

Week 4: Demonstrating “this”

Common nouns normally depend on the situation of evaluation. But under a demonstrative determiner like *this* or *that*, they turn dependent on the situation of utterance.

Demonstrative determiners differ from definite articles in another respect too: they presuppose that the speaker **directs attention** to something. Or – mostly they do ...

A simple definition of the definite article (singular case) in a two-dimensional semantics could (cf. Heim 2011) look like this:

- $\llbracket \text{the} \rrbracket^i(j) = \lambda P_{\langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle} : |P(j)| = 1$. the one and only element in $P(j)$

The material between the colon and the point is **presupposed**: the function is only defined if the set has one and only one member.

Thus if I say

(12) The sponge is dry.

the DP may well denote the one and only sponge in room G-B 212 at the time of $j = i$.

If there are zero or two or more sponges around, it could fail to denote anything.

Now since $P(j)$ is the set at stake, the semantic value can be shifted:

(13) Ten minutes ago the ice cube was still frozen.

So far the definite article (singular case). Now if I say

(14) This sponge is dry.

there can be two or more sponges around but the DP may still denote something.

On the other hand, it will only denote something if there is one and only one sponge directed attention to in i – and this dependence on the situation of utterance extends to the property of being a sponge.

How can we tell? Well, by considering cases like (15) or (16).

(15) ??Ten minutes ago this ice cube was still frozen.

(16) My fiancée thinks this moissanite ring is a diamond ring, and she secretly plans to

(16) replace **the** / ??**this** diamond with a moissanite stone and sell it.

Thus we are pushed towards a definition like the following:



Irene Heim (2011)

“Definiteness and indefiniteness”, in C. Maienborn, K. von Heusinger and P. Portner (eds.), *Semantics: an International handbook of Natural Language Meaning, Volume 2*, Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, 996–1025.

Courtesy: Ede Zimmermann (1991) “Kontexttheorie”, in A. von Stechow and D. Wunderlich (eds.), *Semantik: ein internationales Handbuch der zeitgenössischen Forschung*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 156–229

Google string

“ice cube was still frozen”!

- $[[\textit{this}]](j) = \lambda P_{\langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle} : | P(i) \text{ that the speaker of } i \text{ directs attention to in } i | = 1$.
the one and only $P(i)$ that the speaker of i directs attention to in i

But wait – some $P(i)$ do not need directing attention to: “this room”, “this week”...
So (an aspect of i is like $\textit{place}(i)$, $\textit{time}(i)$):

- $[[\textit{this}]](j) = \lambda P_{\langle s, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle} : \text{there is exactly one } P(i) \text{ that the speaker of } i \text{ directs attention to in } i \text{ or that some aspect of } i \text{ is in } . \text{ the one and only } P(i) \text{ that the speaker of } i \text{ directs attention to in } i \text{ or that some aspect of } i \text{ is in}$

Now this is still too simple, for it fails to differentiate *this* from *that*. Key terms:
proximal – distal.



idou ho anthropos (John 19:5)



Cf. Fillmore's Lecture 4, p. 260: “On the other hand, if you hear me use the phrase “this campus”, you do not need to look up”

How is this to be done?
How sharp is the divide?

Is distance the only factor –
[ThisStatue/ThatPillar](#) – ?

Read Levinson (2004) “Deixis and Pragmatics”, 21–40

There are other uses of “this”, as a discourse anaphoric pronoun (Fillmore 1971: 290) and a ‘referential indefinite’ determiner ([Lonin 2006](#))

Someone summarize [Deichsel 2011](#) for us: “The Discourse Effects of the Indefinite Demonstrative *dieser* in German”, Proceedings of the 23rd ESSLLI Student Session, Ljubljana, 70–77.