



snippets

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***English proximal/distal non-deictic demonstratives align with hearer-new/
 hearer-old information status***

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In this snippet I identify a new (as far as I know) generalization about non-deictic demonstrative DPs: proximal demonstratives presuppose hearer-novelty of their referents, while distal demonstratives presuppose their referents to be hearer-old. This observation motivates an extension of Potts & Schwarz' (2010) (P&S) corpus study of speaker-hearer solidarity effects (roughly: parallel evaluation judgments) in demonstratives.

Demonstrative determiners are used non-deictically in indefinites, generics, epithets and “affectives:”

- (1) a. There was an/*the/this obnoxious guy at the party.
 b. Tim had a/*the/that silly idea about demonstratives.
- (2) a. I watched a documentary about (these) exotic Caribbean fish.
 b. (Those) Boston Terriers are so adorable.
- (3) This/That (Socialist) Obama is raising taxes again.

Each of these constructions has been discussed individually, e.g. in Gundel *et al.* (1993); Partee (2006); Prince (1981); Ionin (2006); Bowdle & Ward (1995); Lakoff (1974), though they were not examined together until P&S. However, P&S do not isolate non-deictics, and do not analyze demonstrative-headed epithets at all.

From (4-5) we see that proximal indefinite demonstratives presuppose hearer-novelty; the distal forms presuppose the referent to be hearer-old:

- (4) (A was at a party; B was not.)
 B: Tell me about the party.
 A: Well, there was this/ #that guy playing these/ #those annoying songs on the piano, but I chatted with this/ #that friendly bartender all night.
 - (5) (A and B were at a party; B has forgotten parts of the night.)
 B: Tell me about the party.
 A: Well, there was that/ #this guy playing those/ #these annoying songs.
 B: I don't remember that/ #this guy or those/ #these songs.
 A: Well, there was this/ #that guy playing these/ #those annoying songs on the piano.
 B: Oh, right, then we chatted with that/ #this bartender for hours!
-

Generics display similar behavior:

- (6) a. A: My roommate just bought a Labrador.
B: Oh, those/these Labradors make great pets.
b. Let me tell you about these/those exotic Caribbean fish.
- (7) (A is a customer; B is a clerk.)
a. A: Can you help me choose a breed of dog to buy?
B: Well, these/those Labradors make great pets.
b. After you and I talked, I told Mary about those/these exotic Caribbean fish.

Epithets and proper names also follow this pattern:

- (8) a. That (socialist) Obama is really something. #I can't believe you haven't heard of him.
b. This (socialist) Obama is really something. I can't believe you haven't heard of him.

P&S state that “[the] content of the evaluative predication involving the *this*-headed proper name is assumed by the speaker to be uncontroversial.” (p.5) The speaker-hearer solidarity evoked by *that* in (8a), and the fact that hearer-familiarity is a necessary condition for solidarity, suggest that *that*-epithets are more likely to presuppose “uncontroversialness” than *this*-epithets. This hypothesis could be tested in an extension of P&S's corpus study. The prediction is that if solidarity effects are measured for *this*- versus *that*-epithets, there will be a stronger correlation between *that*-epithets (e.g. *that bastard Schmidt*) and solidarity than between *this*-epithets (e.g. *this bastard Schmidt*) and solidarity. More generally, if we examine all types of non-deictic demonstratives, the same contrast between distal and proximal forms should hold. This is consistent with the results of P&S, which do not distinguish between deictic and non-deictic uses.

References

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