

The Mighty Demonstrative

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Abstract

Until recently, much typological work was necessarily based on comparisons of grammatical descriptions, still a fundamental resource. But as the field has progressed, it has become ever clearer that some aspects of structure emerge best in unscripted speech. In many languages, dependent clauses in complex sentence constructions are formed with demonstratives or their descendants. Examination of speech in Mohawk, an Iroquoian language of northeastern North America, might add detail to our understanding of a pathway of development that might not be obvious from elicited sentences or written materials. In this language, demonstratives are strikingly frequent in speech, often as placeholders while speakers formulate the next idea. Placeholders rarely appear in elicited examples in grammars or written materials, because speakers do not tend to think of them as integral parts of the language on a par with nouns and verbs. But the Mohawk placeholders are even more frequent than their counterparts in many other languages. Their pervasiveness has crystalized into a discourse construction in which speakers put forth one idea followed by a demonstrative in one intonation unit, then add elaboration in the next, often adding information about an argument of the first clause. This construction could be interpreted as equivalent to complement constructions in other languages, but a closer look indicates that it may represent a stage along one pathway of development.

Keywords: complement constructions; demonstratives; diachrony; discourse, placeholders; prosody

1. Introduction

Cross-linguistically, complex syntactic constructions are often based on demonstratives or related forms. Some examples of object complement constructions in English (eng; Indo-European, Germanic)¹ and German (deu; Indo-European, Germanic) are in (1) and (2).

(1) Object complements

a. *I thought they said*

[that they put the case aside in Europe].

b. *Ich dachte, sie hätten gesagt,*

[dass sie den Fall in Europa beiseite gelegt hätten].

(2) Object complements

a. *They thought*

[that they would make us lose our language].

b. *Sie dachten,*

[dass sie uns vielleicht dazu bringen würden, unsere Sprache zu verlieren].

Some examples of subject complement clauses are in (3) and (4).

(3) Subject complements

a. *It made me happy*

[that he would learn this].

b. *Es hat mich glücklich gemacht,*

[dass er das lernen würde].

(4) Subject complements

a. *It is time*

[that I invite the public].

b. *Es ist Zeit,*

[dass ich die Menschen einlade].

¹ Here and in what follows, when a language is named for the first time, the ISO 639-3 code and its genetic classification according to Glottolog are provided.

Indeed, Heine & Kuteva (2007: 225, 230) point out that cross-linguistically, demonstrative pronouns are common sources of complementizers.

2. Beyond Germanic

Apparently similar constructions also occur outside of Germanic languages. Languages of the Iroquoian family are indigenous to eastern North America. The Northern Iroquoian languages contain just three lexical categories defined in terms of morphological structure: verbs (V), nouns (N), and particles (P). They are polysynthetic: verbs in particular can show elaborate morphological structures, including noun incorporation. They are also head-marking: all verbs contain pronominal prefixes identifying their core arguments. Morphological verbs can accordingly serve as predicates, as in other languages, but also as complete clauses in themselves, as well as referring expressions. There is no case marking on nominals. Particles by definition have no internal structure, though they may be compounded. Examples here are from Mohawk (moh), a language of the Northern branch of the family, spoken in what is now Quebec, New York State, and Ontario. All are from unscripted connected speech, drawn from a corpus of approximately 70,000 words representing eighty speakers.

(5) Mohawk morphological and syntactic structure: *Watshenní:ne'* Sawyer, speaker

P	P	P	V
<i>Sok</i>	<i>nòn:wa'</i>	<i>tsi</i>	<i>iehiatonhseratahkwáhta'</i>
sok	nonhwa'	tsi	ie-hiaton-hser-a-t-ahkw-aht-ha'
so	now	place	INDF.AGT-write-NMLZ-LK-be.in-INS-INS-HAB
So	then	place	one inserts letters with it

V

ionsaiakwakwátho'.

i-onsa-iakwa-kwatho-'

TRL-REP.FAC-1EXCL.PL.AGT-stop.by-PFV

we all went back there

'So then we went to the post office.'

There are three demonstratives, all of which can be used to refer on their own, or in apposition with a nominal. They do not distinguish number. The discourse demonstrative *né:* has also grammaticalized into a definite article *ne* ‘the aforementioned’.

(6) Demonstratives

kí:ken, ki: ‘this one, this, these’

thí:ken, thi: ‘that one, that, those’

né: discourse demonstrative (anaphoric or cataphoric)

Some examples of demonstratives are in (7), (8), and (9).

(7) Proximal: Joe Awenhráthon Deer, speaker

Ienskatahsónteren’ *kí:ken.*

i-en-s-k-at-ahsonteren-’ *kiken*

TRL-FUT-REP-1SG.AGT-MID-connect-PFV *this*

‘I’ll continue **this**.’

(8) Distal: Paul Deer, speaker

Tówa’ *thí:ken* *tehontténions.*

towa’ *thi:ken* te-hon-at-teni-ion-s

maybe **that** DV-M.PL.PAT-MID-change-DISTR-HAB

‘Maybe **that** changes them.’

(9) Discourse anaphoric: Sonny Edwards, speaker

Né: *íá:ken’* *rón:kwe* *ohniare’kó:wa* *rotòn:’on.*

ne: *iaken’* *r-onkwe* *o-hniar-e’ = kowa* *ro-aton-’-on*

that HRS M.SG-person N-snake-NS = AUG M.SG.PAT-became-INCH-ST

‘**That one** was about the man who became a serpent.’

It would appear that these demonstratives mark complement constructions much like those in English and German. Some look like object complements.

(10) Object complement?

Í:kehre' *ni'* *rón:ton'* *ken*
 i-k-ehre-e' n = i'i ron-aton-' ken
 PROTH-1SG.AGT-think-ST ART = 1 M.PL.PAT-say-ST TAG
 'I myself was thinking they said you know'

[thí:ken ne: onhwentsakaiòn:ne kénh neká:ti rotí:ien'].
 thiken ne: onhwentsi-akaion = hne kenh nekati roti-ien-'
that that land-be.old = place there side M.PL.PAT-set-ST
 '[**that** they had put the case aside in Europe].'

(11) Object complement?

Ronnéhrahkwe' *ónhte'*
 ronn-hre-ahkwe' onhte'
 M.PL.AGT-think-PAST perhaps
 'They thought perhaps'

[thí:ken ahshakotiwennáhton'te'
thiken aa-hshakoti-wenn-ahton-'t-e'
that OPT-3PL > 3PL-word-disappear-CAUS-PFV

ne onkwehonwehnéha'].
 ART person = real = style
 ne onkwe = honwe = neha'
 '[**that** they could make our language disappear].'

The examples in (12) and (13) appear to be subject complement constructions.

(12) Subject complement? Carol Phillips, speaker

Wakatshenón:ni
 wak-atshen-onni
 N > 1SG-happy-make
 'It made me happy'

[kí:ken tsi enhawéientéhta'ne' wáhi'].
kiken tsi en-ha-weiente-ht-a'n-e' wahi'
this how FUT-M.SG.AGT-know.how-CAUS-INCH-PFV TAG
 '[that he would learn this you know].'

(13) Subject complement? Paul Deer, speaker

Ó:nen á:re' ki: sakáhewe'
 onen are' kiken sa-ka-hew-e'
 now again this REP-N.AGT-carry-ST
 'It's time again'

[kí:ken wà:kehre' ensakhehón:karon'
kiken wa'-k-hre-e' en-sa-khe-honkaron-'
this FAC-1SG.AGT-think-PFV FUT-REP-1SG > 3PL-invite-PFV

ne onkwe'tá:ke].
 ne onkwe't-ake
 ART person-be.multiple
 '[that we invite the public I think].'

So do we have a universal? Things become more interesting if we look closely at what speakers actually say, complete with prosody and context.

3. Placeholders

Hayashi & Yoon (2010) and Podlesskaya (2010) describe placeholders, lexical items that fill the slot of a delayed word or constituent as speakers search for words. They note that most placeholders develop out of demonstrative pronouns. Because speakers usually do not consider them an integral part of language, they were difficult to capture before easy access to audio and video recording technology.

Mohawk demonstratives occur pervasively in this function. From here on, examples are arranged such that each intonation unit or prosodic phrase begins on a separate line. As characterized by Chafe (1987: 22), "An intonation unit is a sequence of words combined under a single, coherent intonation contour, usually preceded by a pause". When an intonation unit is longer than a line, it is indented on the following line.

Punctuation at the ends of lines reflects prosody: a dash signals a truncation, a comma the end of a non-final intonation unit, and a period a terminal fall in pitch at the end of a sentence-final intonation unit. In (14) the speaker was searching for a word to characterize the translation work they were doing.

(14) Placeholder for word search: Charlotte Kaherákwas Bush, speaker

Tóka' né: ki' kík:ken ionkwaiió'te' wáhi,
toka' ne: ki' kiken ionkwa-io't-e' wahi'
 maybe that in.fact this 1PL.AGT-work-ST TAG
 'Maybe the work we're doing'

kík:ken--
'this'

nahò:ten' kati' kí: tetewawennatá—
n-a-h-o'ten-' kati' kiken te-tewa-wenn-a-ta—
 PRT-FAC-N-be.a.kind.of-PFV actually this DV-1INCL.PL.AGT-word-LK-X
 'is it actually--'

tetewawennanetáhkwa'hs ken káton,
te-tewa-wenn-a-net-ahkw-ahs ken katon
 DV-1INCL.PL.AGT-word-LK-layer-REV-HAB Q or
 'unlayering the words or,'

tetewawennaténie's?
te-tewa-wenn-ateni-e's
 DV-1INCL.PL.AGT-word-change-HAB
 'changing the words?'

In (15) the speaker was searching for a way to refer to drugs.

(15) Placeholder for word search: Joe Awenhráthon Deer, speaker
 ['Are you talking about liquor?']

Én: Tetsá:ron ki;
 ‘Yes. Both these,’

ohné:ka’ tánon’ ne’ne--
o-hnek-a’ tanon’ ne’ne
 N-liquid-NS and that which
 ‘liquor and that which—’

thi:kén:--
 ‘that’

rati’niónhsakon ronnetá’s . . .
rati-’nionhs-akon ronn-et-a’-s
 M.PL.INAL.POSS-nose-interior M.PL.AGT-be.in-CAUS-HAB
 ‘stuff they put in their nose.’

In (16) the speaker was searching for a term for ‘streetcar’

(16) Placeholder for word search: Doris White, speaker
 [‘We’d cross the bridge’]

ok tóka’ takatákhe’ ne’--
ok toka’ ta-ka-takh-e’ ne’e
 and.then maybe CSL.FAC-N.AGT-run-ST that.is
 ‘and then maybe it would come running toward us—’

a, né: ki’ ne wáhi’ ne: a, a;
 ah that in.fact ART TAG **that** ah ah

streetcar *iakwana’tónhkwahkwe’ wahón:nise’.*
iakwa-na’ton-hkw-ahkwe’ wa-h-onnis-e’
 1EXCL.PL.AGT-call-INS-PAST.HAB FAC-N-be.long-PFV

‘a streetcar we used to call it long ago.’

4. Prosodic structure

As in other languages, speakers tend to speak in spurts, introducing one new idea at a time per intonation unit (Chafe 1987, 1994 and elsewhere). This prosodic pattern can be seen in (17), as the speaker announced that ‘A woman named Kahentoréhtha got worse and was taken to Chateauguay’. A number of these intonation units end with a demonstrative *kí:ken* ‘this’ or its shorter form *ki:*, or a simple filler like *a:* ‘ah’ or *en:* ‘um’.

(17) Intonation units: Joe Tiohrakwén:te’ Dove, speaker

<i>Tseià:ta</i>	<i>ki:kén:--</i>
ts-ie-a’t-at	kiken
REP-FI.AGT-body-be.one	this

a:,
ah,

<i>taiakorihwà:rekshe’</i>	<i>ó:nen</i>	<i>ki:</i> ,
ta-iako-rihw-a-hreksh-e’	onen	kiken
CSL.FAC-FI.SG.PAT-matter-LK-push-PFV	now	this

<i>Shahrè:’on</i>	<i>iahshakotí’teron’</i> ,
Shahre’on	i-a-hshakoti-i’teron-’
PLACENAME	TRL-FAC-3PL > FI-reside-PFV

<i>ó:nen</i>	<i>ki:</i> ,
onen	kiken
now	this

<i>né:ne</i>	<i>Kahentoréhtha’</i>	<i>konwá:iats</i>	<i>ki:</i>
nene	ka-hent-oreht-ha’	Ia-iat-s	kiken
that.one	FZ.AGT-field-balance-HAB	FI > FZ.SG-call-HAB	this

‘A woman named Kahentoréhtha’ got worse and was taken to Chateauguay.’

The woman, a brand new topic, was introduced in the first intonation unit, followed by the placeholder *kí:ken* ‘this’ then a pause, before the next intonation unit which consisted of just the filler ‘ah’ as the speaker formulated his comment. That new piece of information, ‘she was taken to Chateauguay’, was uttered in an intonation unit of its own. The name of the woman was given in a final intonation unit. (The final demonstrative is part of a different construction. It is not a placeholder, but rather an antitopic, recapitulating the discourse topic).

Similar prosodic structure can be seen in (18), ‘Another time, chickens were brought in to breed.’ The speaker first introduced a shift in time followed by a filler ‘ah’, then in the next intonation unit the event ‘they brought them’, then another filler, and finally the referent ‘chickens to breed’.

(18) Intonation units: Joe Awenhráthon Deer, speaker

<i>Ó:ia’s</i>	<i>ni’</i>	a: ,
oia’ = s	ohni’	a:
other = DISTR	also	ah

wahat’hewe’,

wa-hati-hew-e’

FAC-M.PL.AGT-bring-PFV

en:,

um

<i>kítkit</i>	<i>thaontenahskón:ni’</i>	<i>wáhe’</i> .
kitkit	th-a-w-ate-nahskw-onni-’	wahe’
chicken	CONTR-FAC-N.AGT-MID-domestic.animal-make-PFV	TAG

‘Another time chickens were brought in to breed.’

This speaker followed that introduction with the comment in (19), ‘Maybe you remember, the building is still there behind Kawinéhtha’s place.’

(19) Intonation units: Joe Awenhráthon Deer, speaker

Ta' nòn:wa' *sè:iahre'*,
 towa' = nonhwa' s-ehiar-e'
 maybe = now 2SG.AGT-remember-ST

shé:kon *tkanónhsote'* ***thi:kén:***,
 shekon t-ka-nonhs-ot-e' **thiken**
 still CSL-N.AGT-house-stand-ST **that**
énska *ohnà:ken'* ***thi:kén:***,
 one behind **that**

a; *né:* *ki:* ***né:***,
 ah that.is this **that**

Ka'-- *en;* *Kahon'--* *Kawinehthà:ke* *ohna:kén:*,
 ka'-- ah Kahon'-- Kawinéhtha's place behind

énska *shé:* *kanónhsote'*.
 enskat shekon ka-nonhs-ot-e'
 one still N.AGT-house-stand-ST

'Maybe you remember, the building is still there behind Kawinéhtha's place.'

Again each new idea was set out in a separate intonation unit, often preceded by a filler or demonstrative placeholder and pause, as the speaker formulated what he was going to say.

This speaker then continued with (20), 'That's where the chickens live'.

(20) Intonation units: Joe Awenhráthon Deer, speaker

Thos *non:* *konti'teróntonhkwe'* ***ki:kén:***,
 tho shes nonwe' konti-'teront-on-hkwe' **kiken**
 there CUST place FZ.PL.AGT-reside-ST-PAST **this**

kítkit.
 chicken

'That's where the chickens live.'

It is important to note that these are all highly skilled first-language speakers; the pausing does not in any way reflect a lack of facility with the language.

The demonstratives at the ends of intonation units (apart from the sentence-final antitopics) have distinctive prosody. Basic demonstratives have penultimate stress: *kí:ken* ‘this, these’, *thí:ken* ‘that, those’. But in these contexts, the pitch continues to rise into the final syllable, which is lengthened: *ki:kén:*, *thi:kén:*. The difference can be seen in the pitch traces in Figures 1 and 2, a comparison of the demonstrative *kí:ken* in its basic use from (7), and *ki:kén:* in its placeholder use from (17).

(7) Basic demonstrative

Ienskatahsónteren’ kí:ken.

‘I should continue this.’

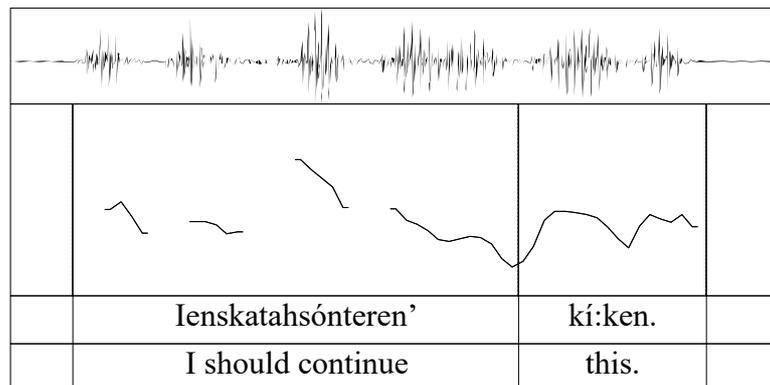


Figure 1: Basic demonstrative

(17) Placeholder demonstrative

Tseià:ta kí:kén:,

one woman **this**

a, taiakorihwà:rekshe’ ó:nen kí:

ah, she got worse now this,

Shahrè:’on iahshakotí’teron’, . . .

Chateauguay there they placed her

‘One woman, she got worse and was taken to Chateauguay.’

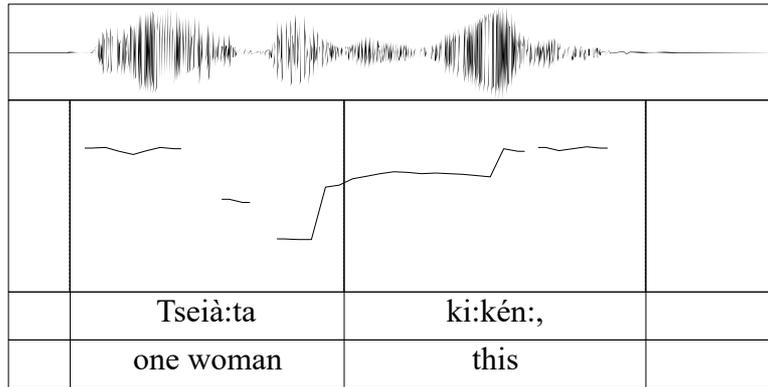


Figure 2: Placeholder demonstrative

5. Conventionalized discourse structure

The pattern of an intonation unit conveying one new idea ending in a demonstrative with rising pitch signaling that further detail is to follow has crystallized into a conventional discourse structure. The further detail is not limited to a specific syntactic role; it may elaborate on a participant, place, time, reason, and more. In (21), the speaker first elaborated on what was numerous, namely ‘stuff causing us worry’, then the location.

(21) Statement + elaboration: Joe Aweenhráthon Deer, speaker

A:	<i>nia'té:kon</i>	<i>ki:</i> ,	
a:	n-i-a'-te-ka-I	kiken	
ah	PRT-TRL-FAC-DV-N.AGT-be.amount	this	
ah	it is many	this	
<i>tsi,</i>	<i>nia'té:kon</i>	<i>tiótkon teka'nikónhrhare'</i>	ki:kén:,
<i>tsi</i>	n-i-a'-te-ka-i	t-io-kon te-ka-'nikonhr-har-e'	kiken
ah	PRT-TRL-FAC-DV-N.AGT-be.amount	always DV-N.AGT-mind-hang-ST	this

nonkwaná:takon.

ne = onkwa-nat-akon

ART-1AL.POSS-town-interior

‘There’s a lot of stuff is causing us worry in our town.’

6. Standard complex syntax?

If we look back at the prosody of examples seen earlier translated with standard complement constructions, we can see that they show the same intonation patterning as the discourse structure of a statement ending in a demonstrative followed by elaboration. Here the same examples are displayed with their prosody, each line representing an intonation unit.

(10) Object complement? Skawén:nati Montour, speaker

Í:kehre' *ni'* *rón:ton'* *ken* ***thí:ken,***
 i-k-hre-e' n = i'i ron-aton-' ken thiken
 PROTH-1SG.AGT-think-ST ART = 1 M.PL.PAT-say-ST TAG **that**

ne:,
that

onhwentsakaiòn:ne *kénh* *neká:ti* *rotí:ien'*.
 onhwentsi-akaion = hne kenh nekati roti-ien-'
 land-be.old = place there side M.PL.PAT-set-ST

'I myself was thinking they said they had put the case aside in Europe.'

The pitch trace in Figure 3 shows that the demonstrative *ne:* was pronounced with rising pitch and increased length, then followed by a pause.

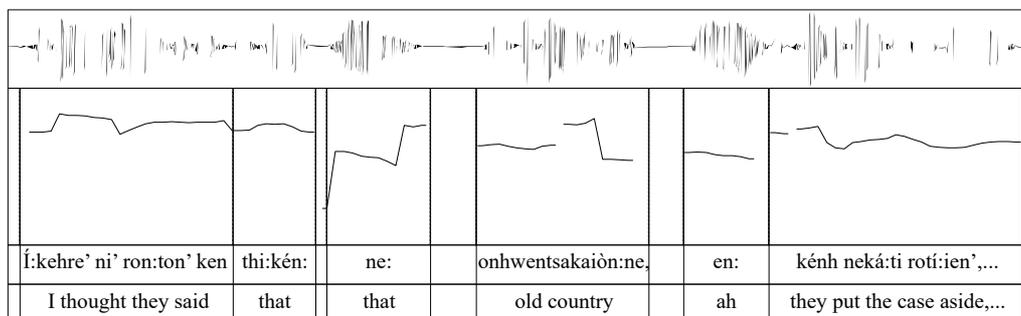


Figure 3: Prosodic structure of (10)

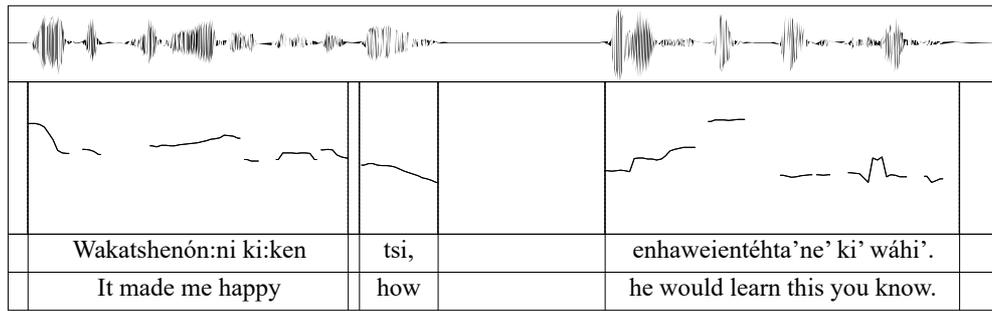


Figure 5: Prosodic structure of (12)

(13) Subject complement? Paul Deer, speaker

Ó:nen á:re' ki: sakáhewe' kí:ken,
 onen are' kiken sa-ka-hew-e' kiken
 now again this REP-N.AGT-carry-ST this

wà:kehre' ensakhehón:karon' ne onkwe'tà:ke.
 wa'-k-hre-e' en-sa-khe-honkaron-' ne onkwe't = ake
 FAC-1SG.AGT-think-PFV FUT-REP-1SG > 3PL-invite-PFV ART person = place

'It's time again that we invite the public I think.'

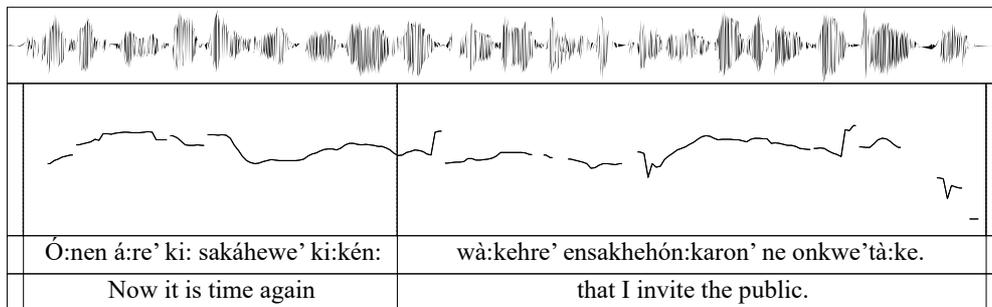


Figure 6: Prosodic structure of (13)

Interestingly, in some examples, the prosody of the intonation-unit final demonstrative is somewhat attenuated. In (11), 'They thought that they'd make us lose our language', and (13) 'Not it is time again that I invite the public', the final syllable of the demonstrative does not show as steep a rise in pitch as it does in some other instances of the construction. In (13), there was also little pause between the demonstrative and the following clause. Such patterns of course vary by speaker. They

could, however, be indicative of incipient grammaticalization of a syntactic complement construction.

7. Conclusion

Mohawk contains numerous sentences that are translated with English complement constructions. A broader look at language in use, however, shows that they are instances of a larger discourse construction which shapes the flow of information. These have apparently evolved out of a common pattern cross-linguistically whereby demonstratives are used as placeholders while the speaker searches for a word or the best way to formulate the next idea. This use can be seen in Mohawk, but the pattern has moved beyond: in perhaps the majority of cases, speakers know well what is to follow. An intonation unit-final demonstrative with continuing prosody indicates that more is to come, and of course serves as a floor-holding device.

Has this pattern evolved completely into complement constructions? It is not limited to elaboration of a core argument of a main clause: it can provide further details about time, place, reason, and more. There are some instances, however, where the final high pitch and length on the demonstrative, and/or the prosodic break between the demonstrative and the following material is somewhat attenuated. This could suggest that such discourse patterns are a stage along one pathway to the grammaticalization of complex syntactic structures.

Ultimately, typology can be richer and more interesting if we are not restricted to elicited translations of single sentences, out of context, from a contact language. Here the discourse context and prosody of unscripted speech reveal that what might at first appear to be canonical complex syntactic constructions are actually cases of a more general discourse construction. At the same time, they could add detail to our understanding of one pathway by which such constructions might develop.

Abbreviations

1 = 1st person

2 = 2nd person

3 = 3rd person

AGT = grammatical agent

ART = article

FUT = future

FZ = feminine-zaic

HAB = habitual aspect

HRS = hearsay

INAL = inalienable

OPT = optative

PAT = grammatical patient

PFV = perfective

PL = plural

POSS = possessive

AUG = augmentative	INCH = inchoative	PRT = partitive
CAUS = causative	INCL = inclusive	REP = repetitive
CSL = cislocative	INDF = indefinite gender	REV = reversive
CONTR = contrastive	INS = instrumental applicative	SG = singular
CUST = customary	LK = linker	ST = stative aspect
DISTR = distributive	M = masculine	TAG = tag question
DV = duplicative	MID = middle	TRL = translocative
EXCL = exclusive	N = neuter	X = unanalyzable
FAC = factual	NMLZ = nominalizer	
FI = feminine-indefinite	NS = noun suffix	

Orthographic conventions

The symbol <i> is a glide [j] before vowels, the digraphs <en> and <on> nasalized vowels [ɛ̃] and [ɔ̃], and the apostrophe <'> glottal stop [ʔ]. The colon <:> indicates vowel length. The acute accent <'> represents stress with high or rising tone, and the grave accent <`> stress with falling tone.

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