

Discourse Functions of Demonstrative Deixis in Tamil

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1. Introduction

In a bibliographical note to the published version of his 1971 Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis, Charles Fillmore begins by stating: "There isn't a great deal to read on the subject of deixis." Twenty-three years later, his statement is still true as regards the study of discourse deixis. While other scholars have evoked the term, little has been written that goes beyond Fillmore's original insight that deictic expressions can refer forwards or backwards in textual space, as in 'This is my explanation (i.e. what I'm about to say next)' and 'That (i.e. what I just said) was my explanation' (Fillmore 1975; cf. also Lyons 1975; Levinson 1983).¹

There are good reasons however for investigating further the role played by deixis in connected discourse. First, deictics are high frequency items: personal pronouns, demonstratives, and time and place adverbs are encountered in virtually every text. Second, deictic expressions in discourse can often only be interpreted by appealing to systematic properties of textual and/or social organization. Finally, deictics grammaticalize over time as different kinds of grammatical operators — demonstratives, for example, become definite markers in many languages — and the evidence that such a process has begun is often apparent only from their behavior in text. A consequence of these facts is that anyone interested in text analysis, grammatical description, or grammatical change might well find a knowledge of discourse deixis useful.

In this paper, I analyze the use of demonstrative deixis in South Indian Tamil, a language which obligatorily encodes two degrees of proximity/distance in determiners and 3rd person pronouns.² The basic questions addressed are the following: In ordinary discourse, what leads Tamil speakers to choose a proximal demonstrative 'this' as opposed to a non-proximal demonstrative 'that'? Do the forms fulfill systematic textual functions, or is their distribution semantically conditioned? The findings reveal a variety of functions fulfilled by 'proximal' demonstratives in Tamil discourse, over and above their literal meaning of physical proximity in relation to a speaking ego. I characterize and illustrate each functional type, arguing that both the semantics of proximity and discourse reference are crucially involved in determining their use. In addition, the investigation makes clear that there are other types of discourse deixis in addition to that identified by Fillmore, thus indicating a potentially fertile ground for discourse-based studies of deixis in other languages.

2. Demonstrative deixis in Tamil

Demonstrative deixis in Tamil contrasts two degrees of distance in space and time: proximal *i-*, said to be reserved for referents close to the speaker, and non-proximal *a-*, which can be used to refer either to remote referents or to referents whose distance from the speaker is unspecified or irrelevant (Lehmann 1989: 94). Together with the interrogative prefix *e-*, they form a three-way morphological paradigm as shown in table 1.

Demonstrative deixis is obligatorily encoded on third person personal pronouns; no deictically neutral forms for 'he', 'she', 'it', or 'they' exist in Tamil, and thus every 3rd person pronominal reference forces a choice between *i-* and *a-*. Similarly, Tamil lacks deictically neutral definite articles but uses demonstrative

determiners *inta* 'this' and *anta* 'that' to signal identifiable referents; these forms also occur with high frequency in discourse.

	Determiners		Pronouns		Adverbs	
proximal	inta N	'this N'	itu	'this-it'	inkē	'here'
<i>i-</i>			ivan	'this-he'	ippō	'now'
			ival	'this-she'	ippati	'like this'
			ivar	'this-he (HON)'	ivvaḷavu	'this much'
			ivarkal	'this-they'	etc.	
				'this-she (HON)'		
non-proximal	anta N	'that N'	atu	'that-it'	ankē	'there'
<i>a-</i>			avan	'that-he'	appō	'then'
			aval	'that-she'	appati	'like that'
			avar	'that-he (HON)'	avvaḷavu	'that much'
			avarkal	'that-they'	etc.	
				'that-she (HON)'		
interrogative	enta N	'which N'	etu	'which-it'	enkē	'where'
<i>e-</i>			evan	'which-he'	eppō	'when'
			eval	'which-she'	eppati	'how'
			evar	'which-he (HON)'	evvaḷavu	'how much'
			etc.		etc.	

Table 1: The deictic-interrogative paradigm in Tamil

The focus of the present study is the use of demonstrative determiners and pronouns in narrative discourse. The narrative prototype of 3rd person past tense involves participants and events which are logically remote from the narrator in time and space. Given the definition of proximal deixis found in Tamil grammars, one might expect that non-proximal *a-* forms would be overwhelmingly preferred in narrative texts. In actuality, the situation is very different.

3. The data

For this study, I analyzed nominal reference as expressed by demonstrative 3rd person pronouns and determiner + N phrases in a corpus of 12 oral Tamil narratives (1491 finite clauses) representing two genres. Five folk tales were examined, along with seven real-life accounts, including both 1st person (N=2) and 3rd person accounts (N=5). The narratives were related in informal circumstances by native Tamil speakers (M=7, F=5) in Madurai, South India. All report past-time events or mythic events represented as if they had taken place in the distant past.

The texts in the corpus were found to contain 953 tokens of nominal reference involving *a-* or *i-*. Not surprisingly, these references are divided equally between demonstrative determiners (50%) and demonstrative pronouns (50%). What is surprising however is the relative frequency of *a-* as opposed to *i-* forms. Despite the prediction that non-proximal *a-* forms would predominate in past time narration, fully 43% — nearly half — of deictic references in the corpus make use of the proximal *i-* form. This distribution is summarized in table 2.

In addition, even though the real-life accounts include two narratives in which the narrator was a protagonist and two others in which the narrator participated peripherally in the narrated events, real-life accounts contain a lower percentage of *i-* forms (38%) than do the folk tales (46%). This further contradicts the expected distribution, since folk tales are less personal and thus ostensibly more

remote than 1st person accounts. In what follows, I take the use of proximal *i*-forms to be the marked case, and focus primarily on the question of why Tamil narrators index referents by means of *i*-.³

	Determiner		Pronoun		Det and Pron combined	
	<i>a</i> -	<i>i</i> -	<i>a</i> -	<i>i</i> -	<i>a</i> -	<i>i</i> -
Real-life accounts N=7, cl.=549	121	50	132	105	253	155
	71%	29%	56%	44%	62%	38%
Folk tales N=5, cl.=942	157	151	135	102	292	253
	51%	49%	57%	43%	54%	46%
Total narratives N=12, cl.=1491	278	201	267	207	545	408
	58%	42%	56%	44%	57%	43%
<i>a</i> - and <i>i</i> - combined	479		474		953	
	50%		50%		100%	

Table 2: Distribution of *a*- and *i*- by grammatical type and genre

4. Functional types

When I examined all instances of determiners and pronouns with the *i*- form in the corpus and grouped them on the basis of discourse function, six more or less discrete types emerged. Some of these functions have been identified in previous discourse studies but have not been associated with deixis. Others are traditionally associated with deixis but their patterning in discourse has never been examined. I further distinguished between proximity (physical or subjective) to the narrator in the 'real world' and to participants in the 'story world'. This distinction has figured importantly in literary narrative analysis, but has received little attention in studies of informal oral narrative to date. My classification produced the distribution of functional types summarized in Table 3. Each type is described and discussed in the following sections.

	DET (%)	PRON (%)	combined (%)
1. physical proximity: to narrator	3	3	3
to participant	12	12	12 15
2. text deixis	12	17	15
3. presentational deixis	6	2	4
4. participant tracking	4	10	7
5. main participant	24	31	28
6. subjective deixis: to narrator	12	6	9 31
to participant	26	18	22
Total	100% N=201	100% N=207	100% N=408

Table 3: Distribution of *i*- by discourse function

4.1 Physical proximity

The most straightforward uses of *i*- in the corpus involve physical proximity, either to the narrator at the time of narration (e.g. the narrator gestures to something in the immediate environment), or to a participant in the story world. The former use is limited to two real-life accounts in which the narrator was personally involved.⁴

- 1) viluntu *inta* itattile atippattu *inta* kai otiñcu pōccu.
fall-CP this place-LOC hit-CP this arm break-CP go-P:3:SG:N

'(I) fell and hit *here* [pointing at scar on forehead] and broke *this* arm [gesturing with right arm].'

More widespread is the strategy of representing something as close to a narrative participant. The following example is from a folk tale.

- 2) aruccunan "enna oru cinna paiyānā *inta* nāttile utkāntu
Arjuna what one little boy-Q this country-LOC sit-CP
irukkānām."
be-PR-3:SG:MASC

'Arjuna (said), "What, it seems there's a little boy sitting (on the throne) in *this* country?!" [*this*=the country Arjuna is currently located in]

Both of these examples involve deixis in the narrow semantic sense; the former is an example of gestural deixis, relying as it does on some physical aspect of the communication situation, and the latter of symbolic deixis, "whose interpretation involves merely knowing certain aspects of the communication situation" (Fillmore 1975:40). It would be impossible to substitute *anta* for *inta* in the examples above without changing the intended referential meaning. However, actual proximity, whether in the real world or the story world, accounts for only 15% of the occurrences of *i*- in the corpus; clearly this explanation alone is not sufficient.

4.2 Text deixis

The second obvious function to consider is what Fillmore originally termed 'discourse deixis', and what, following Lyons (1975), I will call 'text deixis'.⁵ In the present investigation, text deixis refers to the use of *i*- to co-refer to preceding or following portions of text. 97% of the uses of *i*- employed in this function are anaphoric, i.e. refer back to a textual entity previously mentioned.

- 3) "nān English paṭicittirukkīrēn unakkāka vēṇṭi" appaṭi,
"I English study-PR-PROG-1:SG you-BEN sake" thus,
tuition veccu paṭicittiruntatu, anta pillai English.
tuition put-CP study-P-PROG-3:SG:N that girl English
appuram tān teriñcatu it(u) ellām.
afterwards only be known-P-3:SG:N this all

'Thinking, "I'll study English, for your sake", the girl was paying tuition and studying English. (We) only realized all *this* afterwards.' [*this*=the fact that the girl was studying English for the hero's sake]

The text deixis function can be fulfilled by non-proximal *a*- as well.

The use of a proximal deictic in this function appears to be motivated by the closeness of the referent to its previous mention in text, where the text is metaphorically construed as a spatial or temporal construct (Fleischman 1991). However such uses again account for only 15% of *i*- forms in the corpus; the majority of uses remain to be explained.

4.3 Presentational deixis

The third function of *i*-, or some variant of it, is attested for proximal demonstratives in narrative discourse in many languages, including English. This is the use of a proximal NP to introduce a previously unmentioned referent into the

discourse, as in "Then *this* guy on a bicycle comes along". Unlike the other demonstrative functions discussed here, presentational deictics are indefinite; they could be replaced with indefinite articles but not with non-proximal demonstratives. In Tamil, referents introduced for the first time with *i-* tend to be low in specificity and topicality (Givón 1984); that is, their unique identity is not important, and they are often inanimate objects which do not persist in the discourse for more than a single clause.

- 4) anta vīran .. *inta* cāttai .. vaccu, oru itattukku kūtuttu varāru.
that soldier this whip put-CP one place-DAT take-CP come-PR-3:HON
'The soldier takes *this* whip, and brings (Tenaliraman) to a place.' [*this*=a whip, first and only mention]

The following example shows the presentational use of *i-* followed by an immediated shift to *a-* in reference to the same referent.

- 5) "nī iru, unakku mantiram pōturēn" nu colli, *inta* vēppa kilai
you be-IMP you-DAT spell put-PR-1:SG QUOT say-CP this neem leaf
ate vaccu, ippati ippati nnu mantiram pōtānka.
that-ACC put-CP like.this like.this QUOT spell put-P-3:PL
'Saying, "You wait, I'll cast a spell (so it won't hurt)", (the doctor placed) *this* neem leaf, (he) placed that-it (on me) and cast a spell like this.' [*this*=a neem leaf, first mention, not referred to after this clause]

Fillmore (1975:71) suggests that the choice of 'this' or 'that' in an English sentence such as "I went to a party last night and I met *this/that* guy" is determined by whether the speaker thinks the hearer can identify the referent in question; 'that guy' is known to both speaker and hearer, while 'this guy' is known only to the speaker. This observation suggests an explanation for the presentational use of proximal forms, in that what is known only by the speaker is metaphorically closer to the speaker than that which is known by both speaker and hearer. Presentational deixis is statistically infrequent however in the Tamil corpus (as are presentative devices in general), accounting for only 4% of *i-* forms.

4.4 Participant tracking

The next discourse use of *i-* is a contrastive strategy that assigns *i-* to one participant and *a-* to another across a stretch of discourse that involves switching reference back and forth between the two. I term this the participant tracking function. In the example below, from a story about two scholarly friends, Vellaittol and his artistic achievements are indexed by *i-*, while Kunjan Nambiyar and his artistic achievements are indexed by *a-*.

- 6) appa *inta* vellaittolum kuñcan nampiyār reñtu pēr rompa friends.
then this Vellaittol and Kunjan Nambiyar two people very friends
ivar avar vīttukku pōnā cāppituvāru.
this-he that-he house-DAT go-COND eat-F-3:SG:HON
avarē *ivar* vīttukku pōnā cāppituvāru.
that-he-EMPH this-he house-DAT go-COND eat-F-3:SG:HON
cāppittuttu reñtu pērumē rompa nēram varaikkum avanka-
eat-PFV-CP two people-and-EMPH much time until they
itule katai, kavitai, a- .. *itai* patti pēcittiruppānka.
this-LOC story drama tha- this-ACC about speak-PROG-F-3:PL

kuñcan nampiyār tān 'ōttantullal' appaṭi nnu .. anke naṭakkira
Kunjan Nambiyar EMPH ottantullal thus QUOT there happen-PR-AjP
oru tēnsai, atai kaṇṭuppiccavarē avar tān.
one dance-ACC that-ACC discover-PN-EMPH that-he EMPH
avaru atai patti avar pēcittiruppāru.
that-he that-ACC about that-he speak-PROG-F-3:SG:HON
ivar, *ivar* elutina kāviyam patti *ivar* pēcittiruppāru.
this-he this-he write-P-AjP poetry about this-he speak-PROG-F-3:SG:HON

'So *this* Vellaittol and Kunjan Nambiyar (were) very close friends. If *this-he* went to that-he's house, (he) would eat. As for that-he, if (he) went to *this-he's* house, (he) would eat. Having eaten, the two of them would talk until late about stories and plays, about *tha- this*. It was Kunjan Nambiyar who ... a dance that happens there called 'ottantullal'; that-he was the one who discovered that-it. That-he would speak about that-it. *This-he, this-he* would speak about the poetry that *this-he* wrote.'

In this example, *i-* and *a-* forms track the two main participants in the narrative throughout a series of reciprocal actions. Such usage could be said to establish the participants in metaphorical space, i.e. one proximal, the other further away. As such, it is reminiscent of the practice among American Sign Language narrators of establishing participants in different portions of physical signing space, with subsequent reference achieved by signing relevant activities in the space associated with the intended participant (Friedman 1976).

Unlike in ASL, however, where it seems that a participant's location is fixed for the duration of a story, the assignment of *i-* and *a-* for participant tracking in Tamil is relatively unstable. Later in the narrative cited above in (6), for example, the use of *i-* switches from Vellaittol to Kunjan Nambiyar.

- 7) oru nāl *inta-ivar* vellaittol. kuncan nampiyār vīttukku .. kuncan nampiyār
one day this this-he Vellaittol Kunjan Nambiyar house-DAT Kunjan Nambiyar
illāta camayattile pōyirukkāru; pōyttu varum pōtu, *ivar* ..
not time-LOC go-PERF-PR-3:SG:HON go-PFV-CP come time this-he
ivar kēttāru, "cāppittāyā nī? enkē pōyttu varre"
this-he ask-P-3:SG:HON eat-P-2:SG you where go-PFV-CP come-PR-2:SG
nnu kēttāru; avaru atukku "unka vīttukku tān"
QUOT ask-P-3:SG:HON that-he that-DAT your house-DAT EMPH
appaṭi nnāru.
thus say-P-3:SG:HON
'One day it seems that *this- this-he* Vellaittol went to Kunjan Nambiyar's house when Kunjan Nambiyar wasn't there; when (he) was on his way back, *this-he* .. *this-he* asked (him), "Have you eaten? Where are you coming from?" (he) asked. That-he replied to that-it "Your house."

This transition is potentially confusing for the hearer. It is not until the reply "your house" that one realizes that *this-he*, the questioner, is now Kunjan Nambiyar.

Switching the referential value of *i-* in mid-text seems unmotivated if the goal is simply to distinguish one participant from the other. If we assume however that *i-* and *a-* are differentially weighted, with *i-* indicating greater saliency or importance, and assume further that saliency can shift from scene to scene, the shift makes sense. Vellaittol is the principal protagonist of the story, in that the basic plot

concerns how he manages to outsmart Kunjan Nambiyar; hence Vellaittol is initially assigned *i-*. However Kunjan Nambiyar figures prominently in the scene that follows example (7), in which he (*i-*) argues with his wife while Vellaittol (*a-*) watches from outside the house, literally in the background. Thus the participant tracking function exploits both the formal contrast between *i-* and *a-* and the metaphorical association of proximity with foreground or salience.⁶ Narrowly defined as the alternation of *i-* and *a-* to track interacting participants, participant tracking is found in fewer than half of the narratives, and accounts for 7% of uses of *i-* in the total corpus. However the strategy of foregrounding a referent by means of *i-* is more widespread than this figure indicates, as will be seen below.

4.5 Main participant reference

Participant tracking can be subsumed under the broader discourse strategy of assigning *i-* to highly thematic narrative protagonists, thereby signalling their special or salient status in the discourse. This usage is attested in all but one of the texts (a short 1st person account) in the corpus, and accounts for 28% of *i-* forms, more than any single function discussed thus far. When two or more main participants are featured in the same scene, one may be assigned *i-* and the other(s) *a-* as per the participant tracking strategy, or both may be assigned *i-*. This latter use is illustrated in (8), from a story about the ill-fated marriage of a prince and a beautiful woman named Samutra Valli. In this excerpt, the prince and his bride are returning to his kingdom after the wedding.

- 8) appana "tūnkunka utkāntukittu irukkēn" navuṭanē, ivan vantu ..
 then sleep-IMP sit-CONT-CP be-PR-1:SG say-as.soon.as this.he TOP
 ava maṭiyile paṭuttu tūnkum pō- tūnkirran.
 that.she lap-LOC lie-CP sleep when sleep-PR-PFV-3:SG:MASC
 tūnkinavutanē inta camuttira valli ēkappaṭṭa poruḷu .. ēkappaṭṭa
 sleep-as.soon.as this Samutra Valli personal belongings personal
 poruḷkaḷe neraiya pōṭṭirukkā. tiruṭanka vantu, appana
 belongings-ACC many wear-PERF-3:SG:FEM thief-PL come-CP then
 inta camuttira valliye .. nakaiyellām pariccukittu, ivale tūkki.. anta
 this Samutra Valli-ACC jewelry.all pluck-take-CP this.she-ACC lift-CP that
 kenattukkulle pōṭṭu pōyirraṅka. kenattukkulle pōṭṭuttu
 well-inside put-CP go-PR-PFV-3:PL well-inside put-PFV-CP
 pōnavuṭanē, reṇṭāvat vantu pākkum pōtu, inta camuttira valliye kāṇōm.
 go-as.soon.as second TOP see time this Samutra Valli-ACC see-NEG
 "ennāccu ēṭāccu" nnu colli, ivan verantu pōyi kantu pitikka maṭiyale.
 what-happened QUOT say-CP this.he fear-CP go-CP find-INF be.able-NEG
 'So when (she) said, "You sleep; I'll stay sitting here" *this-he* lay down in that-her lap and when (he) was sleep- (he) fell asleep. As soon as (he) fell asleep, Samutra Valli was wearing a lot of her valuables [i.e. jewelry]. Some thieves came, and *this* Samutra Valli .. they took all her jewelry and lifted *this-her* up and threw (her) in that well and then left. After they'd thrown (her) in the well and gone off, the next thing, when (he) looked, Samutra Valli was gone. Crying "what happened, what happened?", *this-he* grew (increasingly) fearful when (he) could not find (her).'

Although in the first sentence the narrator contrasts 'this-he' with 'that-her (lap)', he switches to *i-* to reference Samutra Valli immediately thereafter. Both the prince and Samutra Valli are regularly referred to by *i-* elsewhere in the story as well.

It should be noted in the above example that the prince and Samutra Valli are maintained as distinct referents by means of gender-marked pronouns and agreement suffixes on the finite verbs. If protagonists of the same gender and degree of honorificity were both consistently referred to by pronouns with *i-* (or for that matter *a-*), one can well imagine that ambiguity would result. Such undifferentiated usage is in fact rare.

4.6 Subjective deixis

The final and statistically most important function of *i-*, accounting for 31% of its use, is the expression of subjective deixis (sometimes referred to in the literature as 'empathy' or 'point of view'), where what is subjectively in focus for the narrator or a participant in the story is metaphorically represented as 'close' by means of proximal deictic forms. A related effect is created in cinematography by means of close-up camera shots. Similarly, point of view in written literature can be manipulated by the author to appear close-up and subjective ('internal'), as viewed through the eyes of a character or a subjective narrator, or detached and impersonal ('external'; Fowler 1986). For a Tamil oral narrator, the possibilities can be represented schematically as in figure 1.

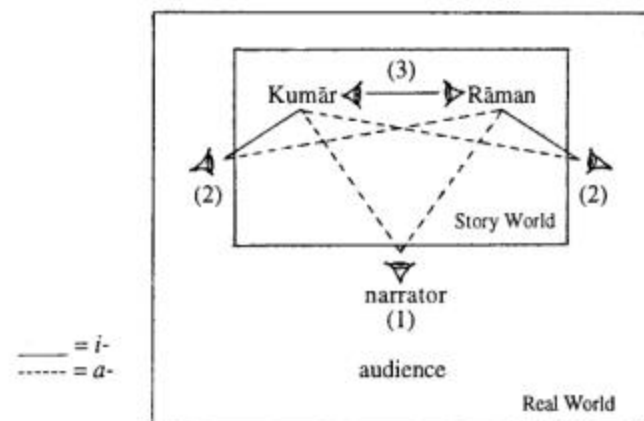


Figure 1: Point of view and deixis in Tamil oral narrative (cf. Kuno 1987:204)

Figure 1 illustrates the possible perspectives that a narrator could take in narrating a hypothetical story involving two male protagonists, Kumār and Rāman. Let us suppose that the status of each in the story is such that both are referred to by 3rd person singular non-honorific pronouns and subject agreement in the verb (i.e. there is a potential for referential ambiguity). At those points in the story where both participants are involved, deictic reference can be deployed in three ways. (1) The narrator could use 'neutral' *a-* forms in reference to both, distinguishing between them by other (e.g. lexical) means; this possibility does not interest us here, as it

does not involve the use of *i-*. (2) The narrator could elect to represent one of the participants by *i-* and the other by *a-*, i.e. by taking a 'close-up' perspective on one. Maintained over continuous stretches of discourse, this becomes the 'participant tracking' strategy discussed above, but narrator close-ups have other uses as well, as will be seen below. (3) The narrator could report the events wholly or in part as though through the eyes of one of the participants, in which case the participant's subjective perceptions are referenced by *i-*. The perspectives associated with these three uses are indicated by the numbers (1), (2), and (3) in figure 1.

An example of subjective closeness to a participant (perspective 3) is given in (9).

- 9) marupaṭiyum pōnavuṭanē, anke vantu oru tavaḷe..taṇṇi illāma..
again go-as.soon.as there come-CP one frog water without
varanta itule ketakkutu. atule pala kakkāke vantu, *inta*
dry-*P*:AjP this-LOC lie-*PR*-3:SG:N that-LOC many crow-PL come-CP this
tavaḷaiyai kottittu pōkanum nnu colli, vaṭṭam pōttukkittu irukkum pōtu,
frog-ACC peck-CP go-should QUOT sat-CP circle put-*PROG*-*F*:AjP time
'As soon as he started off again, a frog is lying there without water in this dry
place. A bunch of crows had come to that place wanting to eat *this* frog [lit.
saying, "(We) must peck *this* frog and go"], and while they were circling
around, ...'

In this example, the frog is not literally close to the crows circling overhead, but is represented as their subjective focus of interest by the use of *inta*; that is, we see the frog through the eyes of the crows.

Narrator subjectivity is more complex. Here I will tentatively posit three sub-types, arranged along a continuum from least to most systematic in terms of discourse function. The least systematic type is associated with 1st person narration, where subjective closeness can be attributed either to the narrator-as-participant at the time of the narrated events (arguably a case of perspective 3), or to the narrator-in-the-present empathizing with the narrator-as-participant (perspective 2). Consider the following, from a 1st person account of the medical treatment the narrator received after falling down an empty well and injuring himself when he was 12 years old.

- 10) anta periyavar pakkattile *inta* ūciya kontukittu *ippatiyē* vantāru
that big.man side-LOC this needle hold-CP like.this-*EMP* come-P-3:SG:HON
pakkattile nēre. "ennanka ūci" nnēn. "itu taikkaṇum" appaṭi
side-LOC directly what-HON needle say-P-1:SG this sew-must thus
nāpla. "ayyayyō vēnām. *inta* periya ūcile vaccu *ippati*
say-P-like oh no don't.want this big needle-LOC place-CP like.this
taccānka nnā eppaṭi-" "at-ellām valikkātu, onnum pannātu, nān
sew-P-3:PL COND how that-all hurt-NP:NEG nothing do-NP:NEG I
mantiram pōtūrēn" appaṭi nnāppla. "ille man- enakku taikkavē
spell cast-*PR*-1:SG thus say-P-like no spe(11) I-DAT sew-INF-*EMPH*
vēnām" appaṭi nnēn. ... ērkanavē enakku vali .. kālaiyile tāt
don't want thus say-P-1:SG already I-DAT pain morning-LOC *EMPH*
viluntirukkēn. matiyanam *inta* vēlai *ivvaḷavu* vaiṭṭiyam panrānka.
fall-PERF-*PR*-1:SG afternoon this work this.much treatment do-*PR*-3:PL

inta kai ellām eṭuttu vaccu kattum pōtu, oṭaccu kiṭaccu payankara
this arm all take-CP put-CP tie-*F*:AjP time break-CP (redup) terrible
vētanaiyile tutikkirēn. attōta *inta* vētanai vēra. inni *itule* ūci
pain-LOC throb-*PR*-1:SG that-with this pain other now this-LOC needle
vaccu kuttunānka nnā, evvaḷavu vētanai irukkum.
put-CP stab-P-3:PL COND how.much pain be-*F*-3:SG:N

'That big man [=the doctor] came up right next to me like *this* holding *this* needle. I said, "What's the needle for?" He's like, "(We) have to stitch *this*". "Oh no, no way. If you put in *this* big needle and stitch like *this*, how (the heck)-" He's like, "That-it won't hurt, (it) won't do anything, I'll cast a magic spell". I said, "No spe(11)- I don't want to be stitched at all." Already I was in pain. I'd fallen in the morning. In the afternoon they're doing *this* work, all *this* treatment. When they took *this* arm and everything and bound it, I'm suffering terrible pain. Along with that (there's) *this* pain in addition. Now if they stick a needle in *this*, it'll really hurt.'

The immediate perspective of the narrator/boy is here evident in the repeated use of *i-* forms; in contrast, the doctor uses *a-* ('That-it won't hurt') to refer to one of the same propositions, the use of the needle to stitch the boy's wounds. No further attempt will be made to classify 1st person subjective *i-* usage here.

The second — less personal, more text-organizational — type of narrator subjectivity involves the manipulation of perspective by a third person narrator to highlight selected referents or scenes (perspective 2 in figure 1). In this respect narrators make aesthetic and organizational choices similar to those made by cinematographers in the production of visual narrative, with *i-* symbolizing a 'close-up'. A skillful example of this strategy is found at the peak of an involved tale in which an old man has managed to convince a king to be cut in half by his son as part of a ritual sacrifice, while the queen his wife holds him steady. All major dramatis personae are in place and ready to proceed with the sacrifice when the following sequence occurs.

- 11) ellārum amaiyā irukkānka. *inta* amma vantu puticcukkittānka.
everyone quiet be-*PR*-3:PL this lady come-CP take-hold-*P*-3:PL
rājā, *inta* rāni vantu puticcukkittā. paiyan vāla
king, this queen come-CP take-hold-*P*-3:SG:FEM boy sword-ACC
tūkkittān. tūkki veṭṭa pōkum polutu, *inta* rājāvōta
lift-*P*-3:SG:MASC lift-CP cut-INF go-*F*:AjP time this king-GEN
itatu kaṇṇule iruntu appaiyē taṇṇi kaṇṇirā kōṭuttu.
left eye-ABL thus-*EMPH* water eye.water-ADV spring-P-3:SG:N
itatu pakkam mātṭiram appaiyē tutikkutu.
left side only thus-*EMPH* suffer-*PR*-3:SG:N
ivan vāla ōnki talaiyile vaikka pōyttān.
this-he sword-ACC raise-CP head-LOC place-INF go-*P*-3:SG:MASC
appa *inta* kaṇṇir viṭarata pāttuttān *inta* kelavan.
then this eye.water shed-*PR*-VN-ACC see-*P*-3:SG:MASC this old.man
"niruttu niruttu niruttu veṭṭāte..."
stop stop stop cut-NEG:IMP

'Everyone is quiet. *This* lady came and took hold (of him). The king, *this* queen came and took hold (of him). The boy lifted the sword. As (he) was

about to cut, suddenly *this* king's left eye issued forth tears. Only the left side is suffering (i.e. weeping). *This-he* having raised the sword was about to bring it down on (his) head. Then *this* old man saw *this* shedding of tears. (He said) "Stop, stop, stop, don't cut!"

In this example, the narrator creates dramatic intensity by presenting vignettes in rapid succession of the queen taking hold of the king, the tears on the king's face, the son with the lifted sword, and finally the old man who calls a halt to the proceedings. Each successive focus is introduced by a close-up *i*-form.

The third and most systematically textual type of narrator subjectivity involves the selective use of *i*- to introduce a scene or other thematic narrative unit. The onset of a new thematic unit is typically distinguishable from previous text in that it involves a change in referent(s), physical location, and/or time (other than simple temporal progression).

- 12) *avan* *yārukumē* *mariyātai* *kuṭukkallai*. *avan* *appāvukkellām*, *avan* *that-he* *no.one-DAT* *respect* *give-NEG* *that-they* *father-DAT* *-all* *that.they* *appāvellām*, "pōtā vāta" *pēciuvān*. *avan* *tampi* *father-all* *go-DIS* *come-DIS* *speak-PFV-PR-3:SG:MASC* *that-he* *y'brother* *tān* *vīṭṭilēyē* *pāttukuvān*. *ivan* *enka* *vīṭṭilēyē* *EMPH* *house-LOC* *care.for-F-3:SG:MASC* *this-he* *our* *house-LOC-EMPH* *paṭuttiruppān*; *enka* *vīṭṭilēyē* *cāppituvān*. *lay* *down-F-3:SG:MASC* *our* *house-LOC-EMPH* *eat-F-3:SG:MASC*

'That-he wasn't respectful to anyone. (He)'d speak disrespectfully even to that-their [i.e. his own] father. It was that-his younger brother who took care of things at home. *This-he* would sleep at our house; (he)'d eat at our house.'

The theme of the first three utterances in this example is the (disrespectful) behavior of the protagonist (*avan*) at his parents' home. *Ivan* at the beginning of the last sentence signals a shift to a new theme and a new location — the protagonist's (acceptable) behavior at the narrator's home. A number of initially puzzling shifts to *i*- turn out to signal thematic transitions of this sort. Just as filmmakers sometimes employ close-ups at plot transitions, Tamil narrators appear to evoke metaphorical proximity in demarcating textual units.

There is thus textual systematicity even in subjectivity; narrators use *i*- not only to express empathy or personal involvement, but also to organize and dramatize the telling by alternating between 'neutral' and 'close-up' perspectives.

5. Semantics and textual functions

We have seen that it is possible to classify proximal demonstrative usage in Tamil on the basis of discourse function, and that this approach turns up a variety of 'discourse deictic' phenomena, some of which have not been remarked on the literature on deixis to date. One might argue, however, that all can be derived via metaphorical extension from the idea of physical proximity. Is discourse deixis a separate linguistic phenomenon, or is the use of deixis in discourse predictable from 'core' semantics?

A case can be made that the notion of proximity underlies the working of each functional strategy to some extent. Insofar as referents physically close to the narrator in the real world or close to participants in the story world are appropriately described by proximal forms, the core semantic characterization of *i*- as proximal and *a*- as non-proximal finds direct support. Beyond this, the notion of proximity

extends metaphorically to encompass parts of text recently mentioned or about to be mentioned ('text deixis'), and further yet to presentational deixis where knowledge of the identity of referents is represented as close to the one who possesses it. Strategies based on subjective deixis invoke emotional or psychological proximity. Even strategies distinguishing main from non-main participants can be related to metaphorical distance via the notion of salience and grounding, where what is in the foreground — hence perceptually more salient — is closer to the perceiving ego.

However, to focus exclusively on semantics is to overlook what is systematic on the discourse level, namely, the use of *i*- forms to introduce referents, switch between referents, and more globally, to index highly thematic referents and demarcate thematic episode boundaries. The notion of proximity is not as useful in interpreting these uses as is a knowledge of the functional requirements of narrative, and especially, of narrative referentiality.⁷ Moreover, one discourse deictic function — that of participant tracking — exploits a purely formal mechanism, that of assigning contrasting forms to contrasting referents. In practice, the assignment appears to be sensitive to saliency principles similar to those involved in determining focal participants. In principle, however, this strategy is effective regardless of which participant is assigned *i*- and which is assigned *a*-. In this and other respects, *i*- shows evidence of extending its range of meanings from semantic into purely textual domains.⁸

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have described a set of functions that proximal deixis fulfills in Tamil oral narrative discourse. The results of the approach taken here reveal that a traditional semantic account in terms of physical distance from speaker is insufficient, even when supplemented by 'text deixis', or the use of a deictic form to refer to previous or anticipated portions of text. Rather, proximal demonstratives in Tamil have metaphorical and textual functions that could not have been easily identified except through an examination of actual discourse. The phenomenon traditionally labelled 'discourse' or 'text' deixis thus emerges as only one of a variety of discourse functions that deictic elements can fulfill.

NOTES

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1 Kirsner (1979) and Gair (1991) are exceptions to this generalization.

2 Hereafter, 'Tamil' will be used as a shorthand for 'South Indian Tamil'. However, the findings presented here are not intended to generalize to other varieties of Tamil. Sri Lankan Tamil, for instance, distinguishes three degrees of distance rather than two, and therefore is unlikely to deploy deixis in discourse the same way as South Indian Tamil. To my knowledge there is as yet no published treatment of discourse deixis in Sri Lankan Tamil; see Gair (1991) however for an intriguing description of discourse deixis in neighboring Sinhalese, a language with four morphological deictic distinctions (close to speaker; close to hearer; removed from both speaker and hearer; previously mentioned in the discourse).

3 I intend this as a first step toward understanding what motivates the choice of *i-* and *a-* in Tamil discourse. Ultimately, the discourse uses of *a-* must also be considered, and the uses of the two forms systematically compared.

4 Standard abbreviations are used for grammatical glosses in the examples given. In addition, the following abbreviations are used: AjP 'adjectival participle', CONT 'continuative', CP 'conjunctive participle', DIS 'disrespectful', F 'future', HON 'honorific', N 'neuter', NP 'non-past', P 'past', PERF 'perfect', PFV 'perfective', PR 'present', PROG 'progressive', and VN 'verbal noun'.

5 I prefer to reserve the term 'discourse deixis' as a cover term for any use of deictic elements to fulfill discourse or textual functions.

6 It goes without saying that the tracking potential would be sacrificed if *i-* forms were replaced by *a-*, although there is no semantic constraint against such a replacement.

7 See Venkatesan (1994) for a detailed discussion of referentiality in Tamil narrative discourse.

8 This observation raises the issue of diachronic change. Textual meaning is Stage II in Traugott's (1982) model of grammaticalization, between propositional (semantic) meaning and expressive (pragmatic) meaning. It is possible that we are here witnessing a very early stage of grammaticalization — or a site of potential grammaticalization — of the Tamil proximal deictic into a different grammatical function. At this early stage, we can only speculate as to what, if anything, it might ultimately become. (One possibility is a 'VIP pronoun' of the sort found in some African languages to refer to high-ranking discourse participants.)

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