German Demonstrative Pronouns Are Sensitive To Perspective-Taking

Stefan Hinterwimmer & Umesh Patil (University of Cologne)

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Previous Research on German Demonstrative Pronouns

- In German two pronouns series: Personal pronouns (PPros, *er/sie/es*) and demonstrative pronouns (DPros, *der/die/das*).
- While PPros are neutral, DPros have been shown to avoid maximally prominent referents as their antecedent when prominence is rendered through subjecthood (Bosch et al. 2007), topicality (Bosch and Umbach 2006, Hinterwimmer 2015) or agentivity (Schumacher et al. 2017).
- Hinterwimmer and Bosch (2017) propose that when the proposition denoted by a sentence containing a DPro clearly expresses an evaluation from the speaker's or narrator's perspective, even the topical referent becomes available as an antecedent of the DPro.
- We report two acceptability studies that test the proposal about the influence of perspective-taking on DPros' antecedent preference.

Test Items Used in the Experiments and Predictions

- In both studies test items consisted of two sentences, as in (1).
- First sentence always established an individual referred to by a proper name as topic, for second sentence six different conditions.

(1) Als Fabian zur Arbeit ging, fand er 100 Euro auf dem Gehweg.
   When Fabian went to work, he found 100 Euros on the sidewalk.
   (a-b) Er/Der hat einfach immer so ein unverschämtes Glück.
   He/He$_{DPro}$ simply always is so incredibly lucky.
   (c-d) Toll, er/der würde heute Abend davon schick essen gehen.
   Great, he/he$_{DPro}$ would spend that for a posh dinner tonight.
   (e-f) Er/Der kaufte sich von dem Geld ein Paar neue Schuhe.
   He/He$_{DPro}$ bought a pair of new shoes for the money.

- In conditions *a-b*, second sentence always clearly expressed an evaluation of the topical referent by the narrator (*narr-judg-PPro/DPro*).
- In conditions *c-d*, second sentence most plausibly interpreted as a thought of the topical referent in *Free Indirect Discourse* mode (*top-judg-PPro/DPro*).
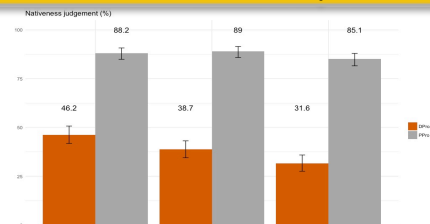- Conditions *e-f* both neutral continuations in narrative mode (*neut-PPro/DPro*).

Predictions:
1. Variant with PPro always at least as good as variant with DPro.
2. Both *top-judg-DPro* and *neut-DPro* reliably worse than *narr-judg-DPro*, since only *narr-judg-DPro* does not violate the bias of DPros against highly prominent referents.
3. No reliable difference between *top-judg-DPro* and *neut-DPro* since they both violate the bias.

Experiment 1

- Yes/no judgment task (run online) where participants (n= 85) were shown 36 mini-texts consisting of the first sentence followed by one of the variants in (1a-f), interspersed with 36 fillers.
- Participants were instructed that these were beginnings of stories produced by advanced German learners and their task was to judge whether the student had reached German native proficiency.

Results of Experiment 1
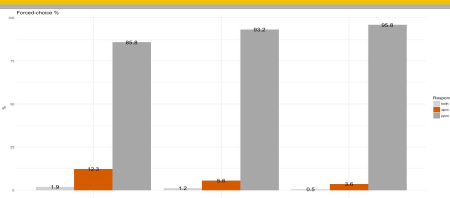

Nativeness judgement (%)

- Across all conditions, sentences with PPros more often rated as native than sentences with PPros.
- *Narr-judg-DPro* > *top-judg-DPro* > *neut-DPro*.
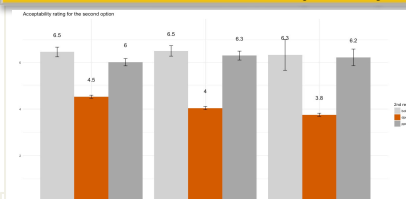
Experiment 2

- Same test items and fillers used, but experimental set-up different.
- Participants 46 native speakers from the University of Cologne.
- Task: In a questionnaire, they first had to choose either the PPro-or the DPro-version of the second sentence for the three conditions (*narr-judg*, *top-judg*, *neut*) as the more natural one.
- Secondly, they had to decide how natural the dispreferred variant sounded to them on a 1-7 scale.
- If they found both variants equally (un)natural, they only had to do the second task.

Results of Forced-Choice Task

Forced-choice %

- PPros chosen more often than DPros across all condition.
- Again, *Narr-judg-DPro* > *Top-judg-DPro (FID)* > *Neut-DPro*.

Results of Acceptability Rating Task

Acceptability rating for the second option

- PPros rated higher than DPros across all conditions.
- Again, *Narr-judg-DPro* > *Top-judg-DPro (FID)* > *Neut-DPro* .

Discussion

- Results compatible with hypothesis that DPros avoid the most prominent individual, which may either be the topical referent or the respective perspectival center.
- Unexpected, however, that *top-judg-DPro/FID-DPro* > *neut-DPro*: In *top-judg-DPro/FID-DPro* antecedent of DPro prominent both in terms of topicality and in terms of perspectival centerhood.
- In *neut-DPro*, in contrast, antecedent only prominent in terms of topicality.
- Consequently, if there is any difference between the two conditions at all, we would expect *neut-DPro* > *top-judg-DPro/FID-DPro.*
- Likewise unexpected *that narr-judg-DPro/FID-DPro* was judged so much worse than *narr-judg-PPro/FID-PPro.*
- Potential explanation for the latter that people are often told in school that DPros are generally to be avoided in written discourse.

References

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