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**MY PLACE OR YOURS? MENTAL SPACES AND THE VARIATION
OF CROATIAN SPATIAL DEMONSTRATIVES**

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Abstract

Demonstratives are central to communication, anchoring reference and facilitating joint attention. Because of this role, their meaning might be expected to remain stable. Yet Croatian presents a striking case: multiple (seemingly incompatible) demonstrative paradigms coexist, specifically for place demonstratives, with *ovdje* and *tu* often overlapping and *tamo* partly encroaching on *ovdje*. At first sight the system appears chaotic, but it is better understood as an evolving complex system.

Drawing on illustrative usage data from online fora, frequency information from an existing web corpus, and previous semantic analyses, this paper examines how communication remains effective despite such variation. Within a mental-spaces framework, demonstratives are shown to function as highly schematic symbolic units that enable interlocutors to align mental spaces even when different forms are chosen.

The findings identify three principles that safeguard communicative success: Innate Flexibility of deictic words, Systemic Flexibility of the Croatian paradigm, and Conceptual Flexibility in mental-space construal. Demonstrative meaning is therefore dynamically construed, illustrating that even in deixis, language has room for change.

Keywords: deixis; mental spaces; Croatian spatial demonstratives; semantic variation; construal.

“Bringing about Armageddon can be dangerous. Do not attempt it in your own home.” (Gaiman and Pratchett 2011: 8)

1 Introduction

When translating between English and Croatian, the intricacy of the Croatian demonstrative system quickly becomes apparent. *Here* may be rendered as *ovdje* or *tu*; *there* may be expressed as *ondje* or *tamo*; directional forms such as *tuda* or *ovuda* add further complexity. What appears chaotic at first sight is better understood, following Kordić (2003), as an evolving complex system. Croatian speakers do not operate with a single fixed paradigm but with overlapping systems whose internal variation is nonetheless systematic.

Demonstratives are central to human communication. They provide the linguistic equivalent of the pointing gesture, directing interlocutors' attention to entities in the discourse or surrounding environment. In doing so, they not only disambiguate reference but also help manage the flow of information, signalling what should remain active in working memory (Diessel 2006; Givón 1989). From a cognitive perspective, demonstratives serve as anchors between *symbolic structures* and the *discourse ground*, encompassing time, space, and interpersonal context (Langacker 1987, 2008).

This study adopts the *mental-spaces* framework (Fauconnier 1985, 1997; Fauconnier and Turner 2002) to explain how such anchoring works. Communication rests on interlocutors' ability to construe compatible mental spaces: temporary, working-memory assemblies that integrate linguistic prompts with sensory cues, and are thus *per definitionem* context-bound (see also Marmaridou 2000). Successful communication presupposes that speakers share both a *symbolic inventory* and a mental representation of the discourse situation. Within these spaces, demonstratives function as highly schematic *symbolic units*, linking linguistic form to immediate experience and thereby enabling rapid alignment between participants.

Given this central role, one might expect demonstrative usage to be exceptionally stable. Yet in Croatian, multiple competing systems coexist. Traditional grammars describe a three-way opposition (*ovdje–tu–ondje* for static spatial demonstratives), but usage shows frequent overlap between *ovdje* and *tu*, as well as between *tamo* and *ondje*. Some scholars have suggested a merger or redistribution of functions (Brala and Matešić 2015; Kordić 2003; Žic-Fuchs 1996). Crucially,

however, communication does not break down, even when speakers adhere to different paradigms.

This paradox raises the central research question: How can variation in demonstratives still lead to successful communication? The working hypothesis advanced here is that demonstrative meaning is not fixed but negotiated dynamically, depending on discourse context, interlocutors' backgrounds, and register.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical background in cognitive linguistics. Section 3 presents the Croatian system and current shifts in usage. Section 4 analyses examples of demonstrative use within a mental-spaces framework. Section 5 discusses the broader implications, and Section 6 concludes by reconsidering the notion of the "ideal speaker" and pointing to avenues for future research.

2 Theoretical background

Demonstratives are among the most context-sensitive elements of language. Unlike lexical words, their meaning is inseparable from the communicative act in which they are used. They index the discourse situation directly, functioning as verbal pointers that establish and maintain *joint attention* (Diessel 2006; cf. Innis 1982 on Bühler's *deictic field* [*Zeigfeld*] within the *organon model* [*Organon-Modell*]). In doing so, they not only designate referents but also help regulate turn-taking, mark information status, and ease the flow of discourse (Brala-Vukanović 2015).

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, this centrality can be explained through the theory of *mental spaces* (Fauconnier 1985, 1997; Fauconnier and Turner 2002). Mental spaces are temporary, working-memory assemblies constructed during communication. They are distinct from linguistic structures themselves, but arise through the guidance of linguistic prompts combined with contextual and sensory cues. As Lakoff's (1987) notion of *idealised cognitive models* suggests, such spaces provide structured templates for conceptualising experience. As Langacker (1987, 2008) emphasises, meaning is not stored and retrieved but dynamically construed.

Successful communication presupposes that interlocutors can coordinate their mental spaces. This requires sharing (i) a symbolic inventory of linguistic signs and (ii) a mental representation of the discourse situation, construed from

linguistic clues and individual experience. Meaning is not retrieved but construed dynamically, with both participants adapting their representations as the discourse unfolds (Langacker 1987, 2008), smoothing out inconsistencies, and ultimately attempting to construct compatible mental spaces.

Langacker's *symbolic account of language* frames this process more generally. Language is a system of symbolic structures: conventional pairings of form and meaning motivated by general cognitive processes (Langacker 2008). Within this system, symbolic units may be more or less schematic. A detailed description (e.g. "the tall man carrying linoleum rolls") prompts a narrow search, while a pronoun ("he") offers only a schematic pointer, with possible middle-ground options ("the man") used when appropriate. Demonstratives represent an extreme case of schematicity: they provide almost no conceptual content, instead directing interlocutors to locate the referent in the shared mental space.

This schematicity explains their efficiency but also their variability. Demonstratives connect symbolic structures with sensory cues, linking the linguistic system to the discourse ground of time, space, and interpersonal relations. Because their interpretation depends so heavily on context, they are inherently flexible. Variation in their use therefore reflects not a breakdown of the system but the adaptability of mental-space construction in real-time interaction.

3 Croatian spatial demonstratives

3.1 *Traditional paradigm*

Standard Croatian grammars describe a three-way distinction of proximal (*ovdje* 'here'), medial (*tu* 'there'), and distal (*ondje* 'yonder'), each paired with dynamic forms expressing direction (*ovamo–tamo–onamo*) or path (*ovuda–tuda–onuda*) (Barić et al. 1979, 1990, 1995; Brabec et al. 1963; Maretić 1963; Raguž 1997; Silić and Pranjković 2005). This symmetrical paradigm, often presented in tabular form (see also Brala-Vukanović 2015), provides a neat structural description. The following tables, taken over from Brala and Matešić 2015, provide a useful overview of both the paradigm based on the norm, and the revised usage-based one.

| DEMONSTRATIVES | | | proximal | medial | distal | Semantic elements | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|-----------------|
| WHO | PRONOUNS* (referential identification) - WHAT | Koji? What? / Which one?) | OVAJ | TAJ | ONAJ | referential identification in its 'primitive' referential sense (not indexical) | |
| | | Kolik? (Of what size?) | OVOLIK | TOLIK | ONOLIK | referential qualification through 'quantification' | |
| | | Kakav? (Of what type?) | OVAKAV | TAKAV | ONAKAV | referential qualification | |
| WHEN – WHERE | ADVERBS (referential location (static and dynamic) MOTION / DYNAMIC (KINETIC) | LOCATION | Gdje? (Where?) (with static verbs) | OVDJE Here | TU There | ONDJE Over there | POINT STATIC |
| | | Kamo? (Where to?) (with motion verbs) | OVAMO Over here | TAMO Over there | ONAMO (All the way) over there | POINT MOTION GOAL | |
| | | Kuda? (Which way?) | OVUDA, Toward here | TUDA Toward there | ONUDA Toward 'over there' | LINE MOTION DIRECTION TO(WARD) | |
| | | Odakle? (From what point?) | ODAVDE, From here | ODATLE From there | ODANDE From over there | POINT MOTION SOURCE | |
| | | Dokle? 1) 'SPATIAL' (To what point in space?) ----- 2) 'TEMPORAL' (To which point in time?) | DOVDE Up to here | DOTLE Up to there ----- Up to then | DONDE Up to (neither here nor there but) 'over there' | FROM - TO (SOURCE - GOAL) → UP TO ; SEGMENT, MOTION | |
| | | Dokuda? | → Dokle 1)** | | | FROM - TO (SOURCE - GOAL) → UP TO ; SEGMENT, MOTION | |
| PRESENTATIVE (mode of predication) | PARTICLES (sentential, discourse demonstratives) | | EVO | ETO | ENO | POINT but referring to entire discourse / event units (e. g. introducing them / giving emphasis / politeness effect) | |
| | Presentatives (in space or discourse) | | | | | | |

| DEMONSTRATIVES | | | | Semantic elements | | |
|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| | | proximal | distal | | | |
| WHO | PRONOUNS* (referential identification) - WHAT | <i>Koji?</i> What? / Which one?) | <i>OVAJ, TAJ</i> | <i>TAJ, ONAJ</i> | referential identification in its 'primitive' referential sense (not indexical) | |
| | | <i>Kolik?*</i> (Of what size?) | <i>OVOLIK, TOLIK</i> | <i>TOLIK, ONOLIK</i> | referential qualification through 'quantification' | |
| | | <i>Kakav?</i> (Of what type?) | <i>OVAKAV, TAKAV</i> | <i>TAKAV, ONAKAV</i> | referential qualification | |
| WHEN → WHERE | ADVERBS (referential location (static and dynamic)) | LOCATION / STATIC | <i>Gdje?</i> (Where?) (with static verbs) | <i>OVDJE, TU</i> Here | <i>TAMO</i> (Over) there | POINT STATIC |
| | | MOTION / DYNAMIC | <i>Kamo?</i> (Where to?) (with motion verbs) | <i>OVAMO</i> (Over) here | <i>TAMO</i> (All the way) over there | POINT MOTION GOAL |
| | | | <i>Kuda?</i> (Which way?) | <i>OVUDA, TUDA</i> Toward here | <i>TUDA, ONUDA</i> Toward (over) there | LINE MOTION DIRECTION TO(WARD) |
| | | | <i>Odakle? Otkud(a)?</i> (From what point or direction?) | <i>ODAVDE, DOVUD(A), OTUD(A)</i> From here, From this direction | <i>OTAMO, od tamo, ODANDE, ODONUD(A), ODATLE</i> From (over) there, From that direction (over there) | POINT MOTION SOURCE LINE DIRECTION FROM |
| | | | <i>Dokud(a)?</i> 'SPATIAL' (To what point in space?) | <i>DOVDE, do ovdje, do tu, do ovuda, do tuda</i> Up to here | <i>DONDE, do tamo, do ondje</i> Up to (over) there <i>DOTLE***</i> | FROM - TO (SOURCE - GOAL) → UP TO ; SEGMENT (DIRECTED), MOTION |
| | | | <i>Dokle?</i> 'TEMPORAL' (To which point in time?) | <i>do sad(a)</i> Up to now | <i>DOTLE, do tad, do onda</i> Up to then | |
| | | PRESENTATIVE (mode of predication) | PARTICLES (discoursal) | Presentative (bringing 'in sight' either visual or discoursal) | proximo-distal <i>EVO, ETO, (ENO)</i> | POINT (pragmatic) |

3.2 *Usage and shift*

Usage, however, diverges from this idealised model, bringing to mind Geoffrey Sampson's (1997) quip about meaning's habit of escaping boxes. Studies have documented a shift from the three-way opposition toward a two-way system in which proximal and medial forms overlap (Brala and Matešić 2015; Kordić 2003; Žic-Fuchs 1996). Some analyses suggest that *ovdje* and *tu* have distinct scopes of use (*ovdje* marking emphasis, *tu* serving as default or anaphoric), while others describe a more general merger.

This stated intricacy becomes even clearer when sociolinguistic factors are considered. Many Kajkavian dialect speakers view *ovdje* as merely a more formal alternative to *tu*, while rural Štokavian speakers often adhere more closely to the old system. The situation in Zagreb, already noted by Žic-Fuchs (1996), seems especially complex, with speakers mixing elements from multiple paradigms.

3.3 *Corpus evidence*

Corpus data confirm this coexistence rather than obsolescence. According to CLASSLA-web.hr (2024), *tu* occurs 1,398,385 times, *ovdje* 950,522 times, *tamo* 755,700 times, and *ondje* 94,788 times. While *ondje* is far less frequent than its competitors, its presence remains significant. Furthermore, as dominant as *tu* has become (far outweighing its normative role), *ovdje* remains ubiquitous, in line with Kordić's (2003) suggestion of structural re-arrangement. These figures demonstrate that *ovdje* and *ondje* are far from obsolete; instead, they compete with *tu* and *tamo* in an evolving distribution.

3.4 *Forum examples*

To explore this question, I draw on selected examples from Croatian internet fora, collected opportunistically and used illustratively. This choice reflects both practical and theoretical considerations: demonstratives occur in both spoken (primarily exophoric) and written (primarily endophoric) language, yet existing corpora under-represent informal spoken interaction. Online fora, by contrast, capture a hybrid register: written yet conversational, informal yet persistent, with contributions from speakers of diverse backgrounds and dialects. While such material cannot substitute for systematic spoken corpora, it offers a valuable window into naturally occurring usage at the interface of speech and writing. At present,

this is the closest we can come to observing this type of usage in situ, pending further research.

Examples illustrate the fluidity of use (deictic words highlighted in bold by the author):

(1) Vi na datum roka morate **ovdje** uploadati svoj rad.

‘By the deadline you must upload your work **here**.’

(2) ... ali nije to tema pa mi je malo glupo **tu** uploadat screenove.

‘...but that’s not the topic so it feels a bit silly to upload [the] screenshots **here**.’

(3) Pošto vjerojatno imaš Face account, bilo bi zgodno da **ondje** uploadaš.

‘Since you probably have [a] Facebook account, [it] would be convenient for you to upload it **there**.’

(4) Piše ti FILE MANAGER. **tamo** uploadas.

It says to/for you FILE MANAGER. **There** you upload [it].

‘It says FILE MANAGER. Upload it **there**.’

(5) Tu sam, ne odlazim. Kako god ovo završilo, ostajem **ovdje**.

‘I’m here, I’m not leaving. However this ends, I’m staying **here**.’

3.5 *Note on data and interim summary*

The picture that emerges from the examples analysed herein is not one of chaos but of structured (admittedly complex) variety. Speakers draw on multiple coexisting paradigms, switching flexibly among them without jeopardising comprehension. The persistence of less frequent forms (*ovdje*, *ondje*) alongside dominant ones (*tu*, *tamo*) highlights systemic flexibility rather than decay.

At this point it should be emphasised that the present study is qualitative in nature. Frequency information from the CLASSLA-web.hr corpus and hand-picked examples from online *fora* are used solely to illustrate the phenomena under discussion. This paper does not aspire to provide a comprehensive account of online usage of Croatian demonstratives, nor does it claim representativeness in a corpus-linguistic sense. Rather, the examples serve to demonstrate how competing forms function in actual usage and how speakers negotiate reference despite paradigm variation.

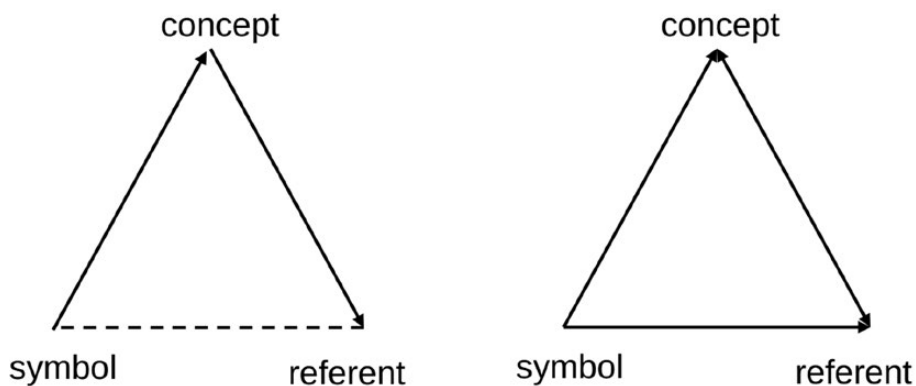
Accordingly, the aim is not to supplant existing descriptive paradigms, except insofar as to urge caution when a complete replacement of one system by another is proposed. The central question addressed here is therefore the following: How can communication remain effective when interlocutors do not share the same paradigm? Section 4 addresses this question through a mental-spaces analysis.

4 Illustrative data and analysis

The central question addressed in this paper is how communication remains effective when interlocutors operate with different demonstrative paradigms. This section addresses the question through a theory-driven analysis illustrated with selected usage examples. The examples are drawn from online *fora* (see 3.4), and serve to demonstrate naturally occurring variation in demonstrative use, while conceptual models of reference and previous semantic analyses of Croatian demonstratives provide the analytical framework.

4.1 Reference mechanisms: lexical vs. deictic items

To clarify the distinctive role of demonstratives, it is useful to contrast them with lexical referring expressions. Lexical items activate a semantic concept, which the hearer then matches against possible referents in the discourse situation. Demonstratives, by contrast, shortcut this process: they prompt the hearer to search directly in the shared mental space, guided by discourse and sensory cues. This difference can be represented with two reference triangles (Kresojević 2021): one for lexical items, where meaning passes through conceptual content (Figure 1), and one for deictic items (Figure 2), where a highly schematic cue anchors reference to the speech situation and triggers an immediate search in the current discourse space (CDS). In the first case, the hearer activates a relatively specific (concrete) concept and then looks for a matching referent in CDS. In the second, the hear-

**Figure 1. Reference triangle for lexical items****Figure 2. Reference triangle for deictic items**

er activates only a schematic pointer, which immediately launches the search in CDS; the richer concept is then filled in by contextual and perceptual information.

This perspective helps explain why demonstrative variation does not lead to breakdown. Even if different forms are chosen (e.g. *ovdje* vs. *tu*), both instruct the hearer to locate a referent within a tightly delimited CDS and both enable rapid alignment of mental spaces. Selecting a “non-preferred” form in a given context may add a minor processing step – hence why it may be noticed – yet the deictic mechanism is fast and robust enough that reference is still resolved efficiently.

4.2 *Semantic overlap: the case of ovdje and tu*

Previous work (Kresojević 2023) has examined the differential semantic elements of *ovdje* and *tu* using the framework of *principled polysemy* (Bergen and Plauché 2005). The semantic pole of each symbolic unit consists of a radial category, with multiple senses radiating from a central prototype. Crucially, their networks overlap in a shared “Inclusive Deictic” sense, where both forms signal the construal of equivalent spatial scene. This overlap provides a cognitive basis for the observed interchangeability of *ovdje* and *tu*, and helps account for the gradual shift from a three-way to a two-way paradigm of static spatial demonstratives.

The forum data confirm this overlap in practice: speakers readily alternate between the two forms, often in near-identical contexts, without signalling confusion or hesitation. For instance, one forum participant writes ‘Vi na datum roka

morate *ovdje* uploadati svoj rad,' while another, in a comparable context, uses *tu*: '... ali nije to tema pa mi je malo glupo *tu* uploadat screenove.' The two expressions designate the same spatial scene, namely the (part of) a web page where it is possible to upload content, differing only in form. A fuller semantic analysis might reveal subtle distinctions that remain productive, but such discussion lies beyond the present scope. The important point here is that the overlap suffices to explain how the system functions in actual usage, with the persistence of both forms despite their functional convergence underscoring the system's flexibility.

4.3 *Dynamically constructing compatible mental spaces*

The explanatory power of mental spaces theory becomes clear when we consider how interlocutors negotiate meaning despite form variation. A static demonstrative designates a spatial configuration relative to the interlocutors. This anchors the construed spatial scene to a reference point within the current discourse space. While the paths of construal may differ – one speaker choosing *tu*, another *ovdje* – the resulting mental spaces remain compatible. Each participant grounds the reference in their own perspective, but the overlap of contextual cues ensures that the construed scenes converge.

This dynamic process can be illustrated by exchanges such as:

(6) Gdje je torba? - Tu kod mene.

'Where is [the] bag? - Here with me.' [spoken from one room to another]

For the locutor, the construal centres on themselves (see Figure 3) and includes the collocutor. For the collocutor – adhering to a more traditional paradigm – *tu* may initially be construed as centred on their own position, potentially even excluding the Lc. Rapid contextual adjustment, however, allows them to reinterpret the utterance as including the speaker. The result is successful alignment: two slightly different, yet compatible, mental spaces anchored to the same communicative ground.

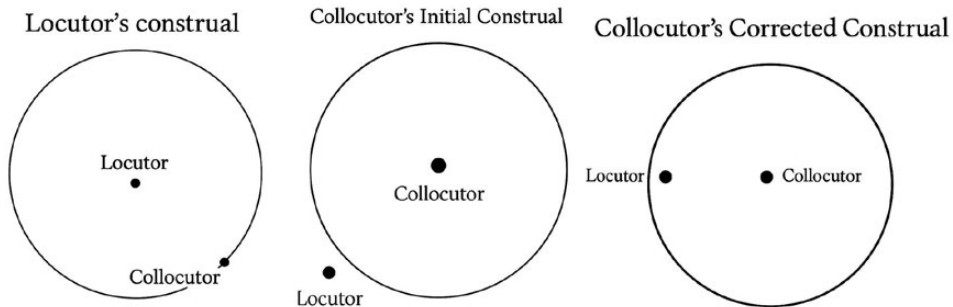


Figure 3. Dynamic construal of “Tu kod mene”

4.4 *A joint picture*

Three principles emerge from this analysis, each preventing communication breakdown. First, *innate flexibility*: the schematic nature of deictic words allows wide scope in referent activation. Second, *systemic flexibility*: Croatian tolerates coexistence of multiple paradigms, enabling speakers to mix and match without friction. Third, *conceptual flexibility*: interlocutors can construe different but ultimately compatible spatial scenes, as demonstrated in the forum data and in everyday usage (see also Tyler and Evans 2003).

Together, these principles show that variation in Croatian demonstratives is not an obstacle but a resource. Meaning is dynamically construed within shared mental spaces, with demonstratives serving as efficient but adaptable anchors between language and context. In other words, demonstratives function effectively, safeguarded by three forms of flexibility.

5 Discussion

The analysis above shows that Croatian demonstratives, despite apparent instability, function effectively, safeguarded by three forms of flexibility. This finding has broader implications both for the study of deixis and for cognitive approaches to meaning construal.

5.1 *Demonstratives as dynamic anchors*

As shown, demonstratives are not static labels but dynamic anchors linking linguistic form to discourse context. Their schematicity explains both their effi-

ciency and their openness to variation. Because they connect symbolic structure directly with perceptual and discourse cues, they can shift in meaning without losing their communicative function.

From a prescriptive standpoint, this can appear problematic: variation is often interpreted as decline or “incorrect” usage. Yet the Croatian case proves otherwise. Demonstratives, despite being presented in descriptive grammars as fixed elements in a tidy paradigm, thrive in the complexity of actual linguistic ecology, with multiple overlapping systems coexisting in practice. Grammarians themselves are often aware of this discrepancy, yet remain unable to account for it. What appears inconsistent from a normative perspective is, in fact, a natural consequence of their schematicity and context-dependence, with meaning negotiated in real time. Variation is therefore not a flaw in the system but a predictable feature of its operation.

A living language does not leap abruptly from paradigm 1 to paradigm 2. It evolves, sustains periods of overlap, and adjusts dynamically through usage. Language is constantly evolving on all levels, and owing to the principles of flexibility even so sensitive a domain as demonstratives has room for adaptation.

5.2 *Rethinking the ideal speaker*

Traditional accounts of linguistic competence assume that an “ideal speaker” masters a fixed paradigm. The Croatian case challenges this assumption. Communication succeeds even when interlocutors rely on different, partly overlapping systems. Competence here is better understood not as the internalisation of a rigid code but as the ability to construe compatible mental spaces dynamically.

This reframing undermines the prescriptive model in which competence equals adherence to a single paradigm. Croatian demonstrates that competence resides in the capacity to negotiate meaning flexibly, drawing on a repertoire of overlapping forms. A living language does not discard one system overnight and replace it with another. It accommodates extended periods of overlap, during which speakers navigate among multiple paradigms with ease. What appears disorderly from the outside is in fact a display of adaptability: the ability of speakers to maintain communication across systemic variation.

5.3 *Broader cognitive implications*

At a cognitive level, Croatian demonstratives highlight the inherently fluid nature of reference and construal. Mental spaces allow interlocutors to arrive at compatible interpretations even when their starting points diverge. The example of (6) ‘Tu kod mene’ demonstrates how apparent mismatches can be resolved by rapid contextual adjustment, thereby securing mutual understanding.

This underscores a broader point: reference is not absolute but emerges dynamically from the interplay of linguistic form, contextual cues, and conceptual processes. Demonstratives make this visible with particular clarity because they are schematic enough to tolerate variation yet central enough to demand resolution. They remind us that communication depends less on a fixed mapping between form and meaning than on the interlocutors’ capacity to adaptively construe shared mental spaces

5.4 *Beyond Croatian*

Although the present discussion has focused on Croatian, the issues raised resonate more widely. Demonstratives in many languages exhibit context-driven variation, and the mechanisms outlined here may apply cross-linguistically (see Diessel 1999; Levinson 2004). The Croatian case makes the dynamics especially visible because two or more systems are currently in play, but the underlying principle is more general: demonstrative meaning is constructed, not fixed.

This perspective could also help explain shifts observed in other systems, for instance the gradual erosion of three-way contrasts in Romance and Slavic varieties (e.g. French *ici* vs. *là*; Russian *zdes’-tut* vs. *tam-tuda*), as well as English (where *yonder* has become marginal). What looks like instability or redundancy is better seen as flexibility, a reflection of the way interlocutors build and maintain shared mental spaces. Croatian thus provides a particularly vivid example of a process that is by no means unique.

6 **Conclusion**

The case of Croatian spatial demonstratives illustrates how communication can succeed even when interlocutors operate with different paradigms. The analysis of forum data, combined with mental-spaces theory and previous semantic

accounts, has shown that apparent mismatches are resolved by flexibility at several levels: innate, systemic, and conceptual.

This can be seen clearly in exchanges such as (6) ‘Tu kod mene’. For the locutor, the construal centres on themselves and includes the collocutor. For the collocutor, adhering to a more traditional paradigm, *tu* may initially be construed as centred on their own position. Yet contextual cues prompt a rapid reinterpretation, yielding two slightly different but ultimately compatible mental spaces, demonstrating how variation can coexist with communicative success.

This study has focused on forum data as the best available proxy for informal speech, but further research is needed. Three avenues are especially pressing: (i) fieldwork on real-time spoken interaction, (ii) exploration of sociolinguistic and dialectal variation, and (iii) comparative investigation across Slavic and other languages. Such work would not only test the analysis proposed here but also clarify whether the Croatian case is part of a wider pattern of deictic change.

The findings also blur the traditional distinction between competence and performance. If communicative success depends not on internalising a single paradigm but on negotiating meaning in real time, then competence itself must be reconceived as inherently flexible. Demonstratives highlight this most clearly: their use shows how linguistic knowledge and communicative practice are inseparable, grounded in shared mental spaces and adaptive construal. What looks like messy performance from a prescriptive angle is, from a cognitive perspective, the very essence of linguistic competence.

The broader moral is straightforward: meaning is not retrieved from a fixed system but dynamically constructed within shared mental spaces. Croatian makes this especially visible because multiple overlapping paradigms of spatial demonstratives currently coexist, yet the principle is more general. Demonstratives reveal the fluid nature of reference and cognition, reminding us that language is not a static code but an adaptive practice. At the end of the day, whether it is my place or yours hardly matters, so long as we are in it together.

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Kod mene ili kod tebe? Mentalni prostori i varijacija hrvatskih prostornih demonstrativa

Sažetak

Demonstrativi zauzimaju središnju ulogu u komunikaciji: usmjeravaju referenciju i omogućuju združenu pažnju sugovornika. Iz toga bi se razloga moglo očekivati da im značenje ostaje stabilno. Hrvatski jezik, međutim, predstavlja zanimljiv slučaj postojanja višestrukih naizgled nekompatibilnih paradigmi prostornih demonstrativa, pri čemu se *ovdje* i *tu* često preklapaju, a *tamo* djelomično ulazi u

područje *ondje*. Na prvi pogled sustav se doima kaotičnim, ali bolje ćemo ga razumjeti sagleda li se kao složeni sustav u transformaciji.

Oslanjajući se na ilustrativne podatke s internetskih foruma, čestotnu analizu postojećih *online* korpusa i prijašnje semantičke analize, ovaj rad istražuje kako komunikacija ostaje učinkovitom unatoč varijaciji. U okviru teorije mentalnih prostora pokazne riječi funkcioniraju kao izrazito shematske simboličke jedinice koje omogućuju sugovornicima usklađivanje mentalnih prostora čak i kada odabiru različite oblike.

Rezultati upućuju na tri načela koja jamče uspješnu komunikaciju: ugrađenu fleksibilnost deiktika, sistemsku fleksibilnost hrvatskog sustava i konceptualnu fleksibilnost u konstruiranju mentalnih prostora. Kao rezultat toga, značenje se pokaznih riječi dinamički konstruira, što i u području deiksije ostavlja prostora za jezične mijene.

Ključne riječi: deiksa; mentalni prostori; hrvatski prostorni demonstrativi; semantička varijacija; konstruiranje iskustva.