

# Language & Languages at the crossroads of Disciplines

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Workshop proposal:

## **The demonstrative in the evolutionary process** *Typological variation and change*

Keywords: demonstrative, variation, change, comparative linguistics, linguistic typology

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### **Workshop description**

Demonstratives tend to be regarded as a primitive category of human language since they are universal and non-derived from lexical items (ANDERSON & KEENAN 1985; DIESSEL 1999; DIXON 2003). Inscribed within what BUEHLER (2008 [1934]) calls “the deictic field” of language, they assume primordial functions in the realm of communication. Their central position in the grammar of languages and the particularities of their functioning have motivated a great number of works in various theoretical frameworks, proving that demonstratives constitute a fruitful field of interdisciplinary dialogue. Linguists are indeed preoccupied with a series of

particularly complex issues such as the indexical mode of reference inherent to the demonstrative (cf. FILLMORE 1982; KLEIBER 1983; HIMMELMANN 1996; DIESSEL 1999), its morphosyntactic status (cf. CORBLIN 1995; HIMMELMANN 1997; DIESSEL 1999; LEEMAN 2004; GARY-PRIEUR 2011; VESELOVSKÁ 2014), the relationship between demonstratives and definiteness (cf. HAWKINS 1978; LOEBNER 2011; LYONS 1999; CZARDYBON 2017), the semantic and pragmatic effects produced by demonstratives (cf. KLEIBER 1991; JONASSON 1998; ŠIMÍK 2015) and the typological variability of demonstratives (cf. ANDERSON & KEENAN 1985; DIXON 2003; JUNGBLUTH & DA MILANO 2015; LEVINSON 2018). Some authors also research prominent cognitive, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic aspects related to the interpretation of demonstrative expressions in a cross-linguistic perspective (cf. JOHNSEN 2019; DIESSEL 2019; DIESSEL & COVENTRY 2020; RUBIO-FERNANDEZ 2022; COVENTRY K. R. *et al.* 2023) as well as the key role that demonstratives play in information processing and language acquisition (cf. CLARK 1978; DIESSEL & MONAKHOV 2022; CHEN *et al.* 2023).

An important part of the works also studies demonstratives from the point of view of evolution and change (cf. GREENBERG 1978; HIMMELMANN 1997; MARCHELLO-NIZIA 2006a & 2006b; CARLIER & DE MULDER 2006 & 2010; CARLIER & GUILLOT-BARBANCE 2015 & 2018; CARLIER 2017; GUILLOT-BARBANCE 2017; DVORAK 2021; PLOCHARZ 2021). These works investigate possible transformations of the demonstrative system, the grammaticalization of the demonstrative into a definite or specific article and its acquisition of new semantic and/or pragmatic functions. The workshop proposes to address demonstratives precisely in the perspective of this evolutionary dynamics. Hence, all papers, regardless of their theoretical background, dealing with one or several demonstratives in relation to changes undergone in the fields of referential semantics, morphosyntax or pragmatics are welcome. We also wish to include typological and/or contrastive research capable of accounting for those system variations which are good candidates for change. The topics of the papers are limited neither by the period nor by the language(s)/varieties of language under investigation. Thus, we hope to discuss part of the research currently conducted into these phenomena in France and beyond.

Dialogue will be at the core of our workshop, in particular dialogue between senior and young researchers. This should allow for comparing and discussing views from as many branches of linguistics as possible (syntax, referential semantics, pragmatics, comparative linguistics, linguistic typology, psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, language acquisition). Corpus-based approaches are most welcome. Here are several questions around which the workshop could be structured (the list is not complete):

- Does the definiteness expressed by the demonstrative boil down to that expressed by definite descriptions in the languages which have them (in other terms: does the demonstrative bear the presupposition of uniqueness)?
- What stages does the demonstrative have to go through to become a definite/specific article? With regard to this transformation, is it possible to pinpoint regularities in different languages and, by doing so, update GREENBERG's 1978 diachronic model?

What criteria can be used to identify the boundaries between the successive stages of this process?

- During the process wherein the demonstrative grammaticalizes into a definite article, what changes does the inner syntax of the noun complex undergo? Does the model, structured around the notion of “phrase” and grounded in the description of strongly configurational languages (cf. CARLIER & COMBETTES 2015), fit the description of the noun complex in languages without a (full-fledged) definite article?
- Amid the typological diversity of languages, is it possible to regularly identify usages where the demonstrative is characterized by an inherent categorical opacity, challenging its linguistic categorization? These cases comprise the attribution of a grammatical category to a demonstrative occurrence as well as the interpretation of occurrences in terms of their type of indexical reference (situational deixis, anaphora, recognitional uses, etc.). What approaches and methodologies allow for surmounting these “categorical distortions”?
- Is the acquisition of pragmatic effects such as “rejecting the referent from the speaker’s personal sphere” (cf. MARCHELLO-NIZIA 2003) – effects based on the ability of some demonstratives to mark physical distance of the referent from the speaker or to associate the referent with the sphere of one of the actors of enunciation – a universal property of language variation? To what extent is the notion of conversational implicature (GRICE 1975) able to account for these effects in their typological diversity?
- What role does the demonstrative play in the cognitive structuring of space? Is this role substantially the same in all languages? Being a primitive language category, can the demonstrative teach as something about the functioning and the structure of human cognition? How to reconcile/articulate approaches based on space and those stressing the importance of more pragmatic factors?
- Some works call into question the view according to which demonstratives do not stem from lexical items (cf. FRAJZYNGIER 1996, HEINE *et al.* 2020). Are demonstratives derived from lexical words via grammaticalization different from other demonstratives? Can recent studies in linguistic typology provide examples of this grammaticalization process and a better insight into it?

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