

Do German demonstrative pronouns avoid perspectival centers?

Umesh Patil (Osnabrück University), Peter Bosch (Osnabrück University) & Stefan Hinterwimmer (University of Cologne)

umesh.patil@gmail.com

German demonstrative pronouns of the *der/die/das*-paradigm (DPros), which are the marked pronoun variant, with personal pronouns of the *er/sie/es*-paradigm (PPros) being the unmarked one, are well-known to avoid maximally prominent discourse referents as antecedents or binders. Prominence is usually defined in terms of the notions subjecthood and topicality (see [1], [2] and [3]). Recently, [4] have argued that individuals functioning as *perspectival centers* are prominent as well and consequently avoided by DPros, where they define *perspectival centers* as follows: An individual x is the *perspectival center* with respect to a proposition p if p expresses the content of an utterance or thought of x or describes a situation perceived by x in a way that is compatible with x 's doxastic state.

We report an eye-tracking study in the visual-world paradigm ($n=48$) that tested the hypothesis that the DPros avoid *perspectival centers*. We used two manipulations of the *perspectival center* — use of epithets and the alteration of “speaker-hood” in indirect discourse. Following [5], we assume that: (i) If a discourse referent R_i is referred to by an epithet, there is a more prominent *perspectival center* with respect to the proposition denoted by the clause in which the epithet occurs — namely the one from whose perspective R_i is presented; this should enhance the availability of R_i as an antecedent or binder of a DPro. (ii) The represented speaker in indirect discourse, i.e. the (individual denoted by the) subject of a verb of communication such as *say* or *tell* is the *perspectival center* with respect to the proposition denoted by the complement clause of that verb; it should therefore be less likely to be the antecedent or binder of a DPro.

We used short discourses, as in (1), where we manipulated the “*perspectival center-hood*” of the topic of the current discourse ($R_1 = \textit{der Polizist}$, ‘the policeman’) — it was either referred to by a PPro in the third sentence (*er*, ‘he’, in conditions a and b) or by an epithet (*der nette Wachtmeister*, ‘the nice sergeant’, in conditions c and d), and it was either the represented speaker in indirect discourse (conditions b and d) or the addressee (conditions a and c). The discourse also introduced another human masculine referent ($R_2 = \textit{der Fotografen}$, ‘the photographer’), and two non-human referents as distractors. The DPro, *der*, occurs in a complement clause in the third sentence. The visual stimuli displayed these four referents and an unmentioned distractor object.

Fig. 1 shows the ratio of focussing frequencies between R_1 and R_2 which indicate how the availability of R_1 as the possible referent of the DPro changes over time. In general, R_1 was less preferred than R_2 , and the manipulation of speaker-hood did not influence R_1 's availability. But in the epithet conditions, R_1 was more preferred than in the pronoun conditions. We interpret these results as: R_2 is generally preferred as the antecedent or binder of the DPro since it is less prominent than R_1 in terms of discourse topicality and subjecthood across all conditions and is not the *perspectival center* of the proposition denoted by the entire sentence or the one denoted by the embedded clause. However, the fact that being referred to by an epithet enhances the availability of R_1 in spite of being maximally prominent, shows that *perspectival center-hood* is an independently relevant factor: The presence of an implicit *perspectival center* even seems to be able to overwrite the additional prominence that R_1 receives in condition (d) by being the represented speaker in indirect discourse.

(1)

Sentence 1 and 2 (same across all four conditions):

Eine gute Nachricht. Der Polizist hat gerade das Motorrad abgestellt und redet mit dem Fotografen.

Good news. The policeman has just parked the motorcycle and talks to the photographer.

Sentence 3 prelude:

(condition a) **Er erfährt** soeben von dem Fotografen der eigentlich wegen der Kängurus hier ist,

(condition b) **Er erzählt** soeben dem Fotografen der eigentlich ...

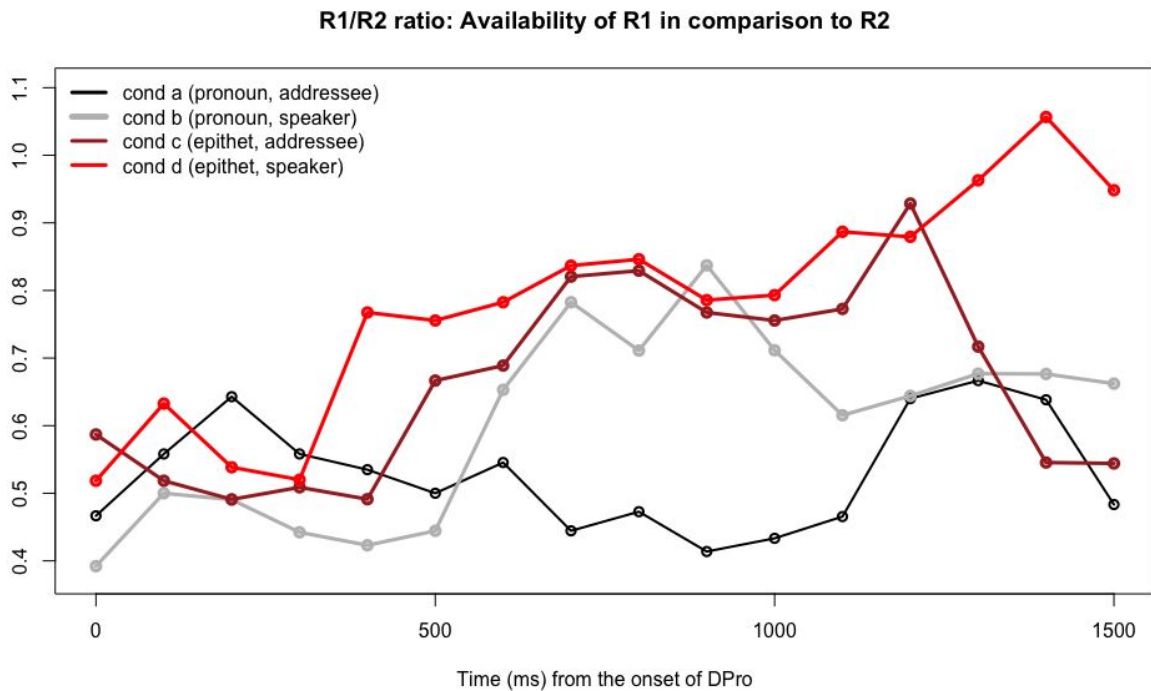
(condition c) **Der nette Wachtmeister erfährt** soeben von dem Fotografen der eigentlich ...

(condition d) **Der nette Wachtmeister erzählt** soeben dem Fotografen der eigentlich ...

Sentence 3 postlude (same across all four conditions): *dass der im Lotto gewonnen hat.*

He/the_nice_sergeant has just learned_from/told the photographer who is here because of the kangaroos that DPro has won the lottery.

Fig. 1. The ratio of focussing frequencies between R1 (policeman) and R2 (photographer), starting at the onset of the DPros (*der* in sentence 3). The higher the ratio, the more available R1 is.



References

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