

On the (non-)at-issueness of gestures and the role of demonstratives

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We argue that speech-accompanying gestures contribute non-at-issue information by default and that gestural content can be shifted via demonstratives, i.e. demonstratives function as ‘dimension shifters’ from the non-at-issue to the at-issue dimension. We discuss a formal account of this proposal and present experimental data that supports it.

Data. Consider an utterance of (1) with a simultaneous iconic gesture indicating an oval object (where underlining indicates co-occurrence of speech and gesture).

(1) Peter bought a casserole ‘oval’ gesture.

The verbal and gestural meaning together communicate that Peter bought a casserole and that this casserole is oval. The claim is that gestural meaning comes in as non-at-issue meaning. Gestural meaning hence cannot be directly denied and it projects across operators such as negation. Interestingly, if a demonstrative like German *so* (roughly: such/like that; cf. Ehlich, 1986) is added, gesture information does become at-issue. It has thus been proposed that *so* acts as a ‘dimension shifter’ (contrary to what Potts, 2005, and many others claim to exist): it shifts non-at-issue meaning to the at-issue dimension. In the same vein, demonstratives such as German *dies-* and English *this/that* make gestural meaning at-issue that is non-at-issue otherwise, when co-occurring with a definite. While German *so ein N* is the shifted version of *ein N*, *dieser/this/that N* is the shifted version of *der/die/das/the N*.

Experimental Support. We present the results of two picture verification tasks that lend experimental support to this analysis. The studies confirmed the assumption that gesture meaning enters into composition as non-at-issue material by showing that mismatching gestures (which are assumed to be non-at-issue) impaired judgments much less strongly than mismatching adjectives (which are at-issue) (cf. Syrett & Koev 2015, who show that false non-at-issue material does not affect the truth value judgements in the same way as false at-issue material). It was also confirmed that demonstratives shift gesture meaning towards at-issue material: Mismatching gestures impaired judgments reliably more strongly if accompanied by a demonstrative.

Selected References. Syrett & Koev (2015). Experimental Evidence for the Truth Conditional Contribution and Shifting Information Status of Appositives, *JoS* • Umbach & Gust (2014). Similarity Demonstratives. *Lingua*