

An Approach to Anaphoric Demonstratives in English*

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1. Introduction

The anaphoric use of the English demonstratives *this* and *that* (*these* and *those*) is quite complicated, as shown by interesting papers by Robin Lakoff (1974) and Chiba & Murasugi (1987). This paper, which is largely based on English discourse data,¹ does not attempt to analyse all such intricate aspects of the demonstratives.

In a number of studies, it has been suggested that the line between deictic and anaphoric use cannot always be drawn very clearly, and that there is no very clear distinction between *this* and *that* in their anaphoric use (Channon 1980, Imanishi & Asano 1990, Leech & Svartvik 1994, among others). In this study I try to answer the question why this is the case. I further want to point out that the degree of the contrast of the demonstratives differs between in dialogue and in writing.

This paper is structured as follows. In section 2, I will present the studies which suggest such unclear distinction between *this* and *that*. In section 3, three hypotheses will be proposed concerning the anaphoric phenomena of the demonstratives. In section 4, I will show that these hypotheses can account for the discourse facts in my data. In section 5, conclusions will be given.

2. Blurred distinction between *this* and *that*

2.1. Interchangeable?

Leech & Svartvik (1994) remark that the contrast of meaning between deictic *this* and *that* is less clear in their anaphoric use, and that these two demonstratives can replace each other “with no difference of meaning.”²

(1) I then tried to force the door open, but *this/that* was a mistake.

(Leech & Svartvik 1994: 59)

Halliday & Hasan (1976: 61) comment that there is no very clearly felt distinction between *this* and *that* in (2), and therefore *that* could be easily substituted:

(2) But then, Mr. Dubois reflected gloomily, women never had any prudence. Though he had profited by *this* lack many a time it annoyed him now.

Imanishi & Asano (1990: 234) take the same view, referring to example (2) above, and say that the distinction between *this* and *that* is neutralized when used anaphorically in many cases.

Similarly, Gundel et al. (1989: 93) also observe that *those* in (3) could be replaced by *these*:

(3) John, *this* speech was a magnificent triumph of the President. He showed he could stay awake for twelve whole minutes. He showed that he could speak every word off of his teleprompter, even the long ones. But the speech doesn't have any chance of putting the scandal behind him, because the scandal is not about mistakes, as he said, and it's not about mismanagement, as the Tower Commission said. It is about a betrayal of principles, it's about lying, and it's about breaking the law. And *those* issues remain.

2.2. Difficult to draw the line?

Chiba & Murasugi (1987:133) note that it seems difficult even for native English speakers to make a clear decision on which of the demonstratives is appropriate in a given context. According to them, in the following example, four of their six native informants chose only *this*, and the rest answered that either of the demonstratives is possible:

- (4) Take the sentence *he pushed the truck*. A child who acquired the verb push from *this/that* sentence could have done so by noting that the pusher argument, *he*, was in the subject position as defined by the phrase structure of English, and that the pushee argument, the *truck*, was in the object position.

One of the investigations by the present author also shows individual differences in the choice of the demonstratives. Observe the examples below:

- (5) After many weeks of rain, the dam burst. This/That resulted in widespread flooding.
- (6) Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410 AD. This/That was the end of civilization as the West had known it.

In (5), out of my 15 native informants, 9 chose *this* for the best choice, and 2 chose *that*. As for (6), the respondents who chose *that* for the best slightly outnumbered those who chose *this* (10 versus 8).

It is probably true that native English speakers tend to choose either of the demonstratives only by their intuitions. However, a number of native English speakers whom I have consulted show a different view from the above; they do not feel that there is no difference between *this* and *that* in the examples shown so far. Some also claim that skilled language users

are likely to be able to detect a difference.

3. Hypotheses

In this section, I will propose three hypotheses concerning the use of the anaphoric demonstratives, which are developed and extended by the present author from the findings on Japanese demonstratives by Mikami (1955),³ Yoshimoto (1986), and Kinsui & Takubo (1990).

The following briefly summarizes the hypotheses:

- (7) Hypothesis 1: The spatial distance from the speaker to the referent in the deictic use of the demonstratives is realized as the psychological distance from the speaker in the anaphoric use. Therefore, the distinction of meaning between *this* and *that* is subjective and not as clear as in their deictic use.
- (8) Hypothesis 2: In dialogue, in which the speaker and the hearer exists in the same context space, the speaker's personal space and the hearer's personal space are still felt to exist.⁴ In this case, *this* generally refers to something which is felt psychologically near the speaker, i.e. in the speaker's personal space, while *that* refers to something which is closer to the hearer than to the speaker, i.e. in the hearer's personal space. Thus, the contrast of meaning between *this* and *that* still somewhat remains.
- (9) Hypothesis 3: In writing, in which only the writer's or the speaker's personal space exists in the context, and the reader's or the hearer's personal space is included in that of the writer, the contrast between the writer (speaker) and the reader (hearer) is not felt. Accordingly, the contrast between *this* and *that* tends to be watered down

greatly.

4. Discussion

Now, using the hypotheses that have just been explained, I will examine my discourse data. As was pointed out in the preceding section, the anaphoric demonstratives are used in two types of situation: in dialogue and in writing. First, I will consider the use of the demonstratives in dialogue, and then in writing.

4.1. *This* and *that* in dialogue

Lakoff (1974) observes that *that* can be used by a speaker to comment on an immediately prior remark by another. *This* cannot be so used. *This* may be used only if the two sentences are uttered by the same speaker.⁵

(10) Dick says that the Republicans may have credibility problems.

This/That is an understatement. (Lakoff 1974: 349)

Halliday & Hasan (1976: 60) also remark with regard to such use of the demonstratives, "In dialogue there is some tendency for the speaker to use *this* to refer to something he himself has said and *that* to refer to something said by his interlocutor." Their examples are shown below:

(11) a. There seems to have been a great deal of sheer carelessness. *This* is what I can't understand.

b. There seems to have been a great deal of sheer carelessness.

——— Yes, *that's* what I can't understand.

According to Lakoff and Halliday & Hasan, the distinction between (11a) and (11b) is clearly related to the distinction of "near (the speaker)" versus "not near." "What I have just mentioned" is "near me," whereas "what you have just mentioned" is not.⁶

While these generalizations presented above could account for many occurrences of the anaphoric demonstratives, like those in the next three examples,

(12) “So the problem is that everyone is trying to control and manipulate each other for energy, because we feel short of it?”

“*That’s* right.”

“But there is a solution, another source of energy?”

“*That’s* what the last insight implied.” (Redfield 1994: 106)

(13) A: They gave Cowley a fund last year for his edition of the Warwick Psalter.

B: I see I didn’t even know *that*. (CEC: 384)⁷

(14) A: They had a sentence with “entirely,” and got people to transform it into the negative. *This* is very tricky. I should have thought there were.

B: Yes, well quite they do *that* sort of thing, you see. (CEC: 136)

there are instances, however, which do not fit these discourse principles.

(15) “Mr. Foltrigg, surely you don’t deny that the defence is entitled to more time, in light of the circumstances?”

“No, Your Honor, I don’t deny *this*. But I think six months is entirely too much time.” (Grisham 1994: 406)

(16) “The lawyer’s missing too,” he announced as he poured coffee from a thermos.

“When did you hear *this*?” Foltrigg asked.

“Five minutes ago, on my car phone...” (Ibid.: 479)

In (15) and (16), *Mr. Foltrigg* uses *this* to refer to the information expressed by his addressee.⁸ In example (17) below, *this* is used similarly:

(17) A: I finally bought a dog last night.

B: Now, is *this* the dog you were telling me about on Tuesday?⁹

In terms of Hypothesis 2, these phenomena can be accounted for as follows: the speaker, by using *this* rather than *that*, is taken to feel him/herself to be involved in the addressee's personal space. In other words, the speaker is taken to appropriate an idea or information introduced by the addressee. Therefore, the use of *this* in (15) - (17) implies the speaker's subjective involvement and his/her appeal to shared experience.

Here, Hattori's (1968: 78 - 9) comment on this phenomenon is worth pointing out. According to him, when asked for advice by someone, if the speaker says "In that case, what you've to do is..." he/she is thought to show a cool and indifferent attitude or sometimes a rude attitude. On the other hand, if the speaker says "In this case..." he/she is thought to show much kindness or interest, and imply that he/she is involved in the subject. If one says "This is a problem," to his/her son, it implies that he/she is anxious together with his/her son. By contrast, saying "That's a problem" implies that he/she takes a cool and indifferent attitude.

However, I disagree with Hattori concerning his account of *that*. Consider (18) and (19):

(18) A: How about dinner tonight?

B: *That* sounds great. I'd love to.¹⁰

(19) A: Where were you yesterday? We missed you.

B: I'm sorry I was absent. I felt terrible yesterday.

A: Oh, *that's* too bad. Did you go to the doctor?

(personal conversation)

In these examples it is clear that the use of *that* does not imply a cool and indifferent attitude to the information given by speaker A in (18) and speaker B in (19).¹¹ I want to claim here that, referring to Hypothesis 1 in section 3, a marked contrast between anaphoric *this* and *that* is not felt.

4.2. *This* and *that* in writing

4.2.1. Cases where the difference is hardly felt

This and *that* are also used to refer to something the speaker or writer has mentioned in his/her own previous utterances. In this use a somewhat different tendency from the use in dialogue can be found, as was claimed in Hypothesis 3 in section 2. That is, the contrast between *this* and *that* tends to be more unclear and watered down than when used in dialogue.

It seems that in the following examples *this* and *that* are interchangeable used without distorting the logic of the statements, although this does not necessarily mean that there are no semantic or pragmatic differences felt. In (20) – (25), *this* could be replaced with *that*:

(20) From Gauguin he learned how to marshal broad planes of color.

To *this* was added the flattened perspective and dramatically simple viewpoints, learned from Japanese woodblocks and the visual stacking of imagery involving crowds of people that was so much a feature of Mexican mural painting.

(*The Japan Times*, Dec.1, 1996: 13)

(21) The boy was afraid and the dog had sensed *this*.

(*OALD* 1995: 1242)

(22) If you are returning to school after working for several years and did not establish a credential file, it may be difficult to obtain letters of recommendation from professors at your undergraduate

institution. In *this* case, contact the graduate schools you are applying to and ask what their policies are regarding your situation. (Peterson's: 4)

(23) If you do not wish to test on any other date, fill in circle #4 next to the words "A test payment refund." If you choose *this* option, your registration will not be transferred to another test date, but you will receive a refund of the total payment and your registration will be cancelled. (BIT: 28)

(24) Regina has an enviable combination of one of the highest standards of living of any Canadian city with one of the lowest costs of living. For *this* reason several corporate and governmental organizations have relocated to the city in recent years. (Univ. of Regina: 4)

(25) In the fifteenth century, admission to trade guilds and to the freedom of the city was extended more broadly, and artisan masters took a greater part in guild and city government. The consequences of such changes for the general plays are worthy of study. But who were guildsmen, what was the social hierarchy of work, how was the city itself constituted and divided? All *these* issues affected the shape and content of the guild plays everywhere, over their two-hundred year history.

(Dalhousie Univ.: 2)

On the other hand, *this* could be used instead of *that* in the next five examples:

(26) An argument over unilateral disarmament broke out between them, and *that* finally put an end to their friendship.

(Quirk et al. 1985: 1458-9)

(27) Remember that not every word you hear is important. *That* means that it doesn't matter if you don't understand some of the words. It is fine to ignore some of the information. (NCB: 70)

(28) The style that Bach followed stayed in effect until the end of the Romantic Period, ending with the music of such composers as Richard Wagner and Gustav Mahler. After *that*, in the early 20th century, the rules changed once again. Composers such as Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, the Big Three of Vienna, introduced a new language of musical expression, the 12 tone row, once more redefining our concepts of melody and harmony. (NCB: 6)

(29) Today's discussion is about a common animal reaction——the yawn. The dictionary defines a yawn as "an involuntary reaction to fatigue or boredom." *That's* certainly true for human yawns, but not necessarily for animal yawns. The same action can have quite different meanings in different species. (BLT: 10)

(30) In a nonperformance area like music education, you need only show that you have attained the level of proficiency normally acquired through an undergraduate program in *that* field. (Peterson's: 5)

Next, it is most important to note that in the similar situations like the following, the two demonstratives both refer to the topics included in the fields of linguistics. And it will be difficult even for a native English speaker to explain why *those* is chosen in (31), and *these* in (32).

(31) Reading, research, discussion, and writing on advanced topics in

semantics; *those* may include: semantic categories, processes, or systems, in language particular studies, typological or universal studies, applied studies, or theoretical studies.¹²

- (32) Reading, research, discussion, and writing on advanced topics in diachronic linguistics; *these* may include: family tree vs. wave theory, linguistic reconstruction (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics), dialect continua, substratum languages, comparing protolanguages, processes of sound and meaning change, or reconstruction of culture and homeland through languages.

We can understand this as a most typical case where the contrast between the demonstratives almost disappears.

4.2.2. Cases where a subtle difference is felt

My discussion in section 4.2.1 has argued that the semantic contrast between *this* and *that* is greatly diluted in writing. It is worth pointing out here that some researchers observe that there can be a subtle difference felt between *this* and *that* in certain cases.

Lakoff (1974: 350) points out that there seems to be a subtle feeling with *this* in (34) that the speaker remains involved in his/her subject, and may well go on to talk about it. On the other hand, *that* in (33) distances the speaker from Kissinger's report, making it less likely that he will expatiate on it:

- (33) Kissinger made his long - awaited announcement yesterday.

This/That statement confirmed the speculations of many observers.

A similar kind of proposal is made by Kamio (1990: 159), who gives the following example:

(34) ... Jackson thus claims that the first theory should be preferred over the second in terms of its explanatory power. This/That is the view expressed by him in his celebrated 1945 article.

According to Kamio, if *this* is used in (34), there can be a subtle feeling that the speaker or writer is in favour of the content expressed in the first utterance in (34). On the other hand, *that* in (34) implies that the speaker or writer has a neutral or somewhat objective opinion towards what is expressed in the preceding utterance.

Some informant reactions, however, are inconsistent with these intuitions. They feel that it is more likely that *that* appears in (34) as a foreshadowing of a subsequent contrastive statement, such as “But if we look at his earlier work, we find that in 1938 he had expressed the view that...”

Now, a question arises as to whether these reactions or intuitions can account for the use of *this* and *that* in cases such as the following:

(35) In this course, phonetic symbols are used occasionally when it is necessary to give an accurate label to an allophone of some English phonemes, but we do not do any phonetic transcription of continuous speech. *That* is a rather specialised exercise. When symbols are used to represent precise phonetic values, not just to represent phonemes, we enclose them in square brackets [], as we have done already with cardinal vowels. In many phonetics books, phoneme symbols are enclosed within slant brackets / /, but *this* seems unnecessary for our purposes. (Roach 1991: 42)

It is true that *that* in line 4, referring to “phonetic transcription of continuous speech,” is used to terminate and present a subsequent

contrastive statement. It should be noted, however, that *this* in line 11, referring to “phoneme symbols enclosed within slant brackets,” is also used to discontinue the topic. So the views presented above should be regarded as weak ones.

To sum up, it follows from what has been observed so far in this section that these kinds of usage are based on the view that the differences between *this* and *that* are felt in such examples as (33) and (34). However, this does not seem to deny my analyses in this paper, since such differences can be seen as subtle ones, as the two studies above say.¹³ In any case, it is not necessary for the purpose of the paper to enter into a detailed discussion of this phenomenon.¹⁴

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have tried to account for the phenomenon that the deictic contrast between *this* and *that* becomes unclear in their anaphoric use, using the theory presented as three hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 has explained that in anaphoric usage, the choice between the two demonstratives which depends on the psychological, subjective distance from the speaker causes the contrast to be unclear. Hypotheses 2 and 3 have claimed that the degree of contrast will vary between in dialogue and in writing: there is only a subtle pragmatic difference, if any, when used in writing, where there is no addressee's personal space.

While some researchers mentioned in section 2 have remarked that the distinction between *this* and *that* is neutralized in many cases, this seems to be an extreme view in the light of this study.

Notes

- * I wish to thank Professor YOSHIDA Seiji, Seijo University; and Professor Pamela A. Downing, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee for valuable comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of the paper.
1. My data come from a variety of spoken and written sources. These include novels, a newspaper article, university brochures, casual conversations in a linguistic corpus by Leech and Svartvik, a personal conversation between a native English speaker and me, and so on.
 2. In his personal comment, however, Professor Leech said that some native speakers are aware of the semantic difference between the two demonstratives.
 3. Mikami (1955) is probably the first to propose that two types of viewpoints are necessary to observe the use of Japanese demonstratives *KO/SO/A*: the contrast between *KO* and *SO*, and the contrast between *KO* and *A*. According to Mikami, in the former case where the speaker and his/her addressee are on the opposite viewpoints, while in the latter case where the speaker and his/her addressee stand on the same viewpoint
 4. Here, I make use of Yoshimoto's (1986) concept and terminology for the deictic usage of the Japanese demonstratives *KO/SO/A*. *Personal space* is the domain surrounding an individual. Entities within this space are most readily perceived and affected by the individual. *Context space*, which is my original term used instead of Yoshimoto's term *conversational space*, is the domain around the interlocutors, from which others are expected to maintain a distance so as not to overhear or interfere with the exchange. Context space includes

personal space. The crucial difference concerning this concept between Yoshimoto and me is that I also use it to explain the anaphoric use of the demonstratives, while Yoshimoto accounts for this use on the basis of another theory.

5. As the native speakers I consulted have suggested, however, there is a frozen expression "This is true." which is very commonly used.
6. Gundel et al. (1989: 93) point out that only *that* can be used to comment on the remarks of another speaker, as shown in the following example where they claim *that* cannot be replaced by *this*:

(i) N: "Bob loves Mary," and someone else wrote "Mary loves Jim" and I wrote "Jim loves Bob"! (laughter). It was three different handwritings, three different people.

K: Yeah, *that's* good.

7. Although in this corpus, for the representation of phonological, phonetic, and prosodic phenomena, all the utterances are transcribed with elaborate symbols unavailable on the standard keyboard, I have here rewritten the transcriptions into simple ones which omit such transcription devices.
8. One of my informants pointed out some tendency for a person such as a lawyer to use *this* often in this way.
9. This exchange, which sounds fine, was constructed by Professor Downing, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.
10. Example (18) is constructed by the present author.
11. As far as my linguistic experience is concerned, in exchanges like (18) and (19), the use of *this* seems to be rare even when the speaker expresses serious interest or sympathy.

12. Examples (31) and (32) are taken from an academic calendar published by the University of Regina, Canada.
13. Gensler (1977: 326) remarks that *this* and *that* can be used very similarly, and that there are “subtly elusive differences” in usage.
14. Leech and Svartvik (1994: 59) comment that *this* is more common than *that* in “formal” English, although they do not explain why. Halliday & Hasan (1976: 61) say that there are marked differences between different styles and varieties of English as regards their patterns of anaphoric usage of *this* and *that*. While these seem to be interesting topics, a close study of them is beyond my present scope.

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