

Perspective as a parameter of prominence. The case of German demonstrative pronouns.

A basic intuition underlying many approaches to anaphoric pronoun resolution, in theoretical, typological, computational, and psycholinguistic work alike, is that personal pronouns (PPros) refer to the most prominent one among several accessible referents. Accessibility is constrained by ϕ -features on pronouns and antecedents, and, if the antecedent is sentence-internal, also by grammatical structure. This intuition has been explicated by prominence rankings in various approaches (e.g., Kennan & Comrie 1977, Gundel e.a. 1993, Grosz e.a. 1995). There is an analogous intuition that demonstrative pronouns (DPros), used anaphorically, avoid the most prominent referent (e.g. Comrie 1997, Diessel 1999). An important additional difference between PPros and DPros, pertaining to accessibility, is that DPros, unlike PPros, seem to be prohibited from being bound by c-commanding antecedents (Wiltschko 1999).

We limit our attention here to German DPros and to two issues: (a) the issue as to which parameters determine the prominence of referents, and thus constrain the referent selection for DPros, and (b) the general accessibility constraint from grammatical structure, which says that DPros cannot be bound by c-commanding antecedents.

As for (a) it has both been argued (i) that grammatical relations are key in determining prominence relations relevant for DPros (Kaiser & Trueswell 2004) – the subject-avoidance hypothesis, and (ii) that information structure provides the crucial parameter (Bosch & Umbach 2007) – the topic-avoidance hypothesis. The evidence for (i), however, has remained inconclusive, since in the experimental stimuli in Kaiser & Trueswell (2004) all subjects also happened to be topics, while (Bosch & Umbach 2007) provide data showing that, at least for German, grammatical relations are irrelevant.

There is still evidence against the topic-avoidance hypothesis of two kinds: (a) Topics are sometimes accepted as DPro referents in situations where the issue is not a choice among several suitable referents, but there is only one referent whose linguistic description bears the correct ϕ -features, as in (1); (b) DPros may even select referents of antecedents that are not only topics, but also c-command the DPro (cf. (2)).

(1) Woher Maria_i das weiß? Die_i muss es wohl von Peter gehört haben.

[How does Maria_i know? She_i [DPro] must have heard it from Peter.]

(2) Was hältst Du eigentlich von Paul_i? Julius_k sagt ja, dass Paul_i glaubt, dass der_{i≠k} ein Genie wäre.

[What do you think of Paul_i? Julius_k says that Paul_i believes that he_{i≠k} [DPro] is a genius.]

The new generalization that we offer, and that will be argued for in the paper in detail, is that DPros are prohibited from being resolved to a DP that refers to the person from whose perspective the current proposition is presented, i.e., the *Perspectival Centre* (PC). In (1) the PC is an external speaker, not identical to Maria; in (2) the PC

is Julius. We thus propose a PC-avoidance hypothesis to replace the topic-avoidance hypothesis, and PC as a core factor of prominence. When utterances contain no indication as to a PC, we claim that the PC defaults to the topic, thereby capturing all previous observations. Finally, we argue that what seems to be a ban against binding can actually be derived from PC-avoidance, since in standard cases the DP c-commanding the DPro is also the PC – either inherently or by default, in virtue of being the topic.

References

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