THE NANOSYNTAX OF SPATIAL DEIXIS
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This paper investigates the fine-grained morphosyntax of spatial deixis. It is proposed that Universal Grammar encodes a basic three-way contrast: Prox(imal) 'close to speaker', Med(ial) 'close to hearer', and Dist(al) 'far from speaker and hearer' (among others, see Fillmore 1982, Diessel 1999, Imai 2003). This underlying three-way system is overtly realized in a number of languages, e.g. (1-4).[*]

(1)   Kwakw'ala [Wakashan] (Bach 2006: 270)
        DEM.PRO suffixes
        -k   '1 vis' [= close to first person and visible]
        -uχ   '2 vis' [= close to second person and visible]
        -iq   '3 vis' [= close to third person and visible]

(2)   Tukang Besi [Austronesian] (Donohue 1999: 137, 147)
        DEM.PRO/ADN
        ana   'near the speaker'
        atu   'nearer the addressee than the speaker'
        iso   'at a distance from either the speaker or the listener(s)'

(3)   Ket [Yeniseian] (Werner 1997: 137)
        DEM.PRO
        ki   'neben dem Sprechenden'
        tu   'neben dem Zuhörenden'
        qa   'vom Sprechenden und Zuhörenden entfernt'

(4)   Basque [isolate] (Hualde & de Urbina 2003: 123)
        DEM.PRO/ADN
        (h)au(r)   'this…indicates proximity to the speaker'
        (h)ori   'that (just there)…[indicates] proximity to the addressee'
        (h)ura   'that (over yonder)…[indicates] remoteness from both'

Indeed, this kind of spatial-deictic system is very common crosslinguistically.

In other languages the three-way contrast is obscured by syncretism, i.e. the expression of two or more semantic distinctions by a single morphological exponent. In some languages there is a Prox/Med morpheme meaning either 'close to speaker' or 'close to hearer', set against a Dist morpheme meaning 'far from speaker and hearer'. See (5) and (6).

(5)   Catalan [Indo-European] (Imai 2003: 23-24, citing Hualde 1992)
        DEM.PRO/ADN

M.SG	**F.SG**	
aquest	aquesta	'proximal to either the speaker or the addressee'
aquell	aquella	'distal'

(6)   Apurinã [Arawakan] (Facundes 2000: 356)
        DEM.ADN

M	**F**	
i-ye	o-ye	'close to the speaker or to the hearer'
u-kira	o-kira	'far from the speaker and hearer'

In other languages there is syncretism of Med and Dist, with one morpheme able to express either 'close to hearer' or 'far from speaker and hearer' – or more simply put, 'not close to speaker'. This is set against the Prox morpheme meaning 'close to speaker'. See (7-10).

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[*]Abbreviations: DEM = demonstrative, PRO = pronominal, ADN = adnominal, M = masculine, F(EM) = feminine, SG = singular.

(7)   English [Indo-European] (author)
        DEM.PRO/ADN
        this   'close to speaker'
        that   'not close to speaker'

(8)   Klallam [Salish] (Montler 2007: 411, 419-420)
        DEM.PRO/ADN
        non-FEM   **FEM**
        t-iə   ts-iə   'near'
        t-əsə   ł-əsə   'far'
        "the far and near demonstratives indicate distance from the speaker, not necessarily
        the addressee" (Montler 2007: 419)

(9)   Pirahã [Mura] (Everett 1986: 285)
        DEM.PRO/ADN
        gíisai   'this / proximal'
        gáihi   'that / distal'
        "distinguished by the proximity of the referent to the speaker" (ibid.)

(10)   Lingala [Niger-Congo] (Meeuwis & Stroeken 2012: 148)
        DEM.ADN
        óyo   'close to the speaker'
        wâná   'close to the hearer or away from both speaker and hearer'

Finally, in some languages there is a single morphological form able to express all three readings, such as French *ce(tte)* or West Flemish *die(nen)/dat*. This is a Prox/Med/Dist syncretism.

According to the theory of nanosyntax (Caha 2009; Starke 2009, 2011), syncretism affects adjacent features. Thus the Prox/Med syncretism entails that the features Prox and Med are merged adjacently, and the Med/Dist syncretism entails that the features Med and Dist are merged adjacently, giving us a linear order of Prox | Med | Dist. Importantly, we have found no cases of a Prox/Dist syncretism to the exclusion of Med. This systematic gap along with the attested patterns in (1-10) can be straightforwardly accounted for by nanosyntactic principles of spellout.

To determine the hierarchy of these features, we investigate patterns of morphological containment (see Bobaljik 2007, Caha 2009, Pantcheva 2011). We find that in some languages the Med morpheme structurally contains Prox. For example, Ma'di [Nilo-Saharan] *ìlɛ́dɨ̀* 'that N near you' contains *dɨ̀* 'this N' (Blackings & Fabb 2003: 123), and Palauan [Austronesian] *ngilecha* 'that / related to the second person' contains *ngile* 'this / related to the first person exclusive' (Janssen 2004: 989-990). Dist also structurally contains Med. For example, Boumaa Fijian [Austronesian] *mayā* 'distant from both speaker and addressee' contains *yā* 'near addressee' (Ross 2007: 278; dialect B in Dixon 1988: 58). The containment facts, then, very clearly point to the hierarchy Dist > Med > Prox. We understand this universal hierarchy in terms of subset-superset relations: the Distal is the full structure [Dist [Med [Prox]]]; the Medial is a subset of this, i.e. [Med [Prox]]; and the Proximal is simply [Prox].

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