

# Indefinite demonstratives, definiteness, and referentiality

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Indefinite demonstrative noun phrases, such as *this guy* in *Then I met this guy*, are specific (Prince 1981), cataphoric (Gernsbacher & Shroyer 1989), express noteworthiness, and are discourse prominent (von Heusinger 2011). We tested the claim that indefinite demonstratives introduce their discourse referent more directly, i.e. with less impact of the noun phrase's descriptive content, than regular indefinites (*a guy*), a claim that is compatible with previous studies (Gernsbacher & Shroyer 1989). If this claim were correct, we should find differences in accessibility for indefinites with pre-activated, inferred concepts and indefinites with brand-new concepts. Inferred and brand-new demonstratives should be similarly accessible.

We conducted a visual world, eye-tracking experiment, in which 45 participants (ps) listened to German short stories consisting of three sentences (40 expt; 80 fillers). The first sentence provided a context, the second sentence introduced two human referents, and the third sentence contained a personal pronoun that could be interpreted as the subject or object referent of the second sentence. Importantly, the critical object referent could either be inferred from context (inferred, *gym... a trainer* vs. *this trainer*) or not (brand-new, *theatre... a trainer* vs. *this trainer*) and was either introduced with a noun following a demonstrative (*this*) or an indefinite article (*a/an*). We analyzed which of the four pictures onscreen participants were fixating at pronoun encounter: picture of the object referent, the subject referent, or one of the two unrelated pictures.

Starting at pronoun onset and for object NPs with an indefinite article, ps looked more to the related picture when the referent could be inferred than when it was brand-new. For object NPs with a demonstrative article, fixation times were slightly longer for brand-new than inferred referents. Generalized mixed models for various time bins post pronoun onset revealed a significant Information status x Article interaction for the bins 500 – 800 ms and 800 – 1100 ms, both  $z$ s > 5, both  $p$ s < .001. Follow-up models confirmed that there were reliable differences in fixation times only between inferred and brand-new indefinites and not between the indefinite demonstrative. Our result suggest that indefinite demonstratives introduce their discourse referent in a more direct way than regular indefinites, possibly because their access interacts more weakly with the descriptive content of the NP.

**References:** • Gernsbacher, M. A. & S. Shroyer. 1989. The cataphoric use of the indefinite *this* in spoken narratives. *Memory & Cognition* 17, 536–540. • von Heusinger, K. 2011. Specificity, referentiality and discourse prominence: German indefinite demonstratives. In I. Reich (ed.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung* 15, 9–30. Saarbrücken: Saarland University Press. • Prince, E. F. 1981. On the inferring of indefinite *this* NPs. In B. Webber, A. K. Joshi & I. Sag (eds.), *Elements of discourse understanding*, 231–250. Cambridge: CUP.