Deferred Reference across Categories

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The literature on demonstratives – the semantic literature in particular – focuses mainly on DP demonstratives (demonstrative pronouns and determiners), which denote in the entity domain. Nonetheless, it is well known that demonstratives exist across syntactic categories, and denote in other domains as well, although not every language offers distinct lexical items for every category. The small sample in (1) illustrates these facts.

(1)	**proximal**	**medial**	**distal**	
manner	kō	sō	ạ	Japanese
thing	this	that		
locative	here	there		
allative	hither	thither		
ablative	hence	thence		
time	then			
degree	yay			
person	der			German
amount	tiek			Lithuanian
quality	takoj			Russian

The puzzle addressed in this paper is how to account for the common deictic semantics that these diverse elements share, while at the same time allowing them to function across syntactic and ontological categories. We propose that the key to the solution lies in the phenomenon of deferred ostension or deferred reference. Rather than an exceptional phenomenon sometimes found in non-standard uses of demonstratives, referential deferment lies at the core of most uses of demonstratives. What is commonly known as deferred reference follows as a side effect of the way standard demonstrative reference is organized. In the present paper, we focus exclusively on the "exophoric" use of demonstratives, leaving anaphoric uses to another occasion.

Deferred ostension across categories We start by illustrating the familiar concept of deferred reference (Nunberg 1993):

(2) [pointing at a stable, to refer to the horse usually kept there]
That horse didn't do too well in the race

We cannot suppose that the speaker is "really" just gesturing at the horse here. We need to acknowledge a role both for the index (the constituent of the utterance context that is being gestured at, henceforth the demonstratum δ_c), and the ultimate referent of the demonstrative expression since, as Nunberg observes, while features like proximal and distal attach to the index, features like number and gender apply to the referent. This is clear from his example in (3):

(3) [pointing first at a plate close to the speaker, then at a plate further away:]
These are over at the warehouse, but **those** I have in stock here.

Hence, there is a level of indirection between the demonstratum and the referent: deferred reference. The indirection is mediated by a relation between index and referent (e.g., between a barn and the horse that is stabled there) that the hearer needs to reconstruct from the context.

With few exceptions, examples of deferred reference in the literature are of DP demonstratives. However, other categories equally allow deferment. Consider first locatives:

(4) [pointing first at a proximal, then at a distal spot in an architectural mock-up:]
We should build the bus stop **here**, not **there**

Note again, that the proximal and distal features attach to the locations in the mock-up, not to the locations that the demonstratives ultimately denote. (5) is a similar example with a temporal demonstrative:

> (5) [pointing first at one, then another date on a calendar:]
>   **Then** I was in Portugal, but by **then** I was back home

Lacking proximal and distal variants, we must rely on the earlier examples to reject the notion that the gesture is already somehow directed at the date itself. But given the shifting reference of two occurrences of *then* we conclude that an anaphoric analysis is implausible: the speaker gestures at a location or entity on the calendar to refer to the date by way of deferred reference.

I return to manner demonstratives below, but (6) shows the now familiar pattern, which can also be illustrated for degree demonstratives:

> (6)　　　[pointing at a near, then a far pair of ballet shoes worn in a particular pattern:]
>   In China, they dance **like this**, but here, they dance **like that**

However, as Nunberg (1993) observes, not every expression whose interpretation depends on context allows deferred reference. E.g., the pronominal *it*, and contextual *local*, do not, indicating that the demonstratives in (2) through (6) must have a particular element to their semantic make up that facilitates deferred reference. I argue that this same element is necessary for demonstratives to function across categories at all.

Demonstratives across categories

Consider the Japanese manner demonstratives as used in (7) (König & Umbach 2018, attributed to Yoko Nishina, p.c.):

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(7)
    a. Hanako-wa koo (+gesture) odor-u.
        Hanako-TOP like this dance-PRS
        'Hanako dances like this. '(speaker is dancing)

    b. Hanako-wa soo (+gesture) odor-u.
        Hanako-TOP like that dances-PRS
        'Hanako dances like that.' (hearer is dancing)

    c. Hanako-wa aa (+gesture) odor-u.
        Hanako-TOP like that dances-PRS
        'Hanako dances like that.' (a third person is dancing)

Both König & Umbach (2018) and Umbach & Gust (2014) assume that the index in these examples is the dancing event in the utterance context. The manner demonstrative then denotes the set of events that are similar, in a specific sense, to this event. Umbach & Gust liken the relation between index and denotation to the type of deferred reference discussed in Nunberg (2004); but this is different from the deferred reference under discussion here, in that the deferment is not arbitrary and recovered from context, but fixed by the definition of similarity.

Why must we assume that the demonstratum in these examples is the dancing event? Without further evidence, one might as well assume that the speaker is gesturing at some abstract object that is a manner. This would immediately facilitate a cross-categorial semantics for demonstratives: the speaker gestures at a manner, or a degree, etc., and the demonstrative simply refers directly to the demonstratum δ_c.

The crucial evidence that this will not work comes from the demonstrative feature values.

In several languages, including Japanese, manner demonstratives come with a proximal, medial or distal value, which triggers a presupposition as to the distance between the speaker and the demonstratum. This presupposition cannot apply to the referent directly, since manners are not the kinds of things that can be located in space. We therefore need a level of indirection between the index, which can be spatially defined as close to, or far from, the speaker, and the ultimate denotation, which cannot. Note that the feature values do not relate to an abstract or metaphorical space where manners might be located: in (7) it is the physical spatial distance between the dancer and the speaker that the proximal, medial and distal features apply to, and likewise in (8) below.

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We conclude that König & Umbach (2018) and Umbach & Gust (2014) are correct that there is a level of indirection between index and referent. However, the index does not need to be an event, and the relation between index and referent is not fixed by similarity, but recovered from context arbitrarily. This is clear from cases such as (6) above: the speaker is not pointing at an event, but at a pair of shoes that suggest a manner of dancing. The shoes must be the demonstratum, as the spatial relation between shoes and speaker determines the use of the proximal or distal value. Likewise in (8):
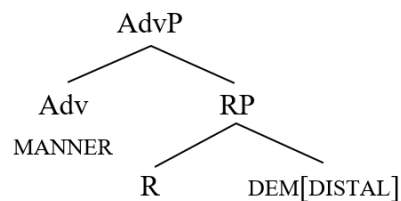
(8) [pointing first at some paint spots on the floor, then at a tarp:]
If you're going to paint like this I don't want you in my living room; like that is ok

We will argue that locative and degree demonstratives support similar arguments.
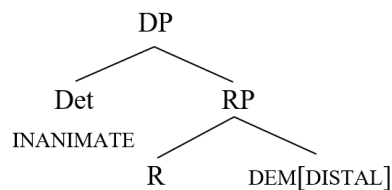
Proposal

We propose that the demonstratives in (1) generally have the syntax in (9), based on Elbourne (2008):

(9)   *a*:

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              AdvP
             /    \
          Adv      RP
        MANNER    /  \
                 R    DEM[DISTAL]
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       that:

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              DP
             /   \
          Det     RP
       INANIMATE  /  \
                 R    DEM[DISTAL]
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We assume that the DEMonstrative feature always denotes the demonstratum δ_C; the feature value acts as a presupposition on δ_C. DEM is selected by a functional head R, a free variable responsible for deferment:

(10)

   a. ⟦ DEM[DISTAL] ⟧^{g,c} $=(\lambda x{:}far\_from\_ \; speaker(x).x)(\delta_C)$

                                           $\equiv \delta_C$ [w/ presupposition δ_C is distal]

   b. ⟦ R DEM[DISTAL] ⟧^{g,c} $=g(R)(\delta_C)$

R's output type and properties are constrained by categorial and other features of the determiner or adverbial head, as in (11)/(12). This is why gender, etc., apply to the referent, not the index.

For *that*, RP combines with an abstract Det *the* in (11a), yielding (11b). If no contextual value is salient, R defaults to IDENT, $\lambda x.\lambda y.y=x$. If R is contextually determined, ostension is deferred.

(11)

   a. ⟦Det INANIMATE⟧$^{g,c} = \lambda P.\iota x{:}inanimate(x).P(x)$

                           [ι the presuppositional determiner meaning]

   b. ⟦ Det INANIMATE [R DEM[DISTAL]] ⟧^{g,c} $=\lambda P.\iota x{:}inanimate(x).P(x)$
      $(g(R)(\delta_C))$

                               $\equiv \iota x[g(R)(\delta_C)(x)]$

"the unique inanimate object that has the salient relation R with the demonstratum". When R defaults to IDENT, $\equiv \iota x[(\lambda y.y=\delta_C)(x)] \equiv \delta_C$

For *a̧*, because the presuppositional MANNER feature on the adverbial head restricts the output of R, R is forced to map the demonstratum δ_C to the required denotation type. This solves the cross-categoriality problem:

(12)

    a. ⟦ [$_{Adv}$ MANNER] ⟧^{g,c}=λx$_{<v,t>}$:manner(x).x

                                    [*v* for events]

    b. ⟦ [$_{Adv}$ MANNER] [R DEM[DISTAL]] ⟧^{g,c}=(λx:manner(x).x)(g(R)(δ$_c$))

      ≡ g(R)(δ$_c$)

        [w/ presupposition that value of R applied to δ$_c$ yields a manner]

In sum, if the demonstratum must be spatially located so as to satisfy the proximity feature values, then manner demonstratives, etc. can only exist if demonstrative reference is mediated by a function R that maps δ to the required domain. Traditional deferred reference falls out as a special case.

References:

Elbourne, Paul. 2008. Demonstratives as individual concepts. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 31:409–466.

König, Ekkehard & Carla Umbach. 2018. Demonstratives of Manner, of Quality and of Degree: A Neglected Subclass.

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