The pragmatics of demonstratives in Germanic (for consideration as a talk)

This paper demonstrates, based on synchronic and diachronic data from English, German, and Icelandic, that demonstrative pronouns in Germanic are pragmatically contrastive. Using data on object topicalization, we show that in information structurally driven operations, demonstrative pronouns pattern more like contrastive elements than like non-contrastive ones.

In various Germanic languages, an operation traditionally termed *topicalization* has been observed, by which various XPs may move to the left edge of the clause. This may be observed both in V2 languages, where it triggers subject-verb inversion, and in non-V2 languages as well. While the topicalization of contrastive elements is allowed across various Germanic languages, topicalization of unstressed, non-contrastive elements is possible in German but disallowed in Dutch, Icelandic, and English (cf. Chocano 2012, for a detailed review of these claims). Frey (2006a,b) proposes that object topicalization in German is the result of two types of movement: Formal Movement (FM), which has no interpretive effect but targets only the highest XP below the C domain; and True A-Bar Movement (TAB), which results in a contrastive interpretation on the topicalized constituent. Since TAB targets only information structurally contrastive elements, non-contrastive topicalization of the sort allowed in German may occur only via FM.

Light (2012) expands this analysis to account for topicalization across Germanic. FM occurs solely to satisfy the V2 constraint; non-contrastive topicalization is entirely disallowed in non-V2 languages, like English. Furthermore, because FM is restricted to the highest available XP, possible candidates of FM are limited by the movement operations available in the Middlefield, such as scrambling. Dutch and Icelandic have more restricted types of scrambling than German, and cannot normally maneuver objects sufficiently high to be candidates of FM (cf. Holmberg 1986; Neeleman 1994). Consequently, these languages also lack non-contrastive object topicalization.

A fine-grained study of the pragmatics of object topicalization across Germanic languages further illuminates this issue. We use parallel parsed corpora of Bible translations in Early New High German (Light 2011), Early Modern English (Kroch et al. 2004) and historical Icelandic (Wallenberg et al. 2011). These include samples of Luther's first bible translation (1522), Tyndale's translation into Early Modern English (1534), and Góttskálksson's translation into Icelandic (1540). A sub-corpus of this sort allows us to look at information structural phenomena on a different level. By considering individual verses we may control for as many variables as possible, since the style and context of the utterance should be relatively fixed across the three translations. We can then examine when each language uses object topicalization, given roughly the same context.

We consider the behaviour of topicalized pronoun objects in this subcorpus. Pronouns are resistant to accent in the absence of a clear contrastive or focal interpretation, and thus ideal for distinguishing likely examples of topicalization via FM or TAB. We find that object topicalization via TAB is constant across all three texts. Consider the examples in (1): the object is unambiguously contrastive, and it is topicalized in all three texts. However, only the German translation contains topicalized personal pronouns without a plausible contrastive interpretation (2). This fits with the claim that only topicalization via TAB occurs in all three languages.

The surprising fact is that all three texts include topicalized demonstrative pronouns which seem to bear no plausible contrastive interpretation (3). This leads us to conclude that, in the case of object topicalization, demonstrative pronouns are behaving consistently like contrastively marked elements. We link this to an analysis suggested in (Schwarz forthcoming), which suggests (using situation semantics) that demonstrative pronouns in German may refer only to entities which do not occur in every alternative to the topic situation. On these grounds we argue that demonstrative pronouns are *sub-informative*, a label which Gast (2010) has also applied to contrastive elements, like contrastive topics.

  This conclusion leads us to a better understanding of the behaviour of demonstrative pronouns in discourse. Thus, a deeper look at an information structural phenomenon leads us a better understanding of other phenomena as well.

(1)   a. Die wellt kan euch   nicht hassen, **mich**   aber hasset sie
          the world can you.PL not   hate   me.ACC PRT hates it.NOM

      b. Heimur-inn fær yður   eigi hatað, en **mig**   hatar hann
          world-the   can you.PL not hate   but me.ACC hates it.NOM

      c. The worlde canot hate you. **Me** it hateth   (John 7:7)

(2)   **Myr**   ist geben aller   gewallt   ynn hymel   vnnd erden
      me.DAT is given all.NOM power.NOM in   heaven.DAT and   earth.DAT
      'To me is given all power in heaven and earth.'   (Matthew 28:18)

(3)   a. **Das**   saget er   aber, zu deutten, wilchs   todts er   sterben wurde
          that.ACC said he.NOM PRT to indicate which.GEN death he.NOM die   would

      b. En **þetta**   sagði hann   teiknandi með hverjum   dauða eð hann skyldi deyja.
          but this.ACC said   he.NOM illustrating with which.DAT death C he   should die

      c. **This** sayde Iesus signifyinge what deeth he shuld dye.   (John 12:33)

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