

SPATIAL DEIXIS IN JAHAI

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1. Introduction

Jahai, a language belonging to the Northern Aslian subgroup of the Aslian branch of Mon-Khmer, is spoken by some 1,000 individuals in the states of Perak and Kelantan, Peninsular Malaysia, and adjacent parts of southern Thailand. Being mobile foragers until recently, most Jahai speakers have now settled down in resettlement villages established by the Malaysian government. They are in frequent contact with speakers of Temiar, a Central Aslian language, and speakers of local dialects of Malay, the Austronesian majority language. Most speakers of Jahai are multilingual and have a good command of Temiar and Malay.

The present paper discusses spatial deixis in Jahai, specifically its multi-term system of demonstratives, and sets out from material collected by the author among speakers of Jahai in Kampung Sungai Banun, in the resettlement area of Air Banun, Hulu Perak district, in the state of Perak, Peninsular Malaysia, during the period 1998-2000.

1.1 Previous accounts

Brief reference to demonstratives is given by Schebesta (1928:809) in his early sketch of Jahai grammar. Three basic demonstrative terms reflecting three degrees of distance are introduced (reproduced here in Schebesta's original orthography): *aŋ* 'this', *ani* 'that' and *un* 'that yonder'. These are said to be linked to the pronoun or noun that they follow by means of *-t-* (cf. the present description in Section 2).

Other Aslian languages for which we have descriptions of demonstrative systems are Temiar (Benjamin 1976:161-63), Jah-Hut (Diffloth 1976:90) and Semelai (Kruspe 1999), and a summary is given by Matisoff (to appear). Peterson (1993; unseen by the author) discusses spatial locatives in Kensiw, a

close relative of Jahai. The present account forms part of a larger descriptive study of Jahai (Burenhult, in prep).

2. Demonstrative distinctions in Jahai: an overview

Like other Aslian languages, Jahai appears to attach great importance to deictic precision. This becomes particularly evident in spatial categorisation and is reflected linguistically in an elaborate system of demonstrative distinctions. This system emanates from a set of seven terms, what will be referred to here as ‘basic demonstratives’, corresponding in meaning roughly to the adverbial demonstratives of many European languages (‘here’ and ‘there’) but expressing further distinctions of distance, elevation and visibility of locations in relation to the speaker and the addressee. These demonstratives, in turn, provide the basis for an identically categorised system of demonstrative pronouns. This section provides a brief description and overview of these categories.

2.1 Basic demonstratives

Although the basic demonstratives may occur as free forms, they are usually found in combination with any of a set of four prepositional proclitics which express location at, motion to, motion from and similarity to the location designated by the basic demonstrative:

/ka-/	‘in/at’
/ba-/	‘to’
/can-/	‘from’
/pn-/	‘like’

The following paragraphs describe each of the seven basic demonstratives.

2.1.1 Speaker-anchored proximal /ʔəh/: PROX1.

This term typically refers to a location near the speaker relative to the addressee, or to the present location of both speaker and addressee: ‘here, near me/us’. Physical contact with the location referred to may have some significance. It is sometimes also used to refer to other locations if these are

contrasted with more distant locations and therefore considered to be relatively proximate.

2.1.2 Addressee-anchored proximal /ʔon/: PROX2.

In the immediate speech situation, this demonstrative is normally used to refer to the location of the addressee relative to the speaker: 'there, near you'. It also functions as an unmarked, 'neutral' demonstrative, which is used to refer to any location away from the speaker that is not saliently within the system of orientation and where more specific demonstratives therefore are not used, typically for geographically unspecified situations. It is also frequently used for anaphoric and sometimes temporal purposes.

2.1.3 Speaker-and/or-addressee-anchored medial /ʔün/: MED.

This typically refers to locations a short distance away from both speaker and addressee: 'there, a little away from me and/or you'.

2.1.4 Speaker-and/or-addressee-anchored distal /ʔani?/: DIST.

Like /ʔün/, this term refers to locations away from both speaker and addressee but usually at greater distance: 'there, far away from me and/or you'. The difference in degree of distance between medial /ʔün/ and distal /ʔani?/ is not apparent and commonly the same location may be referred to by either term. Relative distance is likely to play a role as these two demonstratives are often contrasted with each other. Thus, the same location may be referred to as /ʔün/ if discussed in relation to a more distant location, and as /ʔani?/ if discussed in relation to a more proximate location. Sometimes there seems to be no difference in degree of distance implied at all, and the two are used to simply contrast different medial or distal locations with each other.

2.1.5 Speaker-and/or-addressee-anchored invisible /ʔadeh/: INV.

This demonstrative is used to refer to nearby locations that are not visually accessible to the speaker and/or the addressee at the time of speaking, e.g. locations behind their backs or on the other side of some object: 'there, not visible to

you and/or me'. It may also refer to more distant locations, usually behind the speaker's back.

2.1.6 Speaker-and/or-addressee-anchored superjacent /ʔitih ~ ʔotih/: SUP.

This refers to locations situated higher than the speaker and/or the addressee, proximate and visible as well as distant and invisible, frequently in the sense of 'upstream': 'there, above you/me/us'. The allomorphs /ʔitih ~ ʔotih/ are in free variation and idiolectally determined.

2.1.7 Speaker-and/or-addressee-anchored subjacent /ʔujih/: SUB.

This term refers to locations situated lower than the speaker and addressee, proximate and visible as well as distant and invisible, frequently in the sense of 'downstream': 'there, below you/me/us'.

2.2 Demonstrative pronouns.

The demonstrative pronouns are based on the basic demonstratives and display the same seven distinctions of orientation. They are formed by replacing the initial glottal stop /ʔ/ of the basic demonstratives with /t/.

/təh/	'this, near me'
/ton/	'that, near you'; 'that [neutral]'
/tūn/	'that, a little away from you and me'
/taniʔ/	'that, far away from you and me'
/tadeh/	'that, not visible to you and/or me'
/titih/	'that, above you/me/us'
/tujih/	'that, below you/me/us'

Demonstrative pronouns may occur independently and then constitute full noun phrases:

ja-gej	təh	
IRR-eat	this.PROX1	'I will eat this'

Far more commonly, however, they make up modifiers of nouns or personal pronouns within complex noun phrases:

hajē?	tūn	
house	that.MED	‘that house’
ʔo?	ton	
3S	that.PROX2	‘that [one]’
tmpət	titih	
place	that.SUP	‘that place’
wəŋ	kʃih	je? təh
child	boy	1S this.PROX1 ‘this son of mine’

2.3 Subcategorisation of distinctions

It is possible to subcategorise the distinctions expressed in the systems of basic demonstratives and demonstrative pronouns along three separate semantic ‘dimensions’. First, the speaker- and addressee-anchored proximals, the medial and the distal may all be arranged in a distance-focused and primarily horizontal category.

Second, the superjacent and subjacent terms form a verticality-focused, distance-independent category, and, third, the term signalling invisibility is the single member of a perceptibility-focused category unmarked for distance and direction. Preliminary observations indicate that there may be some restrictions as to the possibility of combining members of these different categories in constructions like ‘from here to there’, especially distance-focused terms with verticality-focused ones, but no firm conclusions can be drawn at this stage.

3. Spatial distribution of demonstrative referents

In order to chart the use of demonstrative distinctions and study their occurrence in relation to referents in real space, video recordings of story-telling as well as spontaneous conversation have been tentatively analysed. Instances of basic demonstratives or demonstrative pronouns are usually

accompanied by other types of deictic information – notably gestures but also helpful linguistic information such as names of referents (in the form of nouns, proper names, toponyms etc.) – which make it possible to plot the referents onto an illustration of the speaker and the surrounding environment and, if necessary, a map of the area covering the domain of spatial reference. The use of different symbols for the seven demonstrative distinctions provides an informative picture of their use in relation to the location of referents.

Only two limited sequences have been analysed for the present purpose, one involving story-telling and one of spontaneous conversation, and although the distribution of referents shows clear patterns, it should be kept in mind that the recorded instances represent only a limited portion of demonstrative usage and the results obtained must be regarded as highly tentative.

3.1 Sequence 1: story-telling

This sequence, two minutes and fifteen seconds long, forms part of a longer sequence of story-telling by a middle-aged Jahai man and was selected because it contains numerous instances of basic demonstratives and demonstrative pronouns (a total of 35) representing all of the seven spatial demonstrative distinctions present in Jahai. However, the single example in this sequence of the subjacent demonstrative was not accompanied by any additional deictic information, which made it impossible to identify the location of its referent.

The story is what the Jahai refer to as *cnel*, an ancestral tale about the Jahai of the distant past, often involving myths of creation, and this particular sequence is about a group of people digging tubers and cutting bamboo in the forest. The story-teller uses available objects and gestures to illustrate his narrative, and it should be noted that spatial reference in this sequence is mainly abstract, the speaker enacting the parts of the people in the story, which is set in a spatially and temporally very different situation. Some sample sentences from this sequence are given here to exemplify the use of basic demonstratives and demonstrative pronouns:

1. wa-des ʔoʔ, tɪmpat ʔoʔ taniʔ,
 IRR.3S-move 3S place 3S that.DIST
 wa-des can-ʔūn wa-des
 IRR.3S-move from-there.MED IRR.3S-move

cn-ʔadeh
 from-there.INV

‘He would move it. That was its place. He would move it from over there and he would move it from back there’.

2. ʔoʔ sej ba-ʔaniʔ, ʔoʔ sej ba-ʔūn
 3S shove to-there.DIST 3S shove to-there.MED

ba-ʔǎh
 to-here.PROX1

‘He shoved it over there, over there and over here’.

3. hɛj pɛk can-ʔǎh, boh, pɛk
 1D chop from-here.PROX1 put chop

can-ʔǎh, boh ba-ʔǎh,
 from-here.PROX1 put to-here.PROX1

pɛk ba-ʔǎh, boh pn-ʔǎh,
 chop to-here.PROX1 put like-here.PROX1

pɛk pn-ʔūn, ʔoʔ boh pn-ʔūn
 chop like-there.MED 3S put like-there.MED

‘We chopped off a piece from here and put it down. Chopped from here, and put it here. Chopped here, and put it like this. He chopped like that, and put it like that’.

3.1.1. Results.

The sequence illustrates well the spatial distinctions outlined in Section 2 but also contains some interesting examples of discourse-determined usage of demonstratives (see Figure 1).

Instances of speaker-anchored proximal terms are clearly associated with referents located in close proximity to the speaker, and in most cases he is in direct physical contact with these referents, real or imagined.

The distribution of referents associated with addressee-anchored proximal terms is restricted to an area in front of the speaker, consistently beyond the spatial scope of the speaker-anchored proximal terms. The speaker is rarely in direct physical contact with these referents; gestures instead suggest that they are 'just out of reach'. The text indicates that the part enacted by the speaker interacts with another role figure sitting opposite, which would explain the use of addressee-anchored terms in this context.

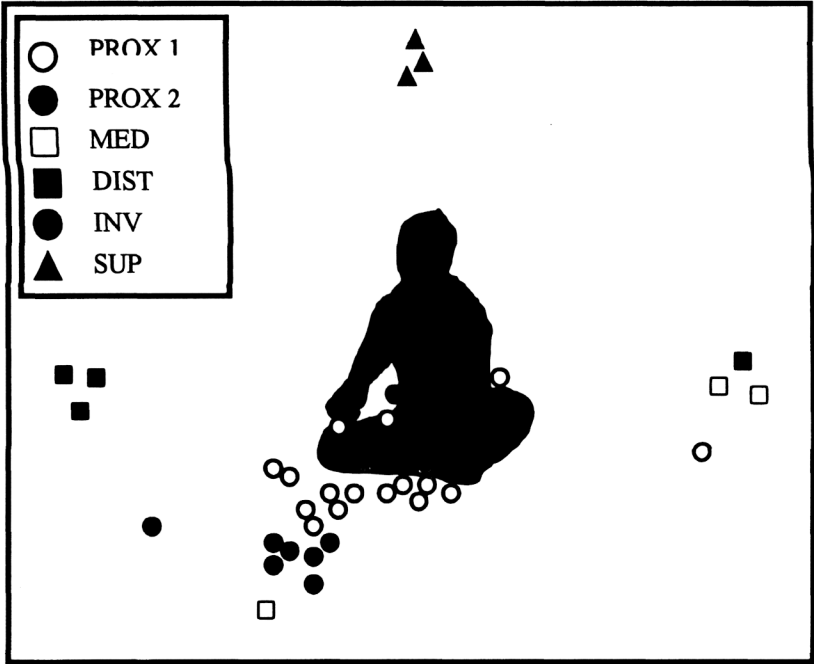


Figure 1. Distribution of referents of demonstratives in Sequence 1.

Medial and distal terms are not so frequent and, with one exception (a medial associated with a referent located in front of the speaker, just outside the spatial scope of the addressee-anchored terms), they are confined to a single passage in which the speaker tells of how people move objects in two different directions. With one exception, the medial terms are associated with referents located to his left, whereas the distal terms are used with referents to his right. It is difficult to estimate the (imagined) location of these referents, but gaze and gestures suggest that they are located at some distance. Importantly, there appears to be no difference in distance implied between medial and distal terms here; instead, they are used to contrast referents moving in opposite directions.

The sequence contains one example of the demonstrative signalling invisibility. This is associated with a referent located just behind the speaker's back. Three instances of superjacent terms are associated with a referent located at some distance straight above the speaker.

3.2 Sequence 2: spontaneous conversation

The second sequence studied covers thirty minutes of spontaneous conversation. The central figure of this conversation is the middle-aged headman (*punghuluh*) of the village, and it is his use of demonstrative distinctions that has been analysed here. The centre of attention is a copy of an article written by Cornelia van der Sluys, a Dutch anthropologist who studied the Jahai in the early 1990s (van der Sluys 1999), and the topic of conversation are two pictures showing Jahai people from a different and still mobile group known to the inhabitants of Kampung Sungai Banun. The conversational situation is rather dynamic, with new participants successively joining in and the article being passed around.

Two types of conversational interaction may be discerned. One of them, characteristic of much of the first half of the sequence, is largely focused on the pictures in the article. Holding up the article, the headman points at and comments on the pictures. The article is then passed around to other participants in the conversation, and then the pictures are commented on from a distance by the headman. Reference is

here mainly restricted to interactional space. In the second half of the sequence, however, the headman's attention shifts from the pictures to places associated with the people in them. Reference is now largely made to distant, identifiable locations where these people have moved, lived, died and so on; that is, reference is made far beyond interactional space.

3.2.1 Results

3.2.1.1 Referents within interactional space. In the parts where reference is mainly restricted to interactional space, the spatial distribution of referents corresponds well with the distinctions outlined in Section 2. Two distinctions dominate: the speaker-anchored proximal and the addressee-anchored proximal. In an overwhelming number of instances, the former is associated with referents located in close proximity to the speaker and, again, physical contact between speaker and referent appears to have some significance. This is particularly apparent when the speaker is holding the article and pointing to the pictures. The addressee-anchored proximal is used as soon as an addressee is holding the article and the speaker is not in physical contact with it. The location associated with the addressee-anchored proximal terms shifts as the referent is passed on to another addressee.

A few exceptions involving the use of speaker-anchored proximal terms when the referent (the pictures) is located near a third person are restricted to situations where the addressee is saliently further away from the speaker than the referent is. Correspondingly, a single instance of the medial demonstrative occurs when the referent is located near a third person away from the speaker and the addressee.

3.2.1.2. Referents beyond interactional space. In the second type of conversational interaction, where reference is made to distant locations beyond interactional space, the use of demonstrative distinctions takes on a different character. Several toponyms are introduced in the discourse, all of which become associated with successively growing sets of demonstrative distinctions. Depending on the context, a place

may be associated with more than one distinction as the point of reference changes (see Figure 2).

Speaker-anchored proximal terms are almost exclusively associated with two places, Bukek (/bkek/) and Pulau Tujuh (/pulɔw tuʒoh/), located in close proximity to each other some 8-10 kilometres from the location of the speaker. They are not more proximate than some of the other places discussed, which are referred to by other demonstrative distinctions, so relative proximity to the location of the speaker is probably not the reason why speaker-anchored proximal terms are preferred. Instead, their use is probably determined by the fact that these two places are closely associated with the people in the pictures.

Similarly, a place called Tekam (/tkam/), located upriver from Bukek and Pulau Tujuh, is associated with the superjacent distinction when discussed in relation to these two places. Earlier in the discourse, however, when Tekam is referred to in relation to the location of the speaker, it is associated with the medial distinction or, when the speaker is turned in the opposite direction, the invisible form.

Two locations situated at high altitude east of the location of the speaker, Mangga (/maŋəh/) and Kelap (/klap/), are varyingly referred to with superjacent, speaker-anchored proximal and addressee-anchored proximal terms. The superjacent distinction is most likely the unmarked form in this particular context, considering the difference in altitude between location of speaker and location of referent. The speaker-anchored proximal distinction is used twice when Mangga is implicitly contrasted with a third location, and it may be of some significance here that Mangga is situated in the traditional home area of the speaker. Addressee-anchored proximal terms are consistently used in their spatially neutral, mostly anaphoric sense (see 2.1.2.).

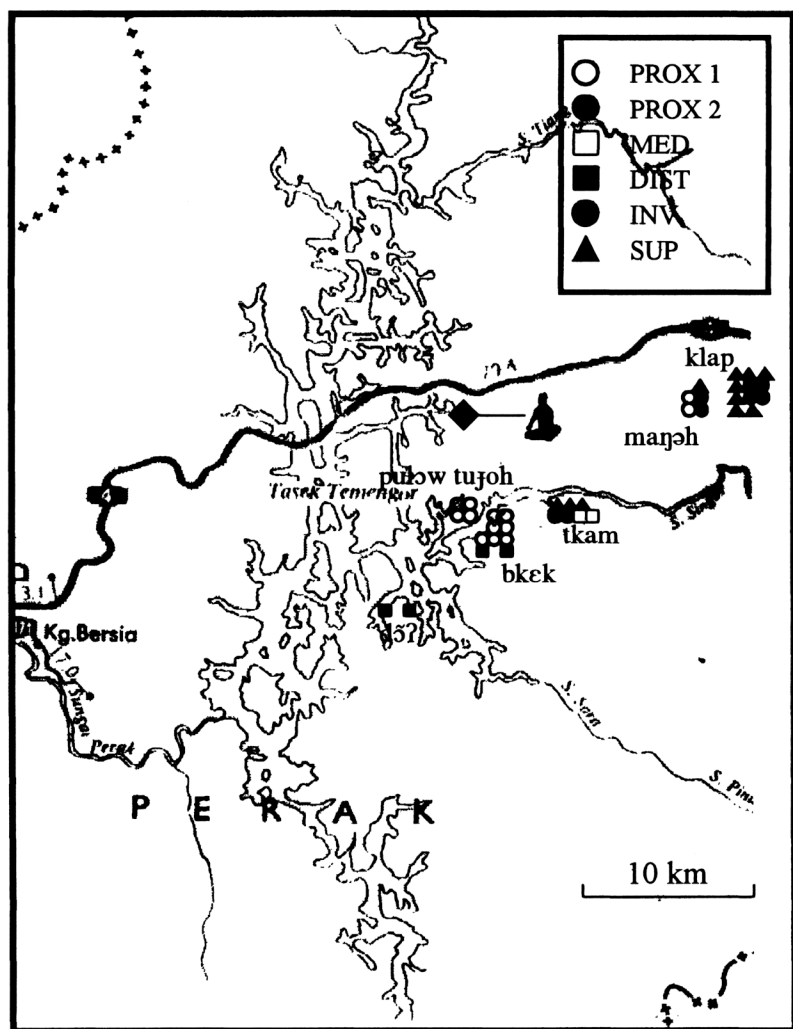


Figure 2. Map of Hulu Perak showing geographical distribution of referents of demonstratives beyond interactional space in Sequence 2.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to provide a description of the multi-term system of demonstrative distinctions in Jahai and to present a limited and tentative study of their use, based on video recordings of story-telling and spontaneous conversation. Seven distinctions were described, which could be organised into three separate dimensions of distance (four terms), verticality (two terms) and perceptibility (one term).

To a great extent, the spatial distribution of referents was shown to be consistent with the spatial distinctions of the demonstratives used, especially in situations where reference was restricted to interactional space. However, the study also suggests that the point of reference may be relocated from its prototypical position in response to e.g. a shift of focus. This appeared particularly apparent in reference beyond interactional space and was indicated by the use of speaker-anchored proximal terms to refer to a distant location which was considered particularly significant and the centre of the story. Other locations were then related to this new point of reference, leading to a complete displacement of the system of spatial reference.

Finally, the complex system of demonstrative distinctions provides a rich source of oppositions with which speakers can and do create multiple referential contrasts. Thus, prototypically spatial distinctions may be used for primarily contrastive purposes. The significance of the multi-term system of demonstratives as a means of elaborating information structure in Jahai discourse should not be underestimated.

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