

LD. Distance Contrasts in Demonstratives

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1. Defining the values

Demonstratives are deictic expressions such as English *this* and *that*. They indicate the relative distance of a referent in the speech situation vis-à-vis the deictic center. The deictic center, which is also called the origo, is roughly equivalent to speaker's location at the time of the utterance. When *this* and *that* are used contrastively, *this* denotes a referent in relative proximity to the deictic center and *that* denotes a referent in greater distance:

(1) *This is my pen and that one is yours.*

The English demonstratives express a simple distance contrast. However, the demonstratives of other languages are often more specific. They may not only indicate the relative distance of the referent to the deictic center but also whether the referent is visible or out-of-sight, at a higher or lower elevation, uphill or downhill, upriver or downriver, or moving toward or away from the deictic center (see Diessel 1999: ch 3).

The map shows the number of distance contrasts that are expressed in adnominal demonstratives; the other deictic features are not shown on the map. That is, if a language employs, for instance, two demonstratives for proximal and distal referents and a third demonstrative for referents out-of-sight, it has been classified as a two-term language, i.e. the demonstratives for referents out-of-sight have been disregarded.

The map is restricted to adnominal demonstratives because in some languages pronominal and adnominal

35 demonstratives do not express the same distance contrasts
 36 (see chapter LP for a detailed discussion of these two kinds of
 37 demonstratives). For instance, in Tongan (Polynesian)
 38 adnominal demonstratives express a two-way contrast between
 39 proximal and distal referents whereas pronominal
 40 demonstratives differentiate between referents that are near
 41 the speaker, near the hearer, or away from speaker and hearer.
 42 In addition, Tongan has a neutral demonstrative that is only
 43 used pronominally (see Table 1).

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Table 1. Demonstratives in Tongan (Churchward 1953: 150–2)

	Pronominal	Adnominal	
Neutral	<i>e</i>		
Near Speaker	<i>eni</i>	Proximal	<i>ni</i>
Near Hearer	<i>ena</i>	Distal	<i>na</i>
Away from Speaker and Hearer	<i>ia</i>		

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Interestingly, if adnominal and pronominal demonstratives do not have the same distance contrasts, which is relatively uncommon, pronominal demonstratives tend to express a larger number of distance contrasts than adnominal demonstratives.

On the map, the distance contrasts of adnominal demonstratives are represented by five values:

@	1.	no distance contrast	7
@	2.	two-way contrast	128
@	3.	three-way contrast	88
@	4.	four-way contrast	8
@	5.	five (or more)-way contrast	4
		total	235

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Languages that do not indicate a distance contrast are languages in which adnominal demonstratives are distance-

58 neutral. An example of such a language is German. Modern
59 German has two adnominal demonstratives that precede a
60 coreferential noun: *dieser* and stressed *der, die, das*. Note that
61 *dieser* does not contrast with *jener* as in older stages of
62 German; like *der, die, and das, dieser* is synchronically
63 distance-neutral.

64 Since the German demonstratives are deictically non-
65 contrastive, one could argue that they are definite articles
66 rather than demonstratives. However, for the purpose of this
67 map German *dieser* and stressed *der, die, das* have been
68 classified as demonstratives because of their pragmatic
69 functions. Like distance-marked demonstratives, these
70 expressions are commonly used to focus the hearer's attention
71 on entities in the surrounding situation, which is not what
72 speakers usually do with definite markers.

73 German may express a deictic contrast between two
74 referents by adding the adverbial demonstratives *hier*
75 'proximal' and *da* 'distal' to the neutral forms:

76

77 (2) German

78 *Das Bild hier gefällt mir besser*

79 DEM picture here like me better

80 *als das da.*

81 than DEM there

82 'I like this picture better than that one (over there).'

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84 The same strategy is used in other languages in which
85 adnominal demonstratives are distance-neutral (e.g. French *ce*
86 *N-ci* vs. *ce N-là*). In general, it seems that all languages have at
87 least two adverbial demonstratives (or deictic particles) that
88 indicate a distance contrast between two referents or locations,
89 and if the adnominal demonstratives are distance-neutral, the
90 adverbial demonstratives can be added to the neutral forms
91 when it is necessary to differentiate between two referents.

92 In languages in which adnominal demonstratives express
93 a two-way distance contrast, the demonstratives refer to
94 proximal and distal referents. Note, however, that in most of
95 these languages demonstratives can also be used non-
96 contrastively. For instance, in Modern Hebrew *ze* indicates a
97 proximal referent when it is used in contrast to *hu* ‘distal’; but
98 *ze* is also used in non-contrastive situations, where it is
99 distance-neutral.

100 Other two term languages employ a special neutral term
101 in addition to distance-marked demonstratives. For instance, in
102 Lithuanian *šis* ‘proximal’ and *anàs* ‘distal’ are deictically
103 contrastive and *tàs* is distance-neutral. Language like
104 Lithuanian have been classified as two-term languages because
105 the neutral demonstrative does not add another distance
106 contrast to the system.

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108 2. Distance- and person-oriented systems

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110 Languages in which adnominal demonstratives express a three-
111 way contrast can be divided into two types: (1) distance-
112 oriented systems in which all demonstratives indicate the
113 relative distance between the referent and the deictic center,
114 and (2) person-oriented systems in which one of the
115 demonstratives denotes a referent in the proximity of the
116 hearer (see Anderson and Keenan 1985). Hunzib
117 (Daghestanian; eastern Caucasus) has a distance-oriented
118 system including three adnominal demonstrative that indicate
119 three different locations on a distance scale (see Table 2), and
120 Japanese has a person-oriented system in which one of the
121 three demonstratives refers to an entity near the hearer (see
122 Table 3).

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124 Table 2. Demonstratives in Hunzib (van den Berg 1995: 61)

adnominal demonstratives

Proximal	<i>bəd</i>
Medial	<i>bəl</i>
Distal	<i>əg</i>

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126 Table 3. Demonstratives in Japanese (Kuno 1973: 27)

adnominal demonstratives	
Near speaker	<i>kono</i>
Near hearer	<i>sono</i>
Away from speaker and hearer	<i>ano</i>

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128 Languages having more than three adnominal demonstratives
 129 are almost always person-oriented; that is, they usually employ
 130 a special term for referents near the hearer. An example of a
 131 four-term system comes from Hausa (see Table 4).

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133 Table 4. Hausa (Wolff 1993: 119–20)

adnominal demonstratives	
Near speaker	<i>nân</i>
Near hearer	<i>nan</i>
Away from speaker and hearer	<i>cân</i>
Far away from speaker and hearer	<i>can</i>

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136 3. Geographical distribution

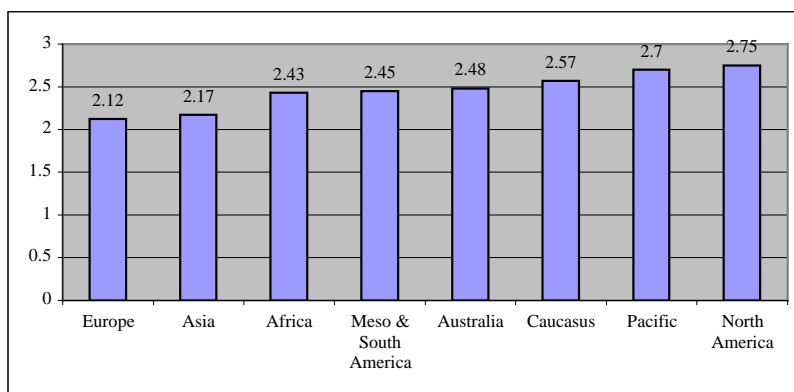
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138 The vast majority of the world’s languages employ two or three
 139 distance-marked demonstratives: 54.4% of all languages shown
 140 on the map have adnominal demonstratives that express a
 141 two-way contrast between proximal and distal referents and
 142 37.4% have adnominal demonstratives that differentiate
 143 between three referents. The majority of the latter have a
 144 distance-oriented system; that is, they distinguish between
 145 three different locations on a distance scale. Person-oriented
 146 systems seem to be less common: about two thirds of the
 147 three-term languages shown on the map have been classified

148 as distance-oriented systems in reference grammars and only
149 one third has been classified as person-oriented.

150 One-term systems, in which adnominal demonstratives
151 are distance-neutral, and larger systems having four, five, or
152 more adnominal demonstratives are cross-linguistically
153 uncommon. Together they account for only 8% of the languages
154 shown on the map. In contrast to the three-term systems, the
155 four- and five-term systems are almost always person-
156 oriented.

157 If we look at the areal distribution of the various distance
158 systems, we find that two- and three-term systems are
159 prevalent throughout the world. However, the occurrence of
160 smaller and larger systems is restricted to certain areas: One-
161 term systems occur quite frequently in Africa (Supyire,
162 Koyraboro Senni, Koromfe, Kera), but they are also found in
163 Europe (German, French) and Meso-America (Mam). Four- and
164 five-term systems occur in three regions: North America
165 (Koasati, Maricopa, Navajo, Tlingit, Quileute), Africa (Hausa,
166 Iraqw, Somali, Malagasy), and the Pacific region (Kambera,
167 Bagandji, Asmat). Figure 1 shows the mean number of distance
168 contrasts that are expressed by adnominal demonstratives in
169 various parts of the world.



170 Figure 1. Mean number of distance contrasts in demonstratives

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172 As can be seen in this figure, there are two areas where
173 adnominal demonstratives express relatively few distance

174 contrasts, Europe and Asia. Especially high is the number of
175 distance contrasts in North America and in the Pacific. However,
176 overall the variation is relatively small across the different
177 regions. It ranges from a mean distance contrast of 2.12 in
178 Europe to 2.75 in North America; that is, the difference
179 between the area with the fewest distance contrasts and the
180 area with the most distance contrasts amounts to about 30%.

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182 4. Theoretical issues

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184 The interpretation of the distance contrasts that are encoded by
185 demonstratives crucially depends on the conceptualization of
186 the deictic center. In a distance-oriented system, the deictic
187 center is basically the same for all demonstratives. However, in
188 a person-oriented system one has to distinguish between two
189 different origos (Diessel 1999: ch 3). The origo of the first and
190 second terms is defined by the location of the speaker,
191 excluding the location of the hearer, whereas all other terms
192 relate the referent to a domain including both speaker and
193 hearer. In other words, in a person-oriented system the deictic
194 center is conceptualized in two different ways: It is the sole
195 domain of the speaker (excluding the location of the hearer) for
196 the first and second terms, and it is the common domain of
197 speaker and hearer for the distal term(s). Thus, from a
198 conceptual perspective, a person-oriented system with three
199 distance terms is a variant of a distance-oriented system with
200 two distance terms in that the demonstratives of such a three-
201 term system never distinguish between more than two
202 referents, namely the deictic center (which is either the location
203 of the speaker or the common domain of speaker and hearer)
204 and the referent. Similarly, a person-oriented system with four
205 demonstratives can be seen as a conceptual variant of a
206 distance-oriented system with three distance terms. What this
207 means is that with very few exceptions (notably the languages
208 that have more than four adnominal demonstratives),

209 languages do not evoke more than three different locations on
210 the distance scale. For the great majority of the world's
211 languages, three appears to be the upper limit; there is very
212 little cross-linguistic variation in this domain.

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