

Estonian demonstrative *too* in between personal and demonstrative pronoun

Renate Pajusalu, Maria Reile, Helen Hint & Piia Taremaa
University of Tartu

Demonstratives often serve as the starting point for various grammaticalization paths – the development into a definite article as well as personal pronouns or, at the very least, into pronouns with personal reference (Heine & Kuteva 2006, see also Yurayong 2020: 204). The grammaticalization cline usually starts from “anaphoric pronominal demonstratives tracking emphatic, contrastive and unexpected discourse topics” (Diessel 1999: 120). Typically, the distal demonstratives tend to grammaticalize into a definite article (Greenberg 1978: 61). However, in Estonian the distal demonstrative *too* shows no indication of going through the grammaticalization process into a definite article. Instead, one of its main functions is to track the referent anaphorically throughout the discourse (Pajusalu 2006), which is also a common function to the third person pronoun *ta* (Pajusalu 2009).

In many languages, demonstratives and third person pronouns are overlapping categories (Kibrik 2011). For example, while demonstratives are traditionally defined as exophoric expressions (e.g., Levinson 2006) they can often be used for endophoric reference to refer to highly salient discourse entities, similarly to personal pronouns (Himmelmann 1996, Kibrik 2011: 124). In Estonian, both the proximal *see* and distal *too* can refer to animate referents (Pajusalu 2009), showing an overlap to the use of third person pronoun *ta* – a pronoun typically used for animate referents.

In this paper, we focus on a less prototypical and less understood minimal referential device in Estonian by exploring the functions of Estonian demonstrative *too* ‘that’ as a third person marking pronoun. Our aim is to better understand when and why is *too* used as a referential pronoun in Estonian. Our research questions are as follows:

Q1: What are the typical functions of the Estonian demonstrative *too* when used referentially as a bare pronoun in contemporary written Estonian? More specifically, what kind of referents does *too* usually refer to in written discourse?

Q2: How does the Estonian demonstrative *too* as a bare pronoun behave morphosyntactically in various usage contexts?

Q3: What are the possible reasons for choosing *too*, when other pronominal forms (i.e., personal pronouns and demonstrative *see*) are available and more common in the language.

To answer these questions, we conducted a corpus study where we analysed sentences where *too* was used as an independent pronoun. Our data come from the Estonian National Corpus 2023 (Koppel et al. 2023) (size 3.08 billion words). To ensure the data represents contemporary uses of *too*, corpus searches were limited to the period of 2014–2023. The data consist of a random selection of 500 sentences where the grammatical form of *too* was not restricted. 250 sentences were retrieved from the web subcorpora (mainly newspapers) and 250 from fiction subcorpora (including translations to Estonian) as the use of *too* may be genre-sensitive. To compare *too* to *see*, the data was taken for *see* following the same procedure.

The data was manually tagged for a range of features. First, to reveal the referential behaviour of *too* as a bare noun in sentences, the following semantic and referential features were tagged: (i) referent type to semantically characterise the entities that *too* can refer to, as established on the basis of the preceding discourse, (ii) the co-referential device preceding the demonstrative pronoun in discourse, (iii) the presence of a competing human referent in the clause preceding the demonstrative. We also coded whether the demonstrative referred (iv) cataphorically and whether the reference was made to the larger textual unit than a phrase. Second, to establish morphosyntactic patterns, we coded (vi) the syntactic role of the demonstrative and (vii) the syntactic role of a coreferential device preceding the demonstrative. In addition, we coded (vi) the syntactic persistence to determine whether the demonstrative was used in the same or in different syntactic role in a clause as its preceding coreferential device.

We analyzed its typical referential functions, the kinds of referents it refers to, and its morphosyntactic behavior based on the corpus data. By comparing *too* with the more frequent demonstrative *see*, we identify *too*'s unique role in promoting human referents into focus. The findings suggest that the choice of *too* reflects syntactic and pragmatic motivations, which are influenced by cognitive salience, typological tendencies, and potentially by contact with neighbouring languages. These features position *too* at the intersection of demonstratives and personal pronouns.

References

- Diessel, Holger. 1999. *Demonstratives. Form, function and grammaticalization* (Typological Studies in Language 42). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1978. How does a language acquire gender markers? In Joseph H. Greenberg (ed.), *Universals of Human Language*, vol. III, 47–82. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Heine, Bernd & Tania Kuteva. 2006. *The changing languages of Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Himmelmann, Nikolaus P. 1996. Demonstratives in Narrative Discourse. In Barbara Fox (ed.), *Studies in Anaphora* (Typological Studies in Language 33), 205–254. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kibrik, Andrej. 2011. *Reference in Discourse* (Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Koppel, Kristina, Jelena Kallas, Madis Jürviste & Helen Kaljumäe. 2023. Estonian National Corpus 2023. Lexical Computing Ltd. / Eesti Keele Instituut.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 2006. Deixis. In Laurence R. Horn & Gregory Ward (eds.), *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, 97–121. 2. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Pajusalu, Renate. 2006. Death of a demonstrative: person and time. The case of Estonian *too*. *Linguistica Uralica* 42(4). 241–253.
- Pajusalu, Renate. 2009. Pronouns and reference in Estonian. *Language Typology and Universals* 62(1/2). 122–139. <https://doi.org/10.1524/stuf.2009.0008>.
- Yurayong, Chingduang. 2020. *Postponed demonstratives in Finnic and North Russian dialects*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.