Emotional Deixis in Dalabon
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Recent studies have challenged traditional descriptions of the semantics of demonstratives and their uses in context, revealing them to be much more complex than previously assumed (e.g. Himmelmann 1996; Wilkins 1999; Özyürek 2001; Diessel 1999; Enfield 2003; Hanks 2005; Naruoka 2006; Dawuda 2009; Cutfield 2012). This work has shown that speakers’ choice of demonstrative is significantly influenced by interactional factors including the speaker’s here-space and engagement area, concurrent gesture, and discourse status of the referent as well as social factors such as ownership of the referent and speaker attitude to the referent. The use of demonstratives to index a speaker’s emotional stance with respect to the referent and/or their interlocutor was first observed by Lakoff (1974), but remains poorly described for most languages. Notable exceptions include Wolter (2006) for English and Naruoka (2006) for Japanese.

In this paper, I use interactional and narrative data from the Dalabon language (non-Pama-Nyungan, Northern Australia) to show that speakers use the demonstratives for three distinct emotive affects: (i) to index an interlocutor’s affinity (or lack thereof) to a referent; (ii) to index their negative assessment of a referent; and, (iii) to index solidarity with their interlocutor or the referent.

In the speech situation, the Dalabon demonstrative nunda is used to index a referent as being located in the speaker’s here-space. This form can also be used to index speaker affinity with a referent and/or addressee affinity with a referent. The demonstrative form nunh is glossed as ‘that, unfamiliar’, as this form is used to index a referent in the speech situation as being somehow difficult or problematic for the addressee to identify. Nunh can also be used to index lack of speaker affinity with a referent as well as the speaker’s negative assessment of a referent. The identifiable (recognitional) demonstrative kanh is used to index the speaker’s assumption that the addressee can identify the referent, either by means of its presence in the speech situation, prior mention in the discourse, shared knowledge, or a combination of these. This demonstrative can be used to index solidarity between the interlocutors or speaker solidarity with the referent. As distinct from English, where interlocutors can use demonstratives to index their solidarity predominantly by means of a shared assessment of a referent, using the Dalabon form kanh to mark a referent as identifiable to both interlocutors also serves as an expression of solidarity, on account of shared experience and knowledge, and shared capacity to deduce the referent.

This paper argues that emotional deixis offers an account of demonstrative use where other interactional or social factors such as location or ownership do not, and that emotional deixis takes into account speaker and addressee affiliation with a referent, negative speaker assessment of a referent and the speaker and the addressee’s shared knowledge. This paper also demonstrates that careful analysis of natural language
data can offer significant insights into the factors motivating speakers’ referring choices, even for severely endangered languages such as Dalabon.

References


