

Demonstratives taking over discourse: the grammaticalisation of deictic clitics in Äiwoo

Åshild Næss (University of Oslo)

The Oceanic language Äiwoo (Solomon Islands) has deictic particles *le* (PROX)/*lä* (DIST) and enclitics =*Ce* (PROX)/=*Cä* (DIST) which are extremely frequent in discourse, and which frequently occur together, ‘bracketing’ a word or constituent:

- (1) a. **Lä** kälikäli nugo=**ngä** i-po-päko=to.
DIST sweet.potato POSS:FOOD.1MIN=DIST PFV-cook-good=now
‘My sweet potatoes are cooked.’
- b. **Lä** maniok=**kä lä** ki-to=**kä**.
DIST manioc=DIST DIST IPFV-be=DIST
‘That’s manioc there.’

The distribution and function of this construction is complex and not easily summarised. It can occur with almost any type of constituent, and with multiple constituents within the same clause, as in (1b). It has functions related to focus and information structure, but the bracketed constituent is not necessarily the focused constituent; it can equally well be the presupposed part of the clause. It is often found in constructions involving a notionally subordinate clause, but the bracketed constituent can be either the subordinate or the main clause. It can be used to indicate that a clause has a topic-comment structure, as opposed to forming part of the presupposition, as in the pair *nelo lä lägä=kä* (sea DIST dry=DIST) ‘the tide (topic) was low (comment)’ vs. *lä nelo lägä=kä* (DIST sea dry=DIST) ‘at low tide’ (background information for a further assertion). In short, the construction just seems to indicate that a particular sequence **forms an interpretationally relevant unit with respect to the surrounding discourse** – it provides a cue to the overall structure of the utterance rather than indicating a specific function (Næss 2021).

There are no historical records that would provide evidence of how this unusual situation has arisen. However, what we know about the grammaticalisation of demonstrative forms in other Oceanic languages may provide clues to the pathways that have led to the Äiwoo construction: among other things, Oceanic languages use demonstratives as phrase demarcation devices, as markers of topic, and to mark notionally subordinate clauses (Moyses-Faurie 1997, Næss and Hovdhaugen 2011, Brill 2010, François ms.). The process known as insubordination, where formally subordinate clauses take on independent uses, might help account for the range of environments in which the construction is used; Evans (2007) notes that typical functions of insubordinated clauses include focus constructions and discourse contrasts, and that «in a number of languages, insubordinated clauses have what at first sight seem to be a bewilderingly wide range of functions» (Evans 2007: 423). Mithun (2008) moreover notes that markers of syntactic dependency can be extended to discourse level, with the function of indicating a relationship to the larger context, which is precisely what the Äiwoo deictics seem to do. I propose that demonstrative forms are particularly suited to taking on such a function, as the core function of demonstratives is to «coordinate the interlocutors’ joint attentional focus» (Diessel 2006, cf. also Evans et al. 2018), i.e. to make sure that the hearer is attending to the same object or concept as the speaker. A construction the function of which is to guide the hearer towards correctly identifying the syntactic and information-structural makeup of an utterance would seem to be a natural extension of this attention-coordination function.

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