

DISCOURSE DISTANCES AND  
THE SWAHILI DEMONSTRATIVES\*

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Proximity is the key concept for understanding a speaker's choice of Swahili demonstrative forms. The alternative approach in Leonard [1985] that proposes a speaker's concentration of attention as the key concept overlooks significant aspects of text structure. Proximity must not be conceived of, as does Leonard, only in terms of spatial distance between the speaker and a referent. Temporal, narrative, and anaphoric distance must also be considered.

Leonard [1982, 1985] is the first in-depth study of the Swahili deictic system and one of the few studies of Swahili grammar to be done from a discourse perspective. He argues that the choice between H, e.g. *hii* 'this', H-o, e.g. *hiyo* 'this/that', and LE, e.g. *ile* 'that', demonstratives in Swahili basically depends on the "noteworthiness of" or the "relative concentration of attention on" a referent rather than, as in traditional analyses, on the (non-)proximity of the referent to the speaker. The most noteworthy referents, he claims, will tend to be referred to with H forms, less noteworthy referents with H-o forms, and the least noteworthy with LE forms. Since new items catch one's attention more than old, he then argues, one would expect that new items will tend to be marked by H while old items will tend to be marked by LE. He claims that a statistical analysis of four chapters randomly selected from five novels indicates this H-for-new and LE-for-old tendency.

In this paper, I will reexamine three chapters (two different authors)

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that Leonard [1985], hereafter referred to as L, used for his statistical analysis and argue that proximity is indeed the key criterion for determining which demonstrative form will be used. Like L, I will limit my analysis to that of the H and LE forms.

### 1. Varying Discourse Distances

The seventh chapter of Abdulla's [1960] *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* (MZ) is entitled "Mfuko Mweusi" ("A Black Purse"). Thus, it is immediately evident what one of the key props in the chapter will be. L's "Concentration of Attention" (COA) hypothesis would predict that mfuko 'purse' will be most frequently referred to by the H demonstrative huu since there will be high COA on the referent. However, his "New v. Old Information" (N/O) hypothesis makes the opposite prediction that mfuko will be most frequently referred to by LE since, after the first reference, it will be "old" information. L pays little attention to the conflicting predictions of these hypotheses.

A purely quantitative analysis of the demonstratives used with mfuko and the chapter's other key prop karatasi 'piece of paper [found in the purse]' reveals no significant difference in the use of the demonstratives:

	H	LE
mfuko	3	4
karatasi	3	4

Table 1: Demonstratives with key props (MZ, ch.7)

However, closer attention to the organization of the text reveals a categorical difference between the narrator's use of H and LE that is predicted by neither COA nor N/O. The rule is simply this: whenever mfuko or karatasi is referred to by the narrator, he uses the LE form; whenever either of the two is referred to by a character, the character uses the H form:

	H		LE	
	mfuko	karatasi	mfuko	karatasi
Narrator	0	0	4	4
Character speaking	3	3	0	0

Table 2: Narrator v. characters' use of demonstratives (MZ, ch.7)

Explaining this difference in terms of COA, one would have to argue that the narrator has "low concentration" on the props whereas the characters have "high concentration". This is unsatisfactory, especially in light of the title assigned by the narrator to the chapter. N/O is also unsupported since the use of the demonstrative here has nothing to do with whether or not the associated referent is mentioned for the first time.

A better explanation is that the narrator's use of LE corresponds with his lack of participation in the scene and, thus, his referring to the objects from a narrative distance (third person voice rather than first person in which this distance would not be as consistently kept). In contrast, the characters use H to refer to objects in their immediate presence.

This distinction between the narrator's and the characters' use of demonstratives is maintained throughout the chapter. In reference to items other than the purse and the paper, characters use LE only when referring to an event or object of a past speech situation that the narrator separates from the present situation by means of a chapter division. Conversely, the narrator uses H only in (1) and in a structure which signals the immediate temporal proximity of two events (2).

(1) upande huu na huu  
side this and this

(2) CLAUSE + na + huku + CLAUSE<sup>1</sup>  
and here

In (1), the coupling of demonstratives conveys the same idea as the English "this (side) and that". In (2), a construction frequently used by Abdullah, huku is used to signal that the event referred to in the second clause overlaps with, or immediately follows, the event mentioned in the first clause of the sentence.

The above analysis supports the traditional one which distinguishes between

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<sup>1</sup>For example, ...alisema hivyo na huku anawasha toza yake... (MZ,26) '...he said this while lighting his pipe...'

H and LE forms in terms of proximity/non-proximity (P/NP). However, it also shows that P/NP must not, in contrast to L's presentation, be considered only in relation to spatial distances but also in relation to temporal and discourse distances.

With this expanded concept of P/NP, all uses of H and LE in MZ's ninth chapter can also be accounted for. The initial distinction between the demonstratives can be made as in Table 3:

	Narrator's uses	Characters' uses
H	6	10
LE	36	9

Table 3: Apportionment of demonstratives in MZ, ch. 9

To be explained are the narrator's six uses of H and the characters' nine uses of LE.

The characters' uses of LE are readily accounted for in terms of spatial and temporal non-proximity. Eight of the nine LE forms are used to refer to a person with whom the two main characters were speaking earlier but from whom they are now separated as they talk about him. The other LE is used to refer to an action of that person (observed by the characters while with him but talked about now that they are separated from him).

Two of the narrator's six H forms occur in the *na huku* structure mentioned above. Two others occur in the adverbial phrase *hivi sasa* 'right now; immediately'; like *na huku*, this phrase signals close temporal proximity of two events. This leaves only the following two occurrences of H to be explained:

- (3) Bali safari hii... (MZ,42)

'But, *this time* (lit., this trip)...

- (4) Mlango wa kutokea haukuwa mdogo kama wa kwanza walioingilia. Upande huu ulikuwa mkubwa... (MZ,39)

'The door for going out was not small like the first one through which they entered. *This side* was large.'

In both (3) and (4), the H is used to contrast one referent with another that is spatially and/or temporally removed from the present narrative situation.

Table 3 can now be revised as Table 4 to make the distinction between H and LE, as used by Abdullah, even clearer:

Non-Proximity		Proximity	
Narrator	Characters	Narrator	Characters
Distanced from characters (3rd pers.)	Refer to items outside present speech situation	Indicates spatial/temporal prox. of one referent cf. to another	Refer to items in immediate speech situation
H	0	6	10
LE	36	0	0

Table 4: Demonstrative allocation with respect to P/NP (MZ, ch. 9)

In sum, all but one<sup>2</sup> of the ninety-four occurrences of H and LE in MZ's chapters 7 and 9 have been accounted for in terms of spatial, temporal, and narrator vs. character P/NP. We shall now consider a different writer's use of demonstratives and see that yet another type of discourse distance may be involved in determining the choice of demonstrative forms.

## 2. Anaphoric Distance

L (p. 283) points out that "the supposed 'proximate' is used to refer to a location that is quite distant from the speaker" in (5), a passage from Kezilahabi's *Kichwa Maji* (KM).

(5) Upande mashariki niliweza kuona nyumba ya Baba ikitokeza juu ya miti. Nilikumbuka kwamba hapa<sup>3</sup> mtoto alikuwa akizaliwa. (KM,88)

'In the East I could see father's house sticking out above the trees. I remembered that *there* a child was being born.' (L's translation)

L argues that H is used to refer to the location where "the pivotal incident

<sup>2</sup> huku na huku, mentioned above.

<sup>3</sup> Hapa is usually translated 'here' but L translates it 'there' in this instance to reinforce his point about the spatial distance between the speaker's location and the house.

of the whole novel" is occurring and thus the speaker is giving it a high degree of attention (p. 284). Similarly, he quotes a paragraph in which the first reference to a group of cows is with LE but the subsequent two references are with H. He concludes: "... at first the narrator views the cows with no special interest and refers to them with LE... But when he sees them as being directly related to a central concern, he refers to them with H" (p. 285).

However, on the page in KM following the scene concerned with the group of cows, there is a parallel passage where the use of the demonstratives is not consistent with the COA prediction:

- (6) Juu ya jiwe niliona kibwawa kidogo cha maji. Ndani ya maji haya<sup>4</sup> niliona nyuki ameanguka aklogelea.... Mwanzoni nilifurahi kumwona huyu mdudu akipigania maisha.... Nilijiona mungu mdogo. Nilitazama tena pande zote, watoto, nyumba na miti, vyote vilikuwa chini yangu.

Nilichukua kijiti kidogo sana ambacho kwacho nilimtoa yule nyuki majini.... Kwa huyu mdudu nilikuwa na nguvu ambazo hazilwezi kufahamika. (KM,88)

'On the rock I saw a puddle of water. In this water I saw a bee, which had fallen in, swimming.... At first I was happy to see *this insect* struggling for life.... I saw myself as a little god. I again looked around; children, houses and trees, all were beneath me.

I took a twig which I used to take *that/the* bee from the water.... For *this insect*, I had incomprehensible powers.'

The bee, like the group of cows, is focused on by the narrator as he develops his philosophical musings. But, the demonstrative form changes from H to LE to H while the concentration of attention remains constant.<sup>5</sup>

In all of the above-mentioned passages, however, H is used when the referent of the NP it modifies has been referred to in the preceding sentences of

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<sup>4</sup>H is used with maji 'water' even though the concentration of attention seems to be on the bee rather than the water. It might be argued that COA is high for both. But such argumentation points to another major weakness of the COA hypothesis: no objective criteria are given for determining the degree of COA on a referent.

<sup>5</sup>N/O cannot explain the choice of demonstratives since "bee" is already old information when H is used for the first time and H is used again after the switch to LE.

the same paragraph. In (6) and in the passage concerning the cows, LE is used when the referent of the NP has been referred to most recently in a previous paragraph. Throughout the chapter, the demonstratives tend to be distributed in this way, as Table 5 shows.

	Anaphoric tie within paragraph	Anaphoric tie across paragraph boundaries
H	35	2
LE	2	9

Table 5: Demonstrative forms related to anaphoric distance (KM, ch. 6)<sup>6</sup>

The notion of proximity/distance is again central to understanding the use of the demonstratives here, but rather than temporal, spatial, or narrator-character distance, the relevant factor here is textual distance, the distance between an anaphor and the item to which it points.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Demonstratives and Discourse Style

As well as indicating the relevance of textual proximity to demonstrative form, Table 5 shows that the large majority of anaphoric references in KM's chapter 6 are H. This is contrary to the prediction of N/O that LE will tend to be used if the referent has been previously mentioned. It also indicates that the use of demonstratives in KM is different from their use in the other novels analyzed by L for his statistical correlation between the choice of demonstrative form and whether or not the associated referent was mentioned for the first time (p. 288). In KM's chapter 6, 80% of the anaphoric references are made by H (in KM's first two chapters, the percentage is about the same); but, according to L (p. 288), in four chapters (including KM's ch. 6) from three different novels, only 38% of anaphoric references are H. Subtracting the KM entry from this total, the figure will be 11%. L did not consider the possibility of stylistic differences in the use of demonstratives, which this

<sup>6</sup>See Appendix A for a discussion of the exceptions.

<sup>7</sup>The concepts of textual distance and anaphoric ties are discussed in detail in Halliday and Hasan [1976].

statistical disparity indicates.

In MZ, as we have seen, the narrator's distance from the characters is more determinant of demonstrative form than anaphoric distance; in reference to the key props of MZ's chapter 7, the narrator always uses LE even though the same prop has been mentioned earlier in the paragraph, e.g. MZ, p. 25. This difference between the MZ and KM uses of the demonstratives may be due to the difference between third person (MZ) and first person (KM) narrative style; a general difference in discourse style of the two different authors; and/or the differing strength of various rules in determining which type of discourse distance (temporal, spatial, narrator vs. character, or anaphoric) is most salient.

#### 4. Physical Distance and Demonstrative Form

L claimed that "throughout modern Swahili novels and plays we regularly encounter referents of H and LE in locations opposite to those indicated by the traditional hypothesis" (p. 283). Although this was a key argument for proposing an alternative hypothesis to account for the Swahili demonstratives, L only supported it anecdotally with two examples (both referred to in Section 2, first paragraph, above) in which factors of textual distance, though relevant, were not considered. L's quantitative statement, however, can be quantitatively tested. To do so, it is best to focus on the exophoric references of quoted speech, in which temporal and spatial factors of the speech situation are most salient, in order to avoid complicating factors such as narrative voice and anaphoric distance that affect the form of endophoric references.

We have already observed that the MZ characters used H only for referents in their immediate speech situation and LE only for those removed from their immediate speech situation (23 H, 13 LE occurrences in chs. 7 and 9). A listing of the thirty-five H/LE demonstratives used in the quoted speech of characters in KM, throughout three chapters, indicates that here, too, there is a 100% correlation between H and spatial/temporal proximity of the referent and between LE and non-proximity (see Appendix B).

#### 5. Conclusion

The above analysis opposes L's claim that P/NP "can only account for a small part of the distribution of [Swahili demonstrative forms] in actual

texts" (p. 281). It also shows that various discourse, as well as spatial and temporal, distances play an important role in the choice of the demonstrative form. Statistical counts based on P/NP account for a much greater amount of material than L's tally based on O/N (p. 288).<sup>8</sup>

Some issues for further research are discourse restraints on the positioning of the demonstratives (they may occur either before or after the head noun); the discourse function of H-O ; whether or not one type of discourse distance is consistently more determinate of the demonstrative form than others; and stylistic differences between authors in their use of the demonstratives.

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<sup>8</sup>This O/N tally is of questionable value anyway since it does not distinguish between endophoric and exophoric references.

## APPENDIX A

Table 5 (Section 2) shows that, in KM's chapter 6, there are two exceptions each to the rule that within-paragraph anaphoric ties are made with H while cross-paragraph ties are made by LE. These exceptions are listed and briefly discussed below.

Cross-Paragraph tie but H form

(a) ....Jina "Furaha" ambalo ni neno jingine la adhabu.

Hii ni adhabu ambayo.... (p. 94)

'....The name "Happy one" which is another name of punishment.

*This is a punishment which....'*

(b) Baada ya siku hizi tatu.... (p. 97)

'After *these three days*....'

In (a), the cross-paragraph tie is between the last word of the preceding paragraph and the first one of the new paragraph. There are no LE cross-paragraph references in which the tie is as close as this (in chs. 1 and 2, as well as 6).

In (b), the H appears in the first NP of the paragraph whose aperture parallels those of the preceding two paragraphs:

¶Kwa muda wa siku tatu.... 'For a period of three days....'

¶Baada ya siku tatu.... 'After three days....'

¶Baada ya siku hizi tatu.... 'After these three days....'

Here, the H seems to be used to signal temporal proximity as well as anaphoric relationship. The events to be reported in the third paragraph immediately follow after the three days mentioned in the first paragraph and overlap with the events mentioned in the second paragraph. There are no days intervening between the first period (of mourning) and the second (when villagers offer beer to the family of the deceased).

Within-paragraph tie but LE form

- (c) Labda mwanadamu anaweza kusema kwamba kuna mwenye uwezo zaidi kuliko yule tunayemfikiria kuwa Mungu. Lakini kama ni vile tutakwenda nyuma mpaka wapi? (p. 89)

'Maybe even a human can say that there is one having more power than the one whom we consider to be God. But if it is *that*, how far back will we go?' (the conditional clause could be less literally translated: "But if such is the case" or "But if it is so".)

- (d) ...nilitazama nyuma. Niliona /a girl in trouble/... Nilikimbia mara moja kwenda kumwokoza huyu msichana... Nilipofika pale mahali sikujua la kufanya. (p. 90)

'...I looked back. I saw /a girl in trouble/... I ran right away to go and save this girl... When I arrived at *that place*, I did not know what to do.'

In KM's ch. 6 (also, chs. 1,2), *vile* 'like that, so, thus' is used in reference to abstract ideas or generalizations while the H form *hivi* is used in reference either to a specific event/item or to an approximate measure of space or time. For example:

Kalia, why have you done this/ *hivi* ? (p. 90)

Referent: attempted rape of a girl

When he finished saying this/ *hivi* ... (p. 90)

Referent: speech reported by direct quote

...about/ *hivi* fifty paces... (p. 98)

...matters concerning girls have gotten into you such/ *vile* that you have forgotten the people of your house. (43)

We humans are created so/ *vile* that we trust in things of the future more than those of the past. (p. 93)

It may be that this semantic distinction between *vile* and *hivi* is more determinate of the form than anaphoric distance; thus, *vile* is used in (c).

In (d), the use of the LE form provides a from-behind perspective of the narrator's movement from one place to another. He has the reader watch him as he runs from the rock to go to the new scene of action rather than see him from in front as he comes to the action. Thus, it seems, here, that the deci-

sion to signal the physical spatial relationship of one referent to another takes precedent over the choice to signal anaphoric proximity.

Note the difficulty of analyzing (c) and (d) in terms of COA. In (c), the referent of *vile* is the startling implication of a parable from nature (see (6)) which, when thought about, caused the narrator's head to hurt. In the paragraph containing (d), the narrator's concentration of attention on *pale mahali* 'that place' continually increases up to his arrival there.

I heard someone crying out... I immediately stood up so that I could hear better where the voice came from. When I heard the voice a second time I looked back. I saw the girl.... I saw only the grass being moved.... I ran...to go and save her... When I arrived at *that place*... (p. 90)

## APPENDIX B

The following lists the occurrences in KM's chapters 1, 2, and 6 of the H and LE demonstratives (with their corresponding head nouns, if explicit) which are used in quoted speech to refer to a physical location or time period. In the right hand column is the English translation of the context in which the demonstrative appears (the translation of the demonstrative is in italics). The "Proximate/Non-proximate" columns (P, N-P) indicate the correlation between demonstrative form and (non-)proximity.

Page	Demonstrative	P	NP	Context
7	humu humu	H H		He comes in <i>here</i> /where the speaker is located/ with a stick! He thinks there's a war in <i>here</i> !
9a	hapa	H		These things did not bring me <i>here</i> /to the office in which we are speaking/ .
b	humu	H		You will be the last one to come in <i>here</i> /where we are speaking/ .
c	siku hizi	H		Where are you <i>these days</i> ?
10	muda wote huu	H		For <i>all this time</i> /that we have been together in this room/ you hadn't recognized me /until I came up to introduce myself/ .
	siku hizi	H		Where are you <i>these days</i> ?
	siku hizi	H		<i>These days</i> I'm working.
12	shimo hili	H		When they came up to me, I said " <i>This hole</i> /that you see <i>here</i> / is so deep..."
15	siku hizi	H		You don't see people <i>these days</i> ?
25	siku hizi	H		My heart is not happy <i>these days</i> .
	hapa	H		When you brought me <i>here</i> /where I am writing this letter/ ...
27	Huku	H		You would have been better off staying there. <i>Here</i> , you have brought yourself into danger.
30	mwaka huu	H		The oranges have ripened; <i>this year</i> /in which we are/ , very many!
32	Hii hapa	H H		<i>This</i> /letter I have with me/ <i>here</i> , you can read

Page	Demonstrative	P	NP	Context
33	siku hizi	H		The young people of <i>these days!</i>
	huku	H		When you were travelling to come <i>here</i> /the area in which we are speaking/ , you did not get to see her?
38	pale	LE		She is <i>there</i> /place away from, not visible to, speakers/ (X2)
	pale mahali	LE		A: She said /she would be at/ <i>that place</i> of yours.... She said don't take long. B: Thank you... I'll go right now.
41	siku hizi	H		...because Mama is keeping a close eye on me <i>these days</i> .
	Huku	H		A: You're going which way?
	huku	H		B: By <i>here</i> . A: I'm going <i>this way/here</i> .
42	hii barua	H		He picked up one of my books from off the table and took out a letter. " <i>This is your letter</i> " /he said/.
43	hapa nyumbani	H		Since you don't know the news of the <i>house here</i> /in which we are speaking/ , I'll tell you.
	hapa	H		Kazimoto, since you have arrived <i>here</i> , your relative has refused to eat.
45	hapa	H		You know that we were brought <i>here</i> /where we now live and are speaking/ by the government.
	hapa	H		It's possible that even now they are <i>here</i> listening to us.
85	siku hizi	H		<i>These days</i> they have ceased...
86	Wale!	LE		A: " <i>There!</i> " He showed us three cows. B: "Let's go /to where they are/ ; we'll help you.
87	upande huu	H		Stand in <i>this area</i> so that they /the cows/ won't go back there /from where we just brought them/ .
98	hapa muji ule	H LE		A homestead was visible ahead of us. "If I kill him <i>here</i> /where we are now/ , <i>that homestead</i> /the people of it/ will hear," I said to myself.

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