that little boy” [he said] (Crow, Graczyk 2009: 72)

Yucatec Maya is another case at hand: the recognitional function is often marked with the non-immediate enclitic –o’:

(5) Father arrives home from travel and notices that one of his four children is not around and so asks his spouse:

kux tuún le pbaal o’, tz’ú chan xantal má’a tinwilik

“How about that kid, it’s been a while since I’ve seen him” (Hanks 2016)

Russian has a specialized marker –to, restricted to recognition. This marker grammaticalized from the distal demonstrative tot:

(6) A conversation overheard in a bus:

- Pomniš? On-to. Znaeš, pravda! - Da?

remember.2SG he-TO know.2SG truth yes

“- Do you remember? The man. You know, it’s true! – Really?” (Bonnot 1986:115)

**Recognition in interactional context**

In Yucatec Maya, stereotypical referents are often introduced with the non-immediate marker -o’:

(7) chokow le k’lin o’

“The sun is hot” (Hanks 2005:207).

Compare ex. (7) with a stereotypical referent “the sun” with (8), where “this wind” encoded by use of the immediate marker –a’ has a value of focus associated with it: the speaker emphasizes that the wind is stronger than the days before (and takes it as a sign of the approach of the hot season):

(8) k’áam e ыхk’ a’ (pointing up) astah bey u tàal camyon e’

“This wind is loud. It’s as if a truck were approaching” (Hanks 2005:207).

Therefore, in Maya recognized and stereotypical referents are contrasted with truly discourse-new and focalized ones, which is supported by the paradigmatic opposition between immediate and non-immediate deictic markers.

Deictic markers in the recognitional function can be used strategically, as a means to formulate an utterance that would presuppose the existence of common ground between the interlocutors and, in some cases, their joint community membership. This is the strategy that I frequently observed in the native Bible translations by the Catholic community of Mano (Mande; Guinea). These translations occur spontaneously, during the Sunday service, when the catechists
orally translate from the French Bible. Note the translation introducing (Lc 4:21) below. There was no previous discourse on the subject, so the usage of the distal demonstrative yā “that” cannot be explained by the anaphoric function; neither the objects in question were present at the interaction scene or otherwise accessible.

(9) wólàkà lè ê kè Nazareth yā wì ɑ̀, yè è ñè gbààɓó Isàiè là sèbè yā gèè à ká ɑ̀ . . .
“(In) the house of God that was in THAT Nazareth, when he finished reading THAT book of Esaiah...”

By using the demonstrative yā in the recognitional function, the catechist, who was orally translating the Bible, backgrounded the referents and made them appear as already known by the congregation. The effect was that the listeners were stepping into an ongoing story (Clark&Haviland 1977:37). Common ground is a property of a social community (Enfield 2006); in this case, a religious community. Thus, presupposing the common ground, the catechist simultaneously presupposes the existence of a religious community.

References


