Ethnic linguistic worldviews: "the devil is in the detail"

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Abstract

Modern Turkish has a threefold system of demonstrative pronouns – *bu – şu – o*, but their distribution is rather specific: the zone closer to the speaker is represented by one pronoun, while the further zone is represented by two. We have determined the conditions for use of each pronoun based on experiments with the speakers of the language, the choice is governed by categories unusual for foreigners. Linguistic data contained in the present report point at the necessity for special contrastive research, which would help the instructors of native language as foreign who don't have good command of their students' native language. Such research can help determine points of nonconcurrence between languages, and from the beginning of instruction concentrate on preventing related mistakes and communicative failures.

Keywords

deixis, demonstratives, demonstrative pronouns, Turkish language

The topic of this report and of the research that preceded it came from a small and at first unexplained observation on the behavior of native speakers of Turkish. There is a threefold deictic opposition in Turkish, i.e. there are three demonstrative pronouns – *bu 'this', o* 'that', and *şu,* about the meaning of which there are different opinions in the literature: "that", "this", "this here", "there/yonder", "situated nearby", "hereinafter contained" and others. The observation consisted in the following: to point at the article of clothing or accessory that he wears, the speaker can

a) use the pronoun *bu* and touch the item or

b) use the pronoun *şu* and simultaneously slightly pull the article away or in the direction of the addressee.

The importance of this, seemingly small, detail is not limited to its role in the body language, which is, nevertheless, essential in mastering and

using a foreign language. This example is very illustrative in showing the necessity for comparative research of ethnic linguistic worldviews in order to discover the nonconcurrences between them that can cause communicative failures, even serious ones. The research of particularities in reflecting the outer world by different languages was founded by the works of W. Humboldt, E. Sapir, and B. Whorf and their followers. At present, the connection between language and reasoning is one of the important topics of linguistic semantics and is also studied within research of ethnic linguistic worldviews. Differences in structuring and categorization of the outer world by speakers of different languages cannot be ignored in the process of foreign language instruction, especially, when preparing professional translators and other specialists who aim to establish mutual understanding between peoples of different cultures. The fine point of this problem is that, firstly, such differences in linguistic worldviews become more prominent when the corresponding cultures are substantially different, and, secondly, these differences are hard to detect even for people with good command of the language. Along with more or less known interlingual differences, such as connotations of animal names (Kornilov, 2003, p. 237-241), color notations (Wierzbicka,1990), and designation of body parts (Kornilov, 2003, p. 215), there are many more disparities between the languages, for example, in segmenting the day (*Доброе утро* 'Good morning' in Russian can be used only during a short time after waking up, but *Good morning* in English can be used until noon) (Kornilov, 2003, p. 80), in the degree to which humans associate themselves with animals (Lado, 1957, p. 115-117), in the system of description of object location and movement (verbs of movement, position and causation) (Majsak, 2000, p. 43-47) and others. Only systematic description of foreign linguistic worldview can help students form at least an approximate system of semantic connections between separate lexemes, resembling the system that every speaker of the language bears in his consciousness, system that forms through practical and linguistic experience.

Deictic indications are always egocentric, i.e. the main reference point when describing spatial location of an object or time of an event is the speaker (Apresjan, 1995, p. 631). Not only presence of the speaker is important, but also his notion about location and size of the space in which he imagines himself – the "field of the speaker" (Apresjan, 1995, p. 637). According to this, the meaning of deictic pronouns can be formulated as the following: "THIS = 'situated within the space where the speaker is or imagines himself', THAT = 'situated outside of the space where the speaker is or imagines himself'" (Apresjan, 1995, p. 636).

In accordance with H. Frei's classification, there are binomial and tripartite deictic systems (Frei, 1944, p. 113). Binomial systems are based on the principle "close to me" (A) and "far from me" (B), and in tripartite systems, there are the following members: "1" = "close to me", "2" = "close to you", and "3" = "far":

A
B

1
2
3
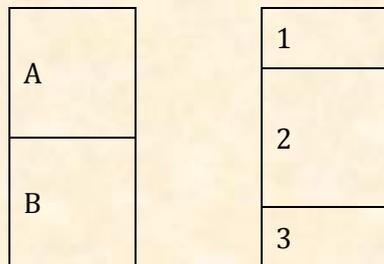
Frei points also that some of the seemingly tripartite systems may in truth be binomial, where one of the two zones is represented by two pronouns (Frei, 1944, p. 114).

A
B_1
B_2

A_1
A_2
B

There is no doubt that in Turkish the opposition of deictic lexemes is truly tripartite, since in relation to unequally distant objects the function of *bu – şu – o* can be in describing the remoteness from the speaker: *bu bina* 'this (i.e. situated in close proximity of the speakers) building' – *şu bina* 'this/that (i.e. moderately remote) building' – *o bina* 'that (i.e. most remote) building'. We should take into account that in such situations there is almost no difference between the positions of the speaker and his addressee, and the objects are situated in the same plane with them, their relative location is obvious, and the furthest object is within human reach. In the case of "macro-situation", when we speak about far away objects for which relative position is not so obvious, for example, flying planes, or "micro-situation", when we point at small objects, all situated close to the interlocutors who, in turn, are situated next to each other, for example, if interlocutors look at a showcase with small objects, the use of deictic pronouns is more or less arbitrary and serves mainly to verify the statements.

As we will show below, the essence of the opposition of deictic pronouns is not limited to opposition in distance. The need for deictic situation in order to elucidate the functions of deictic pronouns makes it impossible to base the research on anything but observation and modeling of real-life situations. In order to explore the conditions of use for each pronoun we have conducted a poll of the native speakers – mostly students, along with some university employees. Multiplicity of factors involved determines the variation in the answers. Besides, relatively low level of normalization of contemporary Turkish language, especially spoken language, and careless attitude of the speakers towards the use of linguistic means complicate the assessment of the results received from respondents. In the process of polling the respondents were given two scenarios. The number of possible answers was not limited.

It is important to note that a necessary condition to use *şu* in describing the location of surrounding objects is **dialogue** (direct deixis). In monologic bookish description location of objects can only be

characterized within the borders of distal and proximal deixis (*bu – o*). Besides that, *şu* **instigates a response** from the interlocutor and, therefore, cannot be used when answering a question: – *Şu ne?* – *Bu kalem* '– What is **this**? – **This** is a pen'*.*

Scenario 1. You are in a store and you want to tell the addressee that you like one of the dresses. Which pronoun would you choose if *a)* the dress is on you; *b)* you are holding the dress in your hands; *c)* the dress is mounted on a stand in front of you; *d)* the dress is in the showcase; *e)* the dress is in your adressee's hands?

Group 1

Location of object	*bu* 'this'	*şu* '?'	*o* 'that'
a) on the speaker	16	1	
b) in the speaker's hands	13	6	
c) on a stand in front of the speaker	2	13	3
d) in the showcase	5	13	5
e) in the addressee's hands	6	3	12

Group 2

Location of object	*bu* 'this'	*şu* '?'	*o* 'that'
a) on the speaker	19	1	
b) in the speaker's hands	17	3	
c) on a stand in front of the speaker	2	16	3
d) in the showcase	2	15	4
e) in the addressee's hands	4	4	13

The answers of the respondents show that in situation *a)* the pronoun *bu* is practically the only choice, and in situation *b)* it is preferred, in situations *c)* and *d)* *şu* is preferable, while in situation *e)* most respondents chose *o*. The choice, of course, was affected by the way in

which the respondents imagined the configuration of the members in the situation, and also by the possibility to complement the utterance with pointing gesture. Thus, in situation *b)* a considerable number of answers with *şu* can be explained by the possibility (in contrast to *a)*) to extend the object towards the addressee; distribution of answers in situations *c)* and *d)* obviously depends on the supposed distance between the showcase or stand and the speaker. As was directly noted by some respondents, pronoun *şu* may be used in all cases when the speaker is not holding the dress; in the situation when the speaker is pointing at the dress in the showcase definitives *o* or *oradaki* 'situated there' would be the most appropriate.

On the whole we can say that *bu* attributes the object to the "field of the speaker", which can be perceived narrowly (i.e. "my field consists of the things that are situated right around me/on me") or more broadly (if the addresse, stand, or showcase situated near the speaker – approximately within the reach of the speaker – are included). Rather big number of answers with *şu* in situation *b)* is dictated by the need of a pointing gesture, which is even more evident in situations *c)* and *d)*. In such a case *şu* takes the object pointed at away from the "field of the speaker", regardless of spatial closeness.

Scenario 2. The speaker is seated at the table. He has a pen *(a)*, but it doesn't work. He conveys this fact to his interlocutor seated at a table nearby and asks him to pass another pen which *b)* is located on the table where the addressee is seating, *c)* is in the addressee's hands, and *d)* is located on a third table, at a small distance from the addressee and at a bigger distance from the speaker. Unlike Scenario 1, in this case the item in possession is not masterless, but belongs to one of the interlocutors (*a, b, c*), it is not put on the speaker, and the arrangement of objects is more clearly defined.

Group 1

Location of object	*bu* 'this'	*şu* '?'	*o* 'that'
a) in speaker's hands	17		
b) on the addressee's table	1	11	4
c) in addressee's hands		5	13
d) at a third table		12	8

Group 2

Location of object	*bu* 'this'	*şu* '?'	*o* 'that'
a) in speaker's hands	22		
b) on the addressee's table	2	18	5
c) in addressee's hands	3	9	12
d) at a third table		11	15

The answers of the respondents show that in such a scenario the speaker can use only *bu* when referring to his own pen. Mention of object that does not belong to the addressee is accompanied by *şu* in the majority of answers (situations *b)* and *d)*), and the item clearly within the "field of the addressee" (situation *c)*) – similar to Scenario 1 – is accompanied by the pronoun *o*. Matter of fact distance between the object and the speaker do not play a decisive role, since the pen situated on a third table, the most distant from the speaker, receives an even number of answers with *şu* and *o* from the respondents.

The answer to the question posed at the beginning of our research is the following: the use of *şu* in relation to an object in the hands of the speaker or on him is possible when the speaker wants to express self-distancing from the object, such answer is accompanied by a characteristic gesture when the speaker slightly pulls the item on him away or, holding the item in his hand, extends it towards the addressee, i.e. practically takes it away from his personal field (cf. above, Scenario 1, situation *b*): *Al şunu!* 'Take this!', *Şu kokmuş tişortu elimden alır mısın!* 'Take (lit. "will you take?") from me (lit. "from my hand") this stinking t-

shirt!', *Şu hırka çok eski* 'This jacket is very old!' (about a jacket that the speaker wears).

As to the relationship between the choice of demonstrative pronoun and spatial orientation of the speaker's body, questioning of the native speakers showed that *bu* can only be used in relation to objects within the visibility distance of the speaker, while the objects behind the speaker can only be referred to with *şu* and *o,* complemented by pointing the finger behind: *Bana şu/o tornavidayı uzatır mısın* 'Give me that screwdriver' (about a screwdriver situated behind the speaker, if he cannot pause his work and take the screwdriver himself).

Thus, we can make the following conclusions about the use of demonstrative pronouns in relation to inanimate objects in direct conversation when the positions of the speaker and his addressee differ:
1) pronoun *bu* indicates that the object is situated within the "field of the speaker" and within his visibility range;
2) pronoun *şu* shows that the object is outside of the "field of the speaker" and, usually, relative closeness of the object to the speaker;
3) pronoun *o* is used to point at an object outside of the "field of the speaker" and relatively far from him or within the "field of his addressee".

Correlation of meanings of the three Turkish demonstrative pronouns can be more accurately expressed if we slightly modify the above mentioned scheme proposed by Frei:

bu	← zone of «self»
şu o	← zone of «not self»

All the above said about the functions of *bu – şu – o* isn't directly related to the translation of these pronouns, i.e. *şu* can be translated as "this" or "that" in different contexts, since, as we have observed, the boundaries of the field of the speaker in relation to demonstrative

pronouns are different in the different languages. The limits of the personal space of the speaker are an important part of the surrounding space's structure within the ethnic linguistic worldview and, as our research shows, are also expressed in the semantics of some lexical groups (Napolnova, 2010).

Let's return to the question of foreign language instruction and how the above said is related to it. It is known that people make certain mistakes when speaking a non-native language: such as incorrect pronunciation, mistakes in the choice and structure of grammatical or syntactic constructions. These mistakes can be easily isolated and explained, it is usually sufficient to show the mistake to the student and try to correct it. Serious cultural or communicative failures arise from a different type of mistakes – the mistakes with origins non-evident to the speakers and difficult to explain to students of the language. As R. Lado has pointed, «There is every reason to believe that the same kind of distortion that we can observe in the sounds of the speach of a nonnative speaker also occurs in the meanings he is trying to convey» (Lado, 1957, p. 85). Acquisition of native language by a child happens simultaneously and parallel to the exploration of the outside world. The child perceives the world not chaotically, but in accordance with the categories offered by his native language. «As a matter of fact the meanings into wich we classify our perience are culturally determined or modified, and they are vary considerably from culture to culture» (Lado, 1957, p. 78). Kornilov proposes to represent the whole of such categories in the form of a "matrix" (Kornilov, 2003, p. 80), and we want to suggest a comparison with a CD that needs to be formatted before recording. This approach calls for special contrastive research which can help the teachers of native language as foreign when they don't know or only poorly know the native language of their students to determine the points of incongruity and from the very beginning concentrate on preventing certain mistakes and communicative failures.

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