

Eliciting Demonstratives in Context: A Real-World Task for Labrador Inuttitut

Demonstrative pronouns encode minimal linguistic meaning, primarily indicating spatial (and other) relationships in context. Demonstrative pronouns are usually sensitive to the distance of the referent from the speaker, as in English *this* (proximal) vs. *that* (distal: [1]). Some languages also show sensitivity to the location of the addressee, as in Japanese *kore* (near the speaker), *sore* (near addressee), and *are* (distant from both). Here we consider Labrador Inuttitut, an Inuit language spoken in Eastern Canada, specifically, Nunatsiavut, with under 400 speakers. Inuit demonstrative systems are known for their size and sensitivity to many factors impacting the relationship between the referent and the speaker: distance, direction, cardinality, elevation [2-4], visibility [4,7,8], shape [3], exteriority vs. interiority [2,3,6], and part/wholeness [5] – but also distance from addressee [2,6]. The current study is part of a larger effort to document Inuttitut language use in context. Here, we focus on demonstrative pronouns.

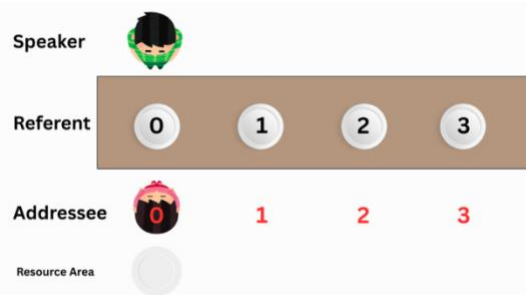
For visible referents, the most recent in-depth description of Inuttitut (Clase 1974) [7] reports sensitivity to speaker distance (proximal vs. distal) and the nature of the referent (restricted vs. extended). Here we focus on restricted referents, or objects with clear boundaries, like a bowl, which can be referred to with *una* (proximal) or *ikinna* (distal). Additional forms can be introduced by the prefix *ta-*, which has been described as a “reference shifter” with a “distancing effect”. Its use has been linked to the referent being anchored to something or someone other than the speaker [2,4,8], to referents that are hard to perceive [9,10], or to anaphoric use [4,6]. Clase (1974) describes *ta-* for Inuttitut as presupposing that the addressee has prior knowledge of the referent, due to prior reference or proximity.

| | pronoun (restricted referent) | pronoun with <i>ta-</i> |
|---------------------|--|----------------------------|
| speaker proximal | <i>una</i> 'this one here' | <i>tanna</i> |
| speaker distal | <i>ikinna</i> 'that one over there' | <i>taikinna</i> |

Our aim was to elicit demonstrative pronouns for visible restricted referents, in a rich context, where the spatial positions of the speaker and addressee are systematically manipulated. We adapted the task from [11], where participants view a web-based scene displaying an aerial view of two interlocutors and 4 referents, and were asked to choose a demonstrative pronoun from a list. Our experimental task preserved the spatial configurations of speaker – addressee – referent. However, we moved the task into a real-world setting, with two naïve participants playing the roles of Director and Matcher and communicating freely during a game that required the Director to instruct the Matcher on which referents to manipulate.

Participants. We developed the task on site, in Nain, Nunatsiavut. Here we present a qualitative analysis of the pattern, based on data from one pair of speakers aged over 70. Data collection is ongoing. **Materials.** To discourage lexical naming, four identical referents were used (ice-buckets), each holding either a prize (e.g., candy), or a penalty (e.g., garbage). The location of the speaker remained unchanged throughout (green). The position of the referent had four options, which influenced its distance from the speaker (black: 0-3). The position of the addressee (red) also had four options (red: 0-3); their position was determined by asking them to stand in front of the resource area (a plate). Crossing the two variables, there were 16 spatial configurations (cf. [11]).

Procedure. We introduced the task as a gameshow, where participants open containers to retrieve a prize or a penalty. The addressee’s starting position changed for each round (0, 1, 2 or 3). At the start of each round, the speaker received a randomized order, and instructed the addressee to open the containers in that order. We gave participants an example of the type of instruction to use (“*Una amalauguk*” Open this one), but they were free to converse. Upon each instruction, the addressee moved the contents from the container to the resource area, thereby resetting the addressee’s location.



Results. Five forms were produced: (i) **una** (Clase’s proximal-restricted); (ii) **unalittauk**, which includes an additional morpheme “how about”, (iii) **tanna** (ta+una), (iv) **ikinna** (Clase’s distal), and (v) **taikinna** (ta+ikinna). We first organize the data in a table, such that each cell contains the pronoun produced, a diagram of the configuration, and the distance from the speaker and addressee.

Distance from speaker (horizontal) was straightforward: we observe that closer referents (roughly 0-1) elicit *una* (and *ta-una* = *tanna*) and further referents (roughly 2-3) elicit *ikinna* (and *ta-ikinna*), as expected from prior research. The second dimension we considered was the distance of the referent from the addressee: here we observe that the absolute distance does not predict *ta*-presence (consider distance 1: *e* vs. *k*, distance 2: *c* vs. *o*). Instead, we relativize addressee distance to the speaker (i.e., negative if they were on different sides of the referent). The diagonals reveal our novel generalization: *ta*-depends on the distance between the partners. When the distance is zero (g,k,n,p), *ta*- is not appropriate. When the distance is 1 (d,h,l,o), *ta*- is added when the referent is furthest from the speaker, but when the distance is larger, the referent needs to be less further from the speaker for *ta*- to be added. In other words, as the distance between partners gets larger (higher diagonal in the table), meaning that the addressee’s perspective is less aligned with the speaker’s, *ta*- is more likely to be used when the referent is closer to the speaker.

| | | Distance from speaker | | | |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Distance from addressee | -3 | (a) 0,-3: Una | | | |
| | -2 | (b) 0,-2: Unalittauk | (c) 1,-2: Tanna | | |
| | -1 | (d) 0,-1: Una | (e) 1,-1: Tanna | (f) 2,-1: Tanna | |
| | 0 | (g) 0,0: Una | (h) 1,0: Unalittauk | (i) 2,0: Tanna | (j) 3,0: Taikinna |
| | 1 | | (k) 1,1: Unalittauk | (l) 2,1: Ikinna | (m) 3,1: Taikinna |
| | 2 | | | (n) 2,2: Ikinna | (o) 3,2: Taikinna |
| | 3 | | | | (p) 3,3: Ikinna |

These two hypotheses were confirmed by logistic regression models. The first model revealed that *una* (vs. *ikinna*) is significantly predicted by speaker distance ($\beta = -2.47, p = .007$). The second model revealed that *ta*- is significantly predicted by both speaker distance ($\beta = 2.03, p = .01$) and the distance between partners ($\beta = 2.29, p = .004$). This supports descriptions that link *ta*- to the addressee, but it reveals that this effect is in fact tied to the distance between partners.

Conclusion. This is the first study to elicit Inuttitut demonstratives in a rich, real-world context. By manipulating the position of the referent and the addressee relative to the speaker, our task reveals that the base pronoun (*una* vs. *ikinna*) depends on distance from the speaker, but *ta*-forms are instead sensitive to positions of both partners with respect to each other and the referent. Our findings support recent calls to shift away from a solely speaker-oriented account of demonstratives [12,13,14]. Future studies should investigate how such distance contrasts from table-top tasks can be scaled up in more naturalistic contexts.

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