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Spatial Metaphors in Reporting Emotions: The use of Emotional Deixis in Interviews with Parents of Children with a Language Disorder

ABSTRACT

The paper explores how Hungarian parents of children with a language disorder use emotional deixis to report their child's condition. Demonstrative pronouns and the metaphorical meaning of space, particularly proximity, are observed in a corpus of six interviews. The questions raised are: a) What entities and relations are typically referenced by emotional deixis? b) What kinds of metaphorical meanings are conveyed by spatial closeness in the use of demonstrative pronouns? Results show that the parents use proximal emotional deixis differently from the usual pattern; instead of expressing their internal direct and positive experience, they employ them to report fundamentally negative experiences of the child's condition, development, diagnosis or therapy, or other negative experiences. Such application of emotional deixis indicates an intense and vivid experience, namely mental and emotional proximity to negative experiences, which stems from the empathic parental role.

Keywords: demonstrative pronouns, emotional deixis, language disorder, metaphor, spatial metaphor

1. Introduction

The paper analyses the metaphorical interpretation of spatial deixis in interviews with parents of children with language disorders (Baranyiné Kóczy & Zajdó, 2022; for a comprehensive overview of deixis, see, e.g., Brisard, 2002; Levinson, 1983; Lyons, 1977). The study focuses on the proximal and distal types of emotional deixis (Lakoff, 1974; also known as *empathetic deixis*, Lyons, 1977) among interviewed parents. The research aims to explore linguistic patterns that reveal how parents feel about their children's state and how they report the difficulties they experience in childrearing, including the various situations they face concerning the child's educational progress and in building social relationships. Finally, the study seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What entities and relations are

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typically referenced by emotional deixis? 2. What kinds of metaphorical meanings are conveyed by spatial closeness in the use of demonstrative pronouns? The paper will primarily focus on the metaphorical interpretation of PROXIMITY in the corpus.

Earlier research has shown that the use of proximal demonstrative pronouns as deixis (“affective this”, Liberman, 2008; Potts & Schwartz, 2010, p. 2) is common in describing a speaker’s “internal direct experience” (Kamio, 1997, p. 18) when it is accompanied by positive emotions (Saeed, 2008). In contrast, distal deixis typically references negative phenomena that are emotionally distant from the speaker (Lakoff, 1974; Lyons, 1977; Potts & Schwarz, 2010; Saeed, 2008; Wolter, 2006; in the context of Hungarian folk songs, see Baranyiné Kóczy, 2018).

The results of the analysis, based on a corpus of six interviews (comprising almost 51 000 words), show (albeit to varying degrees in each interview) that parents of children with language disorders use deixis in a way that differs significantly from the usual dichotomy. Namely, they apply proximal deixis in situations where they report essentially negative experiences about their child’s condition and development, the process of diagnosis or therapy, or other uncomfortable situations the child has faced. In such cases, proximal deixis denotes a *reliving* of negative memories, which invoke intensive emotional experiences (emotional proximity). This can be explained by the empathic attitude that arises from the parenting role.

The paper is structured as follows: After a brief overview of the notions of *spatial deixis* and *emotional deixis*, the corpus and methodology are presented. The results are divided into three sections: a) the functions of demonstrative pronouns; b) the referents of demonstrative pronouns; c) the dynamics of space in deictic reference. The paper is wrapped up with a summary of observations.

2. Deixis in discourse

Languages provide various ways and means for categorizing situations, their participants and features, and the relations between them. A particular situation can be construed in alternate ways (Langacker, 1990; Verhagen, 2007), where perspective is one of the construal operations (Langacker, 1987), comprising linguistic manifestations of figure/ground alignment, viewpoint, deixis, and subjectivity/objectivity. The deictic function of language is related to the epistemic grounding of linguistic symbols (Brisard, 2002; Langacker, 2002), in which participants in a discourse interpret linguistic elements using the contextual information available to them. The deictic elements of language include personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, adverbs, and various lexical and morphological options, through which the speaker can draw the listener’s attention to the speech event, or the things and events connected with it, especially its spatial, temporal, and interpersonal relations (cf. Langacker 1987, p. 126).

Deixis is closely connected to the speaker's egocentric vantage point, the deictic center from which spatial and temporal elements are experienced and produced (Bühler, 1982). The listener is expected to take over the speaker's position mentally; however, the speaker may construe an event from a different vantage point than his own, utilizing deictic projection. Following Levinson's traditional tripartite classification (Levinson, 1983, p. 62), deixis is categorized into *personal*, *temporal*, and *spatial deixis*; this classification has also been maintained by recent cognitive linguistic approaches (cf. Marmaridou, 2000, pp. 74–96). A fourth type, *discourse deixis*, involves endophoric reference by reflecting on the discourse itself.

The present study focuses on spatial deixis and its prototypical linguistic representation demonstrative pronouns. Spatial deixis can be used to express relations primarily based on the processing of physical space or its metaphoric extension to temporal and discursive relations (Marmaridou, 2000, pp. 86–116), and also to mode, state, quality, and quantity, as well as to complex events (Laczkó, 2010).

Distance primarily depends on the speaker's knowledge of the actual spatial context of the speech event, the direction of attention, and the figure/ground alignment (cf. Wallace, 1982, p. 214). Attention can be associated with the intensity/energy level of cognitive processes, which is the degree of salience manifested in the figure/ground alignment (Langacker, 1987, p. 115). Proximal demonstrative pronouns thus perform the process of foregrounding some elements of the events, and they typically refer to those elements temporally close and known to both participants.

Demonstrative pronouns in Hungarian encompass a relatively large collection, because

along with nominal demonstratives, adjectival and adverbial forms of a similar procedural meaning have historically also arisen by the lexicalization of ancient pronominal stems with adjectival/adverbial suffixes. (Laczkó, 2010, p. 100)

As a result, demonstrative pronouns incorporate conceptual content referring to a spatial relationship and a schematic meaning component represented by the case marker they exhibit (p. 100). They may indicate either positional or directional deictic spatial reference involving proximal or distal relations, which is further marked in the vowel of the stem of the pronouns. Front-vowel forms invariably refer to proximal relations (*ez* [this], *itt* [here], *ilyen* [like this], *így* [in this way]), in contrast, back-vowel forms indicate the corresponding distal relations (*az* [that], *ott* [there], *olyan* [like that], *úgy* [in that way]) (p. 100, cf. Table 1). Adverbial demonstratives, which express quality, manner, purpose, cause, or time, also emerge from spatial deixis using a metaphoric extension.

Table 1. The system of Hungarian demonstrative pronouns (cf. Laczkó, 2010, p. 101)

	Proximal	Distal
Nominal	<i>ez</i> [this]	<i>az</i> [that]
Adjectival	<i>ekkora</i> [this size] <i>ilyen</i> [of this kind/sort, this kind of] <i>ennyi</i> [so much/many]	<i>akkora</i> [that size] <i>olyan</i> [of that kind/sort, that kind of] <i>annyi</i> [so much/many]
Adverbial	<i>itt</i> [here] <i>ide</i> [to this place] <i>ekkor</i> [at this time] <i>így</i> [in this way] etc.	<i>ott</i> [there] <i>oda</i> [to that place] <i>akkor</i> [at that time] <i>úgy</i> [in that way] etc.

In addition to its referential function, deixis can express the speaker's subjective attitude toward something, empathy, or emotional distance, called *emotional deixis* (Lakoff, 1974), or *empathetic deixis* (Lyons, 1977). Emotional deixis is grounded in the fact that different mental/emotional states result in different psychological distances, expressed in direct or less direct linguistic forms (e.g., Hashimoto, 2002). Regarding the speaker's mental state, the most vivid "internal direct experience" in the speaker's experience comes from internal feelings, such as pain, emotions, memories, or beliefs, which are directly perceptible to the experiencer (Kamio, 1997, p. 18). As Lakoff (1974, p. 347) puts it, emotional deixis indicates the speaker's emotional involvement, his evaluative attitude towards a given concept, and his intention to facilitate a sense of closeness and shared emotions between the participants. In (1), the distal demonstrative pronoun indicates a negative emotional attitude towards John (Lakoff, 1974, p. 347):

- (1)
John likes to kick puppies.
That¹ man's going to get his one of these days!

Lyons's (1977) term "empathetic deixis" (p. 677) demonstrates that deixis in affective use can also indicate the extent to which the speaker identifies with the listener's position. The choice of proximity-distance dichotomy depends on a number of physical and psychological factors and the internal factors of the referent. Saeed (2008) shows that, in general, English *this* represents emotional closeness, intimacy, vivid experience, and other positive attitudes. In contrast, *that* represents emotional distance, hostility, annoyance, resentment, and similar negative emotional attitudes (p. 405).

Examples that deviate from this schema are relatively rare; however, *this* may be associated with negative experiences when it indicates mental proximity to

¹ All emphasis (indicated by underlining) is that of the authors' throughout the article with the exception of examples cited from work by others.

a negative experience (Hashimoto, 2002). In examples (2) and (3), the proximal demonstrative pronoun *this* emphasizes the liveliness or intensity of the negative experience from the speaker's point of view:

(2)

What shall we do today?' said Mum, with this dreadful grin still plastered across her face. (Saeed, 2008, p. 404)

(3)

Ez teljesen hülye. [This /guy/² is totally stupid.]

3. Data and methodology

The analysis focused on six interviews³ (N1=9191, N2=7553, N3=10 997, N4=5029, N5=9628, N6=8529), in which the use of proximal emotional deixis was observed. The interviews were conducted with nine respondents, three with both parents and three with only the mother. The study uses a qualitative method to investigate the link between the application of deictic proximal demonstratives, particularly demonstrative pronouns, and the mental state of the speakers in the interviews. The semi-structured interview questions were developed by the Research Network members. Hungary was represented by the second author of this study, who translated the questions into Hungarian and collected the Hungarian data⁴. The interviews sought to find out how the parents of children with a language disorder comprehend the concept of language disorder, what experiences they have raising the child at home, at school, and in speech therapy services, and how they view the issues of integration of the child. The interviews lasted 1–1,5 hours, which were recorded and then transcribed. During the data processing, all identifying information was deleted or changed in the recorded material's description to ensure anonymity (for further details, see Baranyiné Kóczy & Zajdó, 2022).

During the analysis, difficulties sometimes arise in identifying deixis due to lack of precise knowledge of the discourse situation, especially its physical setting and the child's location during the interview. An additional problem is that the transcriptions give no clue about stress. For example, *így* 'like this, in this way', pronounced with emphasis can be understood as deixis, however, when pronounced unstressed, the same element functions as a discourse marker.

² In the translations, words and comments added in slashes are used to aid comprehension.

³ The interviews used for the research were conducted under the international research project COST Action IS1406 funded by the European Union (project leader: Prof. James Law, Newcastle University, UK) entitled *Enhancing children's oral language skills across Europe and beyond – a collaboration focusing on interventions for children with difficulties learning their first language*.

⁴ The human research ethics approval for the Hungarian data collection was issued by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Győr (SZE-AK-2018/001).

4. Data analysis

4.1 Functions of proximal demonstrative pronouns

This section investigates the discursive functions expressed by proximal demonstrative pronouns in the interviews. In (4), *ez* [this] refers to a child's workbook:

(4)

Úgyhogy mindig hozza haza a füze(xxx), munkafüzeteket és akkor be van jelölve: *ez* is órai munka volt, *ez* is órai munka volt, *ez* házi feladat. És a Péter semmit nem csinál órán. Persze valahol ott van, mert tudja.

[So he always brings home his noteb(xxx⁵) and workbooks, and then they are marked like: *this* /one/ was classwork, *this* /one/ was also classwork, and *this* /one/ is for homework. And Péter doesn't do anything in class. But, of course, he must be somewhere there because he knows it / the teaching material?/.]

This is a case of deictic projection when the parent recalls a schematic event of writing homework. In addition to the parent-workbook spatial closeness, proximity conveys the parent's negative emotions about the situation when she realizes that "Péter does nothing in class". By listing uncompleted tasks, the parent gives a sense of her mental burden due to the extra work she needs to do at home with the child.

It is worth comparing this with another part of the interview describing a similar situation where deictic projection is not applied. In this case the distal pronoun *ahhoz* [to that] indicates that it is not a vivid and problematic experience for the parent.

(5)

Avval, hogy hazajövünk, akkor mindjárt a matek, mert mindig a matekkal kö⁶ kezdeni. *Ahhoz* ragaszkodik.

[When we arrive home, it's maths because he always starts with maths. He insists on *that*.]

The proximal deixis is also used for people. In (6), the child's teacher is referenced by *ez* [this], who is positively evaluated by the speaker; however, the deictic *ez* [this] recalls a situation when the teacher reported about the child's learning difficulties.

(6)

I': ... a nyelv az nem megy annyira. Vajon miért nem?

⁵ X-es mean unintelligible speech. The number of x-es indicate the number of syllables judged as unintelligible.

⁶ The Hungarian language data contains dialectal phenomena.

⁷ I=interviewer, P=parent

P: Pedig annyira türelmes. Tényleg ez a... az Andi néni a magyartanárr, hogy egyszerűen azt mondja nem tudja.

[I: ... language doesn't go so well. Why not?]

P: But she is really patient. It's really this... Miss Andi is the Hungarian teacher.⁸ She simply says he (the child) doesn't know it.]

In (7) the parent partially shifts the deictic center to the child by deictic projection. Both *evvel* [with this] and *ez* [this] refer to the child's friend, which evoke the FRIENDSHIP IS PROXIMITY metaphor. Although it could imply the parent's happiness over the child's friendship, it is notable that the friend's name is unknown to her. The parent also communicates that the child has difficulty integrating into the class, and uses repetitive constructions, which implies anxiety.

(7)

Konkrét kimondott barátja nincsen neki. Beszélget mindenkivel, meg úgy próbálkozik. Mondjuk most evvel a... aki most a... padtársa most már jóideje. Ugye ide-oda rakosgatják ugye, hogy próbálgatják, hogy hol legyen. De most evvel a kis gyerekkel, most már két hónapja padtársak. Úgyhogy evvel úgy elvan. Főleg az, hogy az apukája rendőr neki, és ugye most öhm... a rendőr, meg a tűzoltó, meg ilyen. Ugye az érdekli. Úgyhogy azért (xxx). Úgyhogy most ez igen nagy barátja neki ez a gyerek.

[He has no specific friend in particular. He talks to everybody, and he is trying. Like now with this... who has been his... seatmate for a while now. You know, they've been moving him around, trying to find a place for him. But now, with this little child, they've been seatmates for two months. So he's okay with this. Especially that his /friend's/ daddy is a policeman, and now well... the policeman, fireman, and stuff. He's interested in that. So that's why (xxx). So now this is a good friend of his, this kid.]

In (8), the demonstrative *ilyen* [like this, such] summarizes Péter's learning behavior and his inferred personality trait (self-contained). This points not only to Péter's psychological traits but also to his behavioral problems at school, both stemming from his language impairment and affecting his social relationships. For example, Péter's behavior in class is construed by the parent from a distance, while she sums it up with a proximal deixis *ilyen* [like this, such]. Proximity here conveys the parent's despair and also addresses the listener to empathize with her.

(8)

Csak olyan makacs a Péter, hogy hát ha nincsen neki kedve, akkor nem veszi elő a könyvet. ... És akkor valamikor óra közbe, fél óra után előveszi a könyvet. Akkor... van amikor kinyitja és akkor csak nézegeti. Úgyhogy ilyen öntörvényű.

[It's just that Péter is so stubborn that he won't take out the book if he doesn't feel like it. ... Then he takes the book out sometime during the class, half an hour later. Then... sometimes, he opens it, and then he just looks at it. So he's so /=like this/ obstinate.]

⁸ The subject of Hungarian in the first years of the primary school includes reading, writing, and grammar.

From these examples, it can be concluded that the proximal demonstrative pronouns express the following functions in the parents' reports: close and vivid experience, emphasis, drawing the listener's attention to an empathic view of the referent or event, and negative evaluation. All of these represent some aspects of the parents' negative emotions when they describe their child's difficulties at school and at home, which directly impact parental and family life.

4.2 The types of referents of proximal demonstrative deixis

This section focuses on presenting the various types of referents denoted by proximal demonstratives, which also exhibit the parents' emotional attitude. The first category is the *disease/disability/learning disorder*⁹ (9–10).

(9)

Első évet én ki is hagytam, hogy tovább nem jártunk fejlesztésre. Azt hittem, hogy így behoztuk ezt a történetet. Aztán akkor megint látszódott a... a... ez akkor a középsős volt. Akkor megint látszódott ez a különbség és a (xxx).

[I skipped the first year, so we didn't go to therapy any further. So I thought that we made up for this story. And then we saw again the... the... this then (s)he was in the middle class [of kindergarten] again. Then again, you could see this difference and the (xxx).]

(10)

Már rendbe volt és elkezdett javulni. Úgyhogy ö... és ö... amik itt olvashatunk a szakvéleménybe, hogy erős szorongásos ö... tünetei vannak Timinek. Ezt én azt gondolom, hogy... hogy ide lehet visszavezetni, mer születésétől kezdve, olyan erős elszakadás félelme van a mai napig kilenc évesen.

[She was all right and started to improve. So, uh... and uh... what you can read here in the expert opinion is that Timi has severe anxiety uh... symptoms. This I think that... that it's here where it can be traced back to because, from birth, she has such an intense fear of separation to this day at the age of nine.]

In (9), *ezt* [this-ACC] refers to the language disorder in which the parent's expected improvement has not occurred. In (10), the mother reports about her child's severe condition in the hospital after birth due to an infection caused by hospital malpractice (use of a contaminated hypodermic needle). She is currently experiencing severe psychological distress as a result. The different proximal deixes highlighted in the data have various referents: the medical report, the child's current anxiety symptoms, and the child's critical condition after birth.

In (11), *ez* [this] refers to different aspects of the child's disorder.

(11)

⁹ The children may have had other disabilities, illnesses, or genetic syndromes in addition to language disorder.

Én azt gondolom, hogy őneki, mint ahogy a Down-szindrómásokra ez jellemző egyébként, hogy nagyon sokaknak hallásproblémájuk van. Illetve gyengébb ő... ez a halló ő..., tehát ami hallással összefüggő szervek. Ő... én azt gondolom, hogy őneki ez gyengébb lehetett és ez mivel ő... azért ez nem volt a topon, ez a..., hogy állandóan szívjuk az orrát, figyeljünk rá, énszerintem ez egyre rosszabb lett.

[I think that, as /this/ is usually the case with Down's syndrome, many have hearing problems. Or it is weaker um ... this hearing um ... so the organs related to hearing. Um ... I think that this was poorer for her, and since this... this wasn't done very well, this ... that we need to keep suctioning her nose and watching over her, I think this became worse and worse.]

Proximal deixis sometimes refers to a *situation* that illustrates the child's unusual behavior, as it was observed in (8) where *ilyen öntörvényű* [he's so /≠like this/ obstinate] referred to situations when the child behaved 'self-contained'. Similarly, in (12) *ez* [this] refers to situations when the child finds it difficult to fit in.

(12)

Volt olyan, hogy unokatesó hívott föl, hogy hát menjünk a Péterért. Nem is a papát hívta föl, hogy ő... menjenek a Péterért, mert a Péter sír. ... Úgyhogy mindig(xxx). Ez is(xxx). Úgy rosszul jön ki a dolgokbu.

[Once, my cousin called me to go get Péter. No, he called Dad that ... they should go get Péter because Péter was crying. /Here, the parent explains that the child was innocently involved in a conflict in the street and got scared./ So always(xxx). This too(xxx). He always gets the wrong end of the stick.]

A further referent group is *learning problems and difficulties*. In (13), deictic *ezeket* [these-ACC] refers to a list of Hungarian words containing the letter *ly*, often misspelled with *j*, because the pronunciation of the two letters is the same. Likewise, the ways tasks are described in (14) ("hasty," "gibberish") represent the child's perspective.

(13)

Úgyhogy most meg... meg a nyelvtannal, hogy tanulják ugye ezeket a... „ly”-os jé, meg a pontos jé. Hát semmi hallása nincsen neki hozzá.

[And now... with grammar, they're learning all these... the 'ly' and the 'j.' Well, he has no ear for it.]

(14)

Tehát ezt a hadaró mesét azt ott sem értette meg, illetve ezeket a halandzsa szövegeket (xxx).

[So this hasty story, he didn't understand it there either, or these gibberish texts (xxx).]

Learning situations are described continuously to be subject to conflict both at school and at home as well. In (15), the proximal deixis refers to the parent-child discourse that takes place daily, in which the parents encourage their child to perform better at school.

(15)

És hiába van leszidva minden nap, hogy Péter nem ezt ígérted, hogy mindig az van neki, amikor elengedjük iskolába, ... és oda van víve, Péter jó legyél, nehogy rossz legyél, az iskolába szót fogadjál, tanuljál, mert akkor itthon kevesebb időd marad.

[And it doesn't matter that he's scolded every day that Péter, this is not what you promised, and it is always that when he is off to school ... and we take him there, Péter, be good, don't be bad, be obedient at school, do study, or else you'll have less /free/ time at home.]

Further examples of the proximal demonstrative refer to the therapy, such as the process of diagnosis and therapy (16) and special education teachers.

(16)

És a gyógytornászunktól hallottunk először a nem tudom milyen terápiáról. Ezt viszonylag későn, egyévesen kezdtük el Kornéllal, ... Ö... körülbelül fél évig volt ez a Dévény-terápia, utána már a terapeuta nem tartotta szükségesnek, hogy tovább kezelje.

[And it was our physiotherapist who first told us about the I don't know what therapy. So we started this relatively late when Kornél was one year old, ... Uh... we had this Dévény therapy for about half a year, and then the therapist didn't think it was necessary to continue.]

4.3 The dynamics of spatial distance in discourse

The usage of deixis can be revealed by linguistic data that spans several sentences. In some cases, the shifts between proximity and distance have already been pointed out, which further demonstrate that spatial properties go hand in hand with emotional ones: a spatial shift often indicates a shift in the parent's attitude. Shifting from distant to close (17–18) demonstrate how the parents bring the situation close as soon as they start speaking about their painful experiences; (18) gives a solid sense of the parental trauma still experienced.

(17)

Én akkor el is vittem egyébként a (egy intézet)-be. ... Még egészen kicsiként, meg ilyen csoportos tornán vettünk részt az elején, de aztán az nem működött. Tehát a többi gyerekkel nem. Tehát ő nem tudta ezt így együtt csinálni.

[And then I took him to (the name of an institute). ... He was very young then, and at the beginning, we took part in group gymnastics, but then that didn't work. Not with the other children. So he couldn't do this like this /in this way/ together.]

(18)

De én azt gondolom, hogy egy... egy koraszülöttnak is megengedik a... a... azt, hogy oda betegyék a kezüket, hogy az illatát érezze. Asz(xxx). A megnyugtatás. És nekem nem engedték meg. Ö... úgyhogy öhm... én azt gondolom, hogy ez itt nagy hiba volt. Akkor ott a kórházban.

[But I do think that a... a premature baby is allowed to... to... that their hands can be put in there so she can smell it. The(xxx) The soothing. And they wouldn't let me. Um... so um... I think that this was a big mistake here. Then there in the hospital.]

In (19), a typical situation is described by a mother, grounded far away from her. When she speaks about the child's inappropriate behavior, she uses the proximal demonstratives to bring the situation close and indicate that directness of the problem to her. Switching back to distance in the last sentence indicates the situation is solved.

(19)

Csak ez a... amikor voltunk a vizsgálaton is, hogy ő mindig bele akar beszélni. Hogyha most is, hogyha éppen a... megyek érte és akkor a napközis tanárral az ember egy-két szót vált ugye szokott mindennap beszélni. És akkor is volt, hogy anya, izé. Mondom Péter beszélgetek. Úgyhogy ez a, hogy övele foglalkozzon az ember. De akkor jól van, akkor rájön most már arra, hogy akkor kimegy az udvarra és akkor én beszélgessek tovább.

[It's just this... when we went to the examination, he always wanted to cut into it. Even now, when the... I go to pick him up, and then you have a word or two with the daycare teacher, you know, you talk to her every day. And then it was also that, mom, uh. I said, I'm talking, Péter. So, this, that you have to deal only with him. But then it's okay, he would realize it, and he would go out into the yard, and I can keep talking.]

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the analysis of the corpus under study, the paper argues that proximal demonstrative pronouns often function as emotional deixis when parents of children with language disorders report about their child's condition and development. The six interviews by parents from different socio-cultural backgrounds provide evidence for the linguistic pattern or strategy of using proximal demonstratives to represent affectivity. Although the transcripts of interviews do not always provide enough clues to properly identify the referents of deictic elements, in most cases they may be identified with sufficient certainty. We analyzed the metaphorical functions of proximal demonstrative pronouns and demonstrated that they have the following roles:

- a) mental closeness
- b) vivid, colorful experience in the speaker's mind/memory
- c) indication of the speaker's emotional involvement
- d) expression of the speaker's empathy with the child through deictic projection
- e) speaker's invitation to the listener to view the situation from his viewpoint
- f) negative evaluation
- g) negative experience

The last two roles, negative evaluation and emotion, differ significantly from the conventional use of deictic representations of proximity since 'proximity' is a spatial relation with an essentially positive connotation. Two additional analyses supported the association of proximal deixis with negative attitudes. One of the analyses pointed out the typical referents of deixis in the interviews

(illness/disability/learning disability, the child's behavior, situations, learning difficulties and problems, therapy, and parent-child discourses through which the parent illustrates learning difficulties). In the analyses, we have also presented cases where the parent construes a similar but not essentially negative situation by pointing away, thus indicating the parents' positive emotions grounded in their relief that the problem has been solved. The second study investigated the dynamic nature of spatial deixis to illustrate how the parents consistently switch from distant to proximal deixis when they turn to a topic they consider emotionally negative. The explanation for the use of proximal demonstrative pronouns as a *negative emotional deixis* is that it indicates an intense experience of the parents' negative perceptions, mental and emotional proximity that stems from the empathic perspective of parenting, overriding the conventional positive–negative dichotomous structure.

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