

Weak and strong demonstratives in Old English

Fr 12.30 – 13.00

Old English (OE) has two series of demonstratives – weak and strong. Like (personal) pronouns, they have a full set of phi-features (gender, number and case), and can be used anaphorically. Both subject and object demonstratives syntactically pattern with pronouns in that they can also occur in the “high” pronoun position. However, while subject pronouns are categorically in the high position, demonstrative pronouns can occur in a lower subject position, just like NP subjects. While the similarities stem from the fact that both demonstratives and pronouns are discourse-linked/anaphoric elements (cf. Van Kemenade and Milićev 2005), the distributional differences, on the other hand, are more difficult to capture.

Although in most cases the difference between pronouns and weak demonstratives can be attributed to the semantic/pragmatic status of the antecedent (demonstratives preferring less prominent/accessible, non-topic, inanimate referents), pronouns and demonstratives crucially involve two different ways of referring. When they do, personal pronouns refer directly, whereas weak demonstratives refer to/through a certain property of the referent (much in the sense of King’s 2001 speaker’s descriptive intention). In this talk we further explore van Kemenade and Milićev’s (2005) proposal that the descriptive content associated with weak demonstratives makes them categorially different from pronouns and strong demonstratives (cf. Cardinaletti and Starke’s 1999 ‘simple demonstratives’). OE strong demonstratives usually have indefinite referents introduced at a new discourse segment, and unlike with weak demonstratives, the context only provides identity information – usually by giving the referent’s name or profession. Such cases suggest that strong demonstratives are licensed by the speaker’s perceptive, rather than descriptive intention, when the necessary property is that ‘being identical to the object of intention’ (cf. King 2001). In other words, both weak and strong anaphoric demonstratives in OE refer through a property; they only differ as much as their restrictive properties do. It remains to be seen whether this difference can be treated as categorial, as well as whether it can be held responsible for the fact that only weak demonstratives can, for instance, be used as relative pronouns in OE.

Cardinaletti, A., and M. Starke (1999). Responses and Demonstratives. The

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Kemenade, A. van & T. Milićev (2005). Syntax and discourse in Old English and Middle English word order. To appear in *Proceedings from the Eight Diachronic Generative Syntax (DIGS VIII)*.

King, J. C. (2001) *Complex Demonstratives*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.