

Strauss 2002 Summary by Joel Gehman

Overview. The article's main argument is that traditional explanations for choice of demonstrative (this, that, it) as a function of the proximity/distance of a referent from the speaker do not adequately explain the distribution of demonstrative tokens in natural conversations. An alternative dynamic explanation is proposed which accounts for choice of demonstrative as a function of a speaker's personal stance towards their listeners, and the referents being discussed. According to the model, demonstratives provide an index of the degree of focus a speaker is asking of listener and in so doing disclose assumptions speakers have of their listeners.

Static Model. Within the traditional model (pp. 131-132), *this* and *that* index the proximity or distance of a referent relative to the speaker. *This* denotes an entity that is near the speaker, or proximal. *That* denotes an entity that is far from the speaker, or distal. The *speaker* is central; the distance of a referent is always gauged relative to the speaker. In short, the relationship between the speaker and the referent governs the choice of demonstrative.

Dynamic Model. Strauss proposes an interactive model (pp. 133-135) which considers (1) the relative importance of a referent being marked by a demonstrative, (2) the relative newness or givenness of the referent, and most importantly, (3) the relationship between interlocutors and the role of the listener. Finally, (4) *it* is included as a third member of the system of demonstratives (Halliday 1985). Overall, demonstratives are chosen as a function of the attention required *relative to the listener*, not proximity/distance relative to the *speaker*. Speakers use referents to frame information for listeners on a continuum from shared, important or new to unshared, unimportant, or given, or somewhere in between. Thus, when analyzing demonstratives the *listener* is as important as the speaker. In short, from the dynamic perspective a speaker's choice of demonstrative (this, that, it) is a function of how much attention the listener is being asked to give a particular referent, and the interactional function served by such a signal. Importantly, the model as presented is limited to spontaneous oral discourse between native English speakers.

Selected Findings.

- A higher frequency of anaphoric (backward pointing) *that* and *it* function as an index of a kind of solidarity among interlocutors, while anaphoric *this* serves as an index of a kind of separateness and independence between speakers and listeners (pp. 143, 144, 147).
- Higher focus markers (this/these) not only emphasize the strength of a speaker's position, but also signal an intention to keep talking (p. 145). *This* utterances lead to topic elaboration or persistence, while *that* often marks the end of a speaker's turn.
- Non-phoric uses of *this* highlights the noun referents in question in a far more vivid manner than would the use of its *a* counterpart (p. 146).
- *This* marked utterances tend to appear with other attention-getting phrases such as "see" which also convey non-shared information (p. 148).
- *This* is a signal by the speaker to pay heightened attention to the referent in question, typically because it represents new information. *That* and *it* are cues for the listener to pay comparatively less attention, typically because these referents are potentially shared information (p. 149).
- *This* is primarily used as a modifier (60%), meaning the noun referent tends to be explicitly mentioned (pp. 150-151). The opposite is true of *that*, where the noun referent is overwhelmingly a pronominal (70%) rather than a modifier (30%).
- Additionally, when *this* does occur as a modifier there is a far stronger tendency for it to co-occur with other modifiers and intensifiers compared with instances of *that* (p. 151).

Questions.

- Compared with the *speaker-centric* orientation of the static model, does the dynamic model represent a shift up to a higher level of analysis, that of the *speaker-listener dyad*?

Vocabulary.

- **Deixis** is "the force with which the hearer is instructed to seek the referent" (p. 134), an instruction to the listener about how much attention to give a referent (p. 135).
- **Exophora** refers to an item which is not named or referred to within the actual text (p. 136). **Endophora** refers to some item from within the text (p. 137). Endophoric references may be **anaphoric** or backward pointing, or **cataphoric** or forward pointing.
- An **interlocuter** is "one who takes part in dialogue or conversation" (Merriam-Webster Online), and may be a speaker or listener (p. 132).

Citation.

- Strauss, S. 2002. *This, that, and it* in spoken American English: A demonstrative system of gradient focus. *Language Sciences*, 24: 131-152.