RESPONSE TO WILT,
"DISCOURSE DISTANCES AND THE SWAHILI DEMONSTRATIVES"

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1. Introduction

    Wilt's analysis [in this issue] appears at first to account for signifi-
cant portions of the Swahili data. But on examination we see that each of
the rules he posits can account for only a sharply limited set of data. Each
fails to account for a wider range of data. Swahili demonstratives H and LE
have traditionally been analyzed to mean "proximity" and "non-proximity", re-
spectively. However, this analysis—both prior to Wilt and in Wilt's hands—
leaves much unaccounted for.

    The "attention" hypothesis, presented in my 1985 paper[1] and disputed by
Wilt, is better able to account for the Swahili data. This hypothesis posits
that H and LE have meanings that deal with a speaker's relative concentration
of attention on a referent: H signals relatively HIGH Concentration of Atten-
tion and LE signals relatively LOW Concentration of Attention. This hypothe-
sis can not only explain all data accounted for by the traditional "proximity"
hypothesis, but can also explain data that the traditional hypothesis cannot.
For example, the proximity hypothesis can explain data in which H refers to
items that are in fact proximate to the speaker. Such items do tend to be re-
ferred to with H (and this is presumably what historically led analysts to
posit "proximity" as the invariant meaning of H).

    Proximate items, however, are but a subset of items that tend to be worthy

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[1]Note that although Wilt lists my 1982 dissertation in his bibliography,
he seems to refer only to the short 1985 paper. I refer the reader to the
dissertation for a fuller treatment of the attention hypothesis (and the prox-
imity hypothesis). Other recent works that call into question the usefulness
of the notion "proximity" in the analysis of deictics are Hanks [1984, 1986].

of higher attention. It is a fairly common occurrence that other items, for
example ones that are thematically important, will overshadow the proximates.
In such cases H may be used to refer to something that is not proximate, or
perhaps whose position cannot even be determined. The operant variable is not
proximity but the relative amount of attention the speaker wants the hearer to
focus.

The reason proximates are so often referred to with H is because humans
are egocentric and tend to view their own environs and experiences as note-
worthy and important. Thus proximate items, which have a greater possibility
of interaction with the speaker, and a greater frequency of interaction, will
indeed tend to be referred to with H. But this higher attention is attached
to nearby items not because of their relative closeness but because of the im-
portance that often comes as a consequence of relative closeness. Yet by no
means do all proximate items accrue importance. It is crucial to realize that
most nearby items are not referred to at all; this alone would make it rather
difficult to argue that sheer proximity can cause reference by H.

The difficulties with Wilt's specific suggestions are discussed in the
following sections. It is my belief that the attention hypothesis remains su-
perior in explaining the actual usage of H and LE.

2. Wilt Neglects Data that Run Counter to his Hypotheses

2.1. Wilt's physical/temporal proximity hypothesis. Wilt's Appendix B is a
table that purports to show that there is an absolute correlation between
Proximity and H and Non-proximity and LE in quoted speech in KM chapters 1, 2,
and 6. Wilt says (p. 88) that he presents "a listing of the thirty-five H/LE
demonstratives used in the quoted speech of characters in KM, throughout three
chapters" and that it shows "a 100% correlation between H and spatial/tempo-
ral proximity of the referent and between LE and non-proximity". Although
the caption (p. 93) states that the table lists examples of H and LE from
quoted speech that "refer to a physical location or time period", Wilt lists
non-place referents as well as ones that are themselves places or times, e.g.
'this hole', 'this...letter', 'that homestead', as well as 'here', and 'these
days'. He organizes these data into a table that shows all examples of H in

the proximate column, all LE in the non-proximate.

However, Wilt neglects to include counterexamples. Following is a para-
graph containing two examples of the H demonstrative of which Wilt includes
only one in his table.

(1)   Counterexample not listed by Wilt: H-Sorcerers are distant
        (Their importance merits H.)

"Kazimoto," Kabenga alianza kunizungumzia, labda <u>wachawi hawa</u> wanatukalia
usiku, mimi leo mgongo unaniuma." Sikumjibu. "<u>Inaonekana</u> kwamba
wanakuogopa wewe," aliendelea. Sikumjibu. "<u>Siku hizi</u> wamekoma kufanya
matata," alisema tena. (KM 85)

'"Kazimoto," Kabenga began talking to me, "maybe H-sorcerers visit upon
us at night, today my back hurts me." I didn't reply. "It looks like
they are afraid of you," he continued. I didn't reply. "H-days they
have stopped causing trouble."'

Wilt lists 'H-days' and enters its H demonstrative in the "proximate" col-
umn as 'these days'. But inexplicably he does not list 'sorcerers' in his ta-
ble of examples.

Notice the passage makes clear that the sorcerers, referred to with H,
are not proximate in either place or time, a clear counterexample to the phy-
sical or temporal proximity hypothesis.

The sorcerers, further, are a very clear counterexample to Wilt's anaphor-
ic proximity rule that states "within-paragraph anaphoric ties are made with
H" (p. 90). By that measure, H-sorcerers are not even remotely proximate in
"anaphoric distance" for there is no prior reference in the preceding sen-
tences of the same paragraph. The passage about the sorcerers is itself the
beginning of the second paragraph of chapter 6. No mention of the sorcerers
is made even as "proximately" as in the chapter's first paragraph, nor is men-
tion made even in the preceding chapter. Yet reference is made with H.

These sorcerers are of great concern to the novel's characters throughout
the book; they are worthy of the characters' attention whether or not they are
physically near and whether their most recent prior mention is made on one
side or the other of a paragraph boundary. They are thus referred to with H.

I find two other, less striking, counterexamples that Wilt also neglected

to list. The first, mchezo huu [KM 18] 'H-play' is not occurring at the mo-
ment of speaking, but it will presently, and the speaker is urging his audi-
ence to pay full attention to the play when it does. The second, mambo haya
[KM 21] 'H-events' are not taking place at the moment of speaking, having oc-
curred the previous night. Mambo haya could also refer to 'H-matters' dis-
cussed most recently not within the same paragraph but rather in earlier par-
agraphs. It likely refers to both 'H-events' and 'H-matters', neither of
which is "proximate", yet each of which is of central concern both locally
and to the overall plotline and thematic structure of the novel.

2.2. <u>Wilt's anaphoric proximity hypothesis</u>. In support of this hypothesis,
Wilt attempts to demonstrate two skewings (p. 90): (1) H used for "within-
paragraph anaphoric ties", thus H within P in the table below; and (2) LE
used when the referent of the NP has been referred to most recently in a pre-
vious paragraph, thus LE across P.

    Wilt (p. 87) adduces the following skewing, based on data from a single
chapter of text:[2]

(2) Source: KM, chap. 6

	within P	across P
H	<u>35</u>	2
LE	2	<u>9</u>

    To support Wilt's claims, the data must of course skew towards the top
left cell and the bottom right cell, underlined. The skewings in this one
chapter support his hypothesis. But he neglects the other chapters discussed
in my paper, e.g. JM, chap. 1, a striking counterexample:

(3) Source: JM, chap. 1 [Kiango, S.D., 1974, *Jeraha la Moyo*. Nairobi:
             Foundation Books.]

	within P	across P
H	<u>8</u>	0
LE	38	<u>8</u>

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[2]See REFERENCES, p. 95, for full titles of sources.

Examination of data from all four chapters discussed in my paper further does not support Wilt's hypothesis, as the combined figures show:

(4)   Sources: KM, chap. 6; JM, chap. 1; MZ, chap. 9; MZ, chap. 7

	within P	across P
H	63	10
LE	70	48

So, Wilt sets out to show that anaphoric distance can explain the distribution of H and LE better than the new vs. old strategy of the attention hypothesis. He adduces data from one chapter that seem to support the anaphoric proximity hypothesis. He neglects the three other chapters that I used in the very count that he is attempting to discredit. These data do not support anaphoric distance at all. Thus, when the larger picture is examined anaphoric distance is not useful in explaining H and LE. However, all four chapters do show a correlation of H with new and LE with old [Leonard 1985:288], which supports the hypothesis that H means HIGH Concentration of Attention (COA) and LE means LOW Concentration of Attention. Once more we observe that the attention hypothesis is able to explain more data than the proximity hypothesis.

3.   Wilt Makes Unwarranted Claims and Assumptions.

Wilt erroneously assumes that since the title of chapter 7 of MZ is *Mfuko Mweusi* 'A Black Purse', any reference to the purse other than its being "most frequently referred to by H" cannot be adequately explained by the attention hypothesis. He also erroneously assumes that what he terms my Old/New "hypothesis" would demand that the purse be frequently referred to by LE, "since, after the first reference, the purse will be 'old' information". Wilt further claims that I "pay little attention to the conflicting predictions of these hypotheses" (p. 82).

Quite the contrary. Such concerns are discussed in the text, and then condensed in a footnote:

"All other things being equal a speaker will use H for new things and LE for old. But as we saw in the discussion on proximity, other things are often not equal—other factors can outweigh the noteworthiness that stems from newness [or proximity to speaker] or make an old item [or far-away

item] worthy of attention. Examples of the former include the deliber-
ate downplaying of a new item for thematic reasons as well as the intro-
duction of new but purely background items. Examples are.... Thus we do
not expect a 100% correlation between H and new, LE and old, just as we
do not expect (and most certainly do not find) a 100% correlation between
H and proximity, LE and non-proximity. By definition, the invariant *mean-
ing* of a form [is what] correlates 100% with the form's utterance. "New"
and "old", "proximate" and "non-proximate" are but categorizations of fac-
tors that tend to influence a speaker in his choice of H (HIGH COA) vs.
LE (LOW COA)." [Leonard 1985:289]

Wilt's other assumption that the attention hypothesis would predict more
H than LE on a referent named as a chapter title is much too mechanical and
simplistic a view of the situation. To appreciate what is going on in, for
example, the particular instance of chapter 7 of MZ, we must look at the total
pattern of grammatical attention, including the choice available to the speak-
er not to direct attention at all. We must also look at how the attention-at-
attracting position of the purse accrues to referents associated with it and
not just to the referent named *purse* alone.

As stated above, HIGH COA means "the hearer should concentrate the high-
est degree of attention on the referent". The use of LOW COA is an instruc-
tion that the hearer direct a lesser amount of attention than if HIGH COA were
signaled. It should be understood that LOW COA still directs appreciably more
attention than if no attention were directed at all. It is not generally not-
ed that most items mentioned in texts receive no grammatically-directed atten-
tion. In the chapter in question (not at all unique in this regard), literal-
ly scores of referents are merely mentioned, once, by a common noun. Far few-
er are referred to by a pronominal reference such as subject marker, object
marker, etc. Far fewer still are ever referred to by demonstratives. This
general distribution is borne out by count after count performed on different
texts. That an item is mentioned by a demonstrative at all is thus, relative
to the myriad other props, quite a singling out for attention.

Further, in the narrative portions of the chapter in question we find 6 H
and 15 LE, a total of 21 demonstratives. Of this total, 4 refer specifically
to the purse, 2 refer to the place the purse is found, 2 to the sides of the
purse, 4 to the document found in the purse, and 1 to what is written on that

document. Thus 13 of 21 instances of grammatically-related attention are directed to the purse, its location, and its contents (3 of 6 H, 10 of 15 LE).
Relative to all other props mentioned in this chapter, this is a great deal
of attention, quite appropriate for a central prop whose name is indeed the
chapter title.

Wilt notes that in the chapter in question quoted speech is more likely
to have H and narration more likely to have LE. It is true that in general,
quoted speech (and transcribed conversations) will contain relatively more
demonstratives and relatively more high-deictic demonstratives than will third
person narration. The characters are living through the situations so the
items they deal with are more important to them, and they therefore concentrate more attention than does a narrator who is not living through the situations. Although Wilt purports to have found a skewing that establishes discourse distance as a determiner of demonstrative choice, what he has done in
reality is to pick up on a few more variables on the importance scale.

4. Wilt Overlooks Subtle Thematic Interplays

Wilt contrasts (p. 86) two almost adjacent passages from KM. One, adduced in Leonard [1985], shows clearly the correlation between speaker's concern and degree of COA and further shows that this correlation is more important than physical proximity.

The second passage, Wilt claims, does not bear out this correlation.
This second passage is complex and subtle in its interplay among demonstrative, lack of demonstrative, and choice of noun. The pivotal distinction here
is between nyuki 'bee' and mdudu 'insect'. It would seem that Wilt considers them two words for the same thing. He thus misses the role of the demonstratives and the import of the passage.

Throughout this novel a central issue that obsesses the narrator is the
power and knowledge relation between God and human, on the one hand, and human and animal on the other (the very point of the first passage in question).
In the second passage, the correlation between speaker's concern and degree
of COA becomes clear when one realizes that the relation which is important
to the speaker is *God : human :: human : insect* and not *human : bee*. Mdudu

'insect' is referred to exclusively with H, HIGH COA. 'H-insect' is portrayed as making the author happy in its struggling for life. Nyukí 'bee' is referred to twice with LE, LOW COA, and twice with the bare noun. The 'bee', a bare noun with no COA, is an entity that gives up hope (alíkata tamaa). 'LE-bee', now an inert figure, is pulled from the water. 'To H-insect', the author realizes, "I had a strength that could not be comprehended. Perhaps H-example could help a human in understanding the mystery of God." Then doubt creeps in that there is a God—perhaps the all-powerful is just Time—and reference is made to a non-idealized 'LE-bee'. 'Insect' is a term at a higher level of abstraction and 'bee' is a particular instance of that abstraction.

This brief discussion no more than touches on the complexity of the passage. My intent simply was to outline a bit of the interplay between the grammatical forms and the thematic structure.

5. Conclusion

The preceding discussion has shown that not only does Wilt's hypothesis present considerable problems with data, it also rests on shaky conceptual grounds. I can find no justification for the claim that the different kinds of "proximity" are at all the same other than that they share the word "proximity". It is well-known that a single word can be used to refer to very different ideas. And indeed these are different ideas. It is unclear what motivates positing a single semantic substance that combines such disparate parameters as, on the one hand, "distance from a speaker" and, on the other hand, whether the referent "has been referred to most recently in a previous paragraph" (p. 87).

In the final analysis, proximity—even extended this way—cannot account for much of the data. As I stated in Leonard [1985], the attention hypothesis can explain all data that the proximity hypothesis can account for and it can explain data that the proximity hypothesis cannot. My conclusion then, and now, is that between the competing hypotheses, the one that better fits the linguistic facts is still the attention hypothesis.

REFERENCES

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