

Gender loss and demonstrative anaphors

Mi 18.00-18.30

It is well known that personal pronouns, the primary anaphoric elements in many languages, often originate as demonstratives (Givón 1984, Diessel 1999). A re-enacting of the historical move from demonstrative to personal pronoun can be witnessed in languages that show a mismatch between nominal and pronominal gender, as exemplified by Swedish and Dutch.

Both Swedish and Dutch have seen a period of deflection, whereby gender markers in the attributive domain were reduced and partially lost. Instead of the traditional Indo-European three genders, Dutch and Swedish now mark two genders within the NP and on other targets beyond. In both languages, however, the personal pronouns have kept the original three-way distinction, thus creating a mismatch between the gender values of the pronouns and the gender values elsewhere. This mismatch leads to new semantic associations for the pronominal genders (Audring 2006) and to uncertainty in pronoun usage.

The demonstratives play an interesting role in these developments. As adnominal elements, they participate in the deflection process (which generally starts in the attributive domain). Thus, both Dutch and Swedish possess a common gender demonstrative, an element collapsing the masculine and feminine gender distinction. As anaphoric elements, these common gender demonstratives are extremely convenient: they allow anaphoric reference without commitment to masculine or feminine gender. By using a common gender demonstrative instead of a masculine or feminine personal pronoun, uncertainties are masked and clashes are avoided.

Examples (1a) and (b) from Dutch illustrate the situation. (1a) represents a typical case of uncertainty about the appropriate pronoun for a (formerly feminine) noun. Version (1b), resorting to a demonstrative, is the preferred option.

- (1) a) **De tentoonstelling** was over voordat ik **?hem/?haar** kon bezoeken.
the[C] exhibition(C) was over before I it[M]/[F] could visit
- b) **De tentoonstelling** was over voordat ik **die** kon bezoeken.
the[C] exhibition(C) was over before I it[C] could visit
'The exhibition was over before I could visit it'

Under these circumstances, demonstrative pronouns can become the favoured anaphoric elements. However, this excessive use of demonstrative anaphors has consequences for their semantics and for the conditions on their distribution. In the course of their promotion to main anaphoric elements, they lose their specific demonstrative content and become progressively more like personal pronouns.

This paper discusses the developments sketched above and presents original data from modern spoken Dutch.

Audring, Jenny (2006). Pronominal Gender in Spoken Dutch. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 182, 85-116.

Diessel, Holger (1999). *Demonstratives. Form, Function and Grammaticalization*, Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Givón, Talmy (1984). *Syntax: A functional-typological introduction*. Vol.1, Amsterdam: Benjamins.