

Beyond cyclicity in understanding discourse-pragmatic change

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The overall goal of the network ‘The role of pragmatics in cyclic language change’ was to deeply consider putative cyclic change in numerous languages and constructions. We have probed this question by focusing on double demonstratives in English. Our explorations have demonstrated that consistent with current literature about other kinds of doubling (for example, Friedman & Joseph 2023: §6.1.2.3) doubling in demonstratives in English does not involve cyclic change.

Using large archives of spoken language data from the UK and Canada we first targeted the form demonstrative + *t/here* + NP (Ontario Dialect Project; Tagliamonte 2007-2010; Tagliamonte 2013). We expanded the analysis to conduct an accountable analysis of the demonstrative system. A unique feature of the English system is that the single demonstratives are robust, enabling us to study doubled demonstrative constructions in conjunction with their singular counterparts, as in (1-2):

- (1) Well *this here* man was chucking money through the window ... (NTT_012, age 78, born 1906)
- (2) I knew that she was going out with *this* other man (NTT_012, age 78, born 1906)

This comparative approach enabled us to identify the different functions of single and double demonstratives and the extent of overlap in their distributions. We were also able to scrutinize the perspective offered by UK versus Canada usage.

We discovered that double demonstratives are deployed in specific discourse-pragmatic contexts; in Canada for introducing discourse-new, hearer, new referents (3), and in the UK for retrieving topics in the discourse (4).

- (3) I was cooking a bunch up and all of a sudden *this here* fox was in the window. (wshiloh, 77, born 1939)
- (4) Well, I asked a **lady** to take us across ... and I says to ***this here* lady** ... So, she says ... Yes, come along. (NTT_012, age 78, born 1906)

We suggest that these two signalling functions are assigned to the adverb *here* due to its inherent salient function of pointing/highlighting referents in the surroundings or discourse. The single demonstrative endures for the usual demonstrative functions such as exophoric and anaphoric reference.

Double demonstratives have become moribund in contemporary English grammar. However, their function has been taken over by a new form, ‘indefinite *this*’ (Prince 1981; Rupp & Tagliamonte 2022), a trajectory that transforms a double demonstrative *this here* to a single demonstrative *this* while maintaining the double demonstrative function.

In summary, despite expectation, the English demonstrative system does not constitute an example of cyclic change. The assumption of a cycle requires replacement of a single form by a double form; however, in English the single form is not replaced. Rather, the single form continues and while the double dies, a new form emerges with the same function. A possible explanation for the demise of the double is that its social currency was devalued by its rustic and less-educated connotation; however, its function was still useful and continues to be used to the present day. Taken together, our findings show that theories of

language change must not only consider discourse-pragmatic functions but also how each function and each form develop within the linguistic system– both double and single.

References

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