# A (morpho)phonological typology of demonstratives: A case study in sound symbolism

## Sonja Dahlgren & Seppo Kittilä
*University of Helsinki*

sonja.dahlgren@helsinki.fi, seppo.kittila@helsinki.fi

We propose a (morpho)phonological typology of proximal and distal demonstratives; only the most basic proximal ('this') and distal ('that') forms are taken into account. The proximal vs. distal nature of demonstratives is easy to measure both non-linguistically and linguistically. Four major types are distinguished: Vowel type, Consonant type, Additional element –type, and Varia. Examples of the first type comprise, e.g., Betta Kurumba (*i* 'this', *a* 'that') and Alyawarra (*nhinha vs. nhaka*). In type 2, front consonants pair with proximal demonstratives, and back consonants with distal demonstratives (e.g., Bunaq, *bari* 'this' vs. *baqi* 'that'). In the additional element type, the distal demonstrative typically has an additional element, making it longer (e.g., Òko *òne* 'this', *ònébé* 'that'), but the distal demonstrative may also simply be phonologically longer (e.g., Ngalakan *nu-gaʔye* vs. *nu-gunʔbiri*,). Finally, a number of strategies are used in Type 4.

The occurrence of the two first types can be explained by iconicity. In most cases, front or high phonemes appear on the proximal demonstratives, and back/low phonemes on distal demonstratives. Proximal demonstratives are thus pronounced at the front and/or high part of the oral cavity, while distal demonstratives are pronounced lower and more back, reflecting the proximal/distal nature of their referents in the physical world. The first type is the most common in our data, which suggests that iconicity plays a role here. Our findings support earlier findings that proximal and distal demonstratives have an iconic (vowel) phonemic manifestation (e.g., Ohala 1984). Previous studies, however, have not found systematic correspondences regarding consonants (Johansson & Zlatev 2013). The third type can be explained by both markedness and iconicity. The distal element is in most cases more marked than the proximal demonstrative, and some languages use less linguistic substance for referring to entities close to the speaker. The fourth type contains different kinds of cases with few systematic generalizations.

**References:** • Johansson, N. & J. Zlatev. 2013. Motivations for sound symbolism in spatial deixis : A typological study of 101 languages. *The Public Journal of Seimotics* 5(1). • Ohala, J. 1984. An ethological perspective on common cross-language utilization of $F_0$ of voice. *Phonetica* 41. 1-16.