

Discourse usage of demonstratives in Chechen

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Abstract

The Northeast Caucasian language Chechen does not only use personal pronouns to refer back to participants, but it also uses independent near demonstratives. These demonstratives are used in order to refer back to the topic of the preceding sentence or the topic of the immediately preceding clause. Usage of the independent near demonstrative is optional, but when used, it usually refers back to one of the main characters in a narrative.

1. Introduction

Participants in a narrative are usually introduced using a name or a descriptive noun phrase. The methods to refer back to already introduced participants in a discourse are language dependant. Some languages prefer to continue referring to a participant using a descriptive noun phrase (e.g.: *the king*) or name. Others may use personal pronouns, or a combination of a determiner and a noun. Chechen allows the speaker to choose from the following options:¹

- (1) personal pronoun (=remote demonstrative) – *iza* “he”²
- (2) remote demonstrative + noun phrase – *i stag* “that man”
- (3) near demonstrative – *hara* “this one”
- (4) near demonstrative + noun phrase – *hara zhima saagha* “this little gift”

In this paper I would like to focus on the third option, the near demonstrative as it is independently used. In that situation the demonstrative is not used as specifier for a noun, but syntactically conveys a whole noun phrase (just as a personal pronoun would).

As is the case with personal pronouns, the function of demonstratives has been described in terms of information status or attention status (Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski 1993). It has been argued in the literature that demonstratives correlate with referents of relatively lower attention status than those referred to with unstressed personal pronouns (Comrie 1997, Gundel et al. 1993, Bosch, Katz and Umbach 2007). In this paper I show that Chechen independent demonstratives refer back to main characters when these are topical in the immediately preceding context.

2. Chechen demonstratives

An overview of two important demonstratives in Chechen compared with the third-person pronoun is given in Table 1. The demonstrative are divided into those that refer to nearby participants or objects and those referring to participants that are further away from the speaker³. Each of these demonstrative types can occur as a dependant one – a modifier of a

¹ This is not intended as an exclusive list of references – zero reference is for instance also possible.

² Chechen does not distinguish between the gender of personal pronouns, but prefixes to a subset of verbs as well as the auxiliary mark the gender of the nominative case participant they agree with. So in many cases gender is discernable for personal pronouns—but not from the pronouns themselves, but from the verb-agreement. For instance *iza* is ‘he/she/it’. But *iza j-u* means ‘she is’, since the auxiliary starts with the gender prefix *j*, whereas *iza bu* means ‘it is’, since it starts with gender prefix *b*.

³ Properly speaking Chechen makes a three-way distinction: nearby, neutral, and further away. However, the “neutral” demonstrative has virtually taken over the role of the “further away” one.

noun phrase (indicated by the columns marked “dep.” in the table), or as an independent one – a complete noun phrase itself (see the columns marked “ind.” in the table). In that situation demonstratives are inflected for case⁴ just like other nouns. Finally most of the dependant and independent demonstratives have a full form and a short form.⁵

Table 1 Chechen demonstratives and third-person pronoun

	Close				Neutral/Distant				Pronoun
	ind.		dep.		ind.		dep.		
	full	short	full	short	full	short	full	short	
singular									
Abs	<i>hara</i>	-	<i>hara</i>	-	<i>(iza)</i>	<i>(i)</i>	<i>i</i>	-	<i>iza</i>
Gen	<i>hoqynan</i>	<i>qynan</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocynan</i>	<i>(cynan)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>cynan</i>
Dat	<i>hoqunna</i>	<i>qunna</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocunna</i>	<i>(cunna)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>cunna</i>
Erg	<i>hoquo</i>	<i>quo</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocuo</i>	<i>(cuo)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>cuo</i>
Ins	<i>hoqynca</i>	<i>qynca</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocynca</i>	<i>(cynca)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>cynca</i>
All	<i>hoqynga</i>	<i>qynga</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocynga</i>	<i>(cynga)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>cynga</i>
Mat	<i>hoqunax</i>	<i>qunax</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocunax</i>	<i>(cunax)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>cunax</i>
Cmp	<i>hoqul</i>	<i>qul</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocul</i>	<i>(cul)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>cul</i>
plural									
Abs	<i>horsh</i>	-	<i>hara</i>	-	<i>yzash</i>	<i>(ysh)</i>	<i>i</i>	-	<i>ysh</i>
Gen	<i>hoqeeran</i>	<i>qeeran</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>oceeran</i>	<i>(ceeran)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>ceeran</i>
Dat	<i>hoqaarna</i>	<i>qaarna</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocaarna</i>	<i>(caarna)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>caarna</i>
Erg	<i>hoqaara</i>	<i>qaara</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocaara</i>	<i>(caara)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>caara</i>
Ins	<i>hoqaerca</i>	<i>qaerca</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocaerca</i>	<i>(caerca)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>caerca</i>
All	<i>hoqaerga</i>	<i>qaerga</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocaerga</i>	<i>(caerga)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>caerga</i>
Mat	<i>hoqaarax</i>	<i>qaarax</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocaarax</i>	<i>(caarax)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>caarax</i>
Cmp	<i>hoqaaral</i>	<i>qaaral</i>	<i>hoqu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>ocaaral</i>	<i>(caaral)</i>	<i>ocu</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>caaral</i>

The next section shows examples illustrating the usage of the independent demonstratives.

3. Usage of demonstratives in Chechen

The independent demonstrative is used in the following situations:

- a) To a person or item that is physically nearby. Speaker and hearer both see it. This is called “deictic” usage.
- b) Cataphorically to immediately following items that are listed.
- c) Anaphorically referring back to a whole sentence or paragraph.
- d) As grammatical recapturing of previous NP consisting of Dem+N. The normal reduction of Dem+N is Dem alone.
- e) In discourse under the following conditions:
 1. Referent must be a *main* character in the current part of the story (subjective choice by author). Imposed salience.
 2. Referent is Topic (most likely: subject) about whom a comment is made in:
 - in the immediately preceding sentence,
 - or in some cases the immediately preceding clause.
 3. When the referent is plural, then the topic in the preceding clause or sentence should at least be part of the group denoted by the referent.

N.B: a plural referent refers to a hypertheme. The topic of the preceding clause or

⁴ The abbreviations used for case are the following: abs = absolutive, gen = genitive, dat = dative, erg = ergative, ins = instrumental, all = allative (goal), mat = material, cmp = comparative.

⁵ The difference in usage between the full and the short forms are not known to me.

sentence should, if singular, point to a referent that is part of the same hypertheme. It is not necessary that the hypertheme was introduced earlier.

4. In exceptions the near demonstrative is used to recover the most likely (continuing) topic out of more possibilities (i.e. when there is more than one participant with matching number and 3rd person).

The instances above will now be illustrated by examples, most of which are taken from the Chechen narrative “Beshtuo” (Baduev 1991). This narrative is an original Chechen novel, a love story, consisting of eighteen chapters. Where the Beshtuo story did not give an appropriate example for the usage of the demonstrative to be explained, other material is used.

3.1. Deictic usage of the near demonstrative

An example of the deictic usage of the demonstrative (situation *a* in the outline above) is shown in (1). These words are spoken by Vahid while he is speaking about his sister Busana, and what to do with her so that she is not going to make a fuss when they are going to make her marry someone against her will.

- (1) Txovsa hara dwaajiga ysh swabaaghahw,
tonight this-ABS away-lead-INF 3P-ABS here-come-COND

quo cwa jyhwwaerzhuo jama qieram bu.
this-ERG one shameful.thing do-DAT danger B-PRS

‘When they come to lead this one away tonight, there is danger for this one to do something shameful.’

(Baduev 1991:268)

3.2. Cataphoric usage of the near demonstrative

The near demonstrative can be used cataphorically to point to an immediately following list of items, participants or events, as in situation *b* of the outline. An example to illustrate this usage is given in (2)—this is not from the Beshtuo story, but from a newspaper article. The near demonstrative *horsh* ‘these’ points to the list of five “means” following the colon.

- (2) a. Suuna swaxietariehw, ceeran <taruonash> qietamuo chuloocursh
1S-DAT reckon-NML-LOC 3P-GEN mean-PL understanding-ERG include-NML-PL

horsh xila tarlo: ishkuolash, hwiexarxuoj, programmash, uchebnikash,
this-PL be-INF may-PRS school-PL teacher-PL program-PL primer-PL

metodicheski posobiesh.
methodical exercise-PL

‘I think their understating of “the means” may include the following: schools, teachers, syllabi, textbooks and aid materials.’

(Abolkhanov 2005)

3.3. Near demonstrative referring back to a whole sentence or paragraph

One example illustrating the usage of the near demonstrative to refer back to a whole sentence, paragraph or idea—as situation *c* in the outline—is (3), taken from the Beshtuo story. In sentence (a) Beshtuo’s friend Beta charges him to quickly mount his horse. But Beshtuo doesn’t understand what is going on, which explains his reaction in (b). The near demonstrative *hara* refers back not only to the charge of Beta, but to the whole situation. The *near* demonstrative, as opposed to the personal pronoun/neutral demonstrative, is used because the situation is physically and emotionally nearby.

- (3) a. “Zhe, Beshtuo! Hwajn govra_na t’e vaalal chexka!”
 Come! Beshtuo! 2S.RFL-GEN horse-DAT on go-IMV fast
 ‘Come, Beshtuo! Quickly mount your horse!’
- b. “Oj, hwo hwiervaella? Ja ieghiina? Hara hun du? Swadiicahwa cq’a!”
 Sure 2S-ABS go.crazy-PSTN or quarrel-PSTN this-ABS what D-PRS tell-PLEASE once
 ‘Sure, have you gone craze? Or quarrelsome? What is this? Please tell me!’ (Baduev 1991:272)

3.4. The independent demonstrative as a reduction of demonstrative + noun

An example of the demonstrative as a reduction of Dem+NP (situation *d* in the outline at the beginning of section 3) may be found in sentence (4), which is the first sentence in a new paragraph of the Beshtuo story. This large and complex sentence can be divided into two parts. The first and main part is ‘Beshtuo ... paid attention to this Xedizhat’. This part contains the finite verb—it is the matrix clause. The second part is syntactically slightly more than subordinate to the first part, its main verb being a present participle. The subject and topic of the first (main) part of the sentence is Beshtuo. The near demonstrative *hara*, referring to Xedizhat, in the second part of the sentence, is a reduction of *qu Xedizhatana* ‘to this Xedizhat’ in the first part of the sentence.

- (4) Beshtuo_i, shien naanas_k shaa_k jalalie zuda jaalajie aella
 Beshtuo_i 3S.RFL-GEN mother-ERG 3S.RFL-ABS die-BEFORE wife marry-IMV say-PSTN
- shiega_i diexar darna, Busana_m shiega_i ca je’acha, cwana a
 3S.RFL-ALL request do-NML-DAT Busana 3S.RFL-ALL NEG come-WHEN one NEG
- zudchux shien_i chaam qietar boocushiehw, qu Xedizhatana_n
 wife-MAT 3S.RFL-GEN taste touch-INF B-NEG-THOUGH this-OBL Xedizhat-DAT
- t’ehwaevziniera, hara_n, shaa_i sanna, q’ien xilarna,
 pay.attention-REM this-ABS 3S.RFL-ABS like poor be-NML-DAT
- aatta shiega_i jooghur ju myettush.
 easily 3S.RFL-ALL come-FUT J-PRS reckon-PTC

‘Beshtuo_i, since his_i mother_k had requested him_i to marry before she_i died, had, when Busana_m did not go to him_i, and even though he_i had no taste for any other woman, paid attention to this Xedizhat_n, reckoning that this one_n, since being poor like him_i, would easily come to him_i.’ (Baduev 1991:272)

3.5. Discourse usages of the near demonstrative

In this section several examples will be given of the discourse usage of the independent near demonstrative (see point *e* of the outline). When a demonstrative is used, it usually refers back to the *subject* of the immediately preceding sentence, as in (5). The near demonstrative *qunna* is the subject of the second sentence, and it refers back to *Busana*, who is the subject of the first sentence.

- (5) a. Busana Beshtuoga hwaezhira.
 Busana Beshtuo-ALL look-PSTR
 ‘Busana looked at Beshtuo.’
- b. Qunna shiena bolu cataam c’ehhwana bicbelira
 this-DAT self-DAT B-REL sadness suddenly forget-PSTR
 ‘Suddenly this one forgot her distress.’ (Baduev 1991:257)

Less common is the usage of a demonstrative when it refers back to the subject of the immediately preceding *clause*, as in (6). The immediately preceding context is (a), where the

subject of the first and second part of the sentence is ‘water/tears’. Then in (b) Busana is the implied experiencer of the first part of the complex sentence ‘Beshtuo and what he had told her kept appearing (to Busana)’. That Busana is the implied subject may need some clarification. In Chechen this can be concluded from the reflexive that is used in ‘Beshtuo_i and what he_i had told herself_j’. The reflexive ‘herself’ is a long-distance one and coreferent with the subject of the matrix clause. From context the reflexive must point to Busana, because Beshtuo spoke to Busana. Therefore the matrix clause’s subject must be Busana too.

While Busana is in the reader’s mind as the implied topic (which overtly would have been a dative case experiencer) of the first part of sentence (b), the demonstrative subject in the second part of sentence (b) is linking back to her.

- (6) a. *Amma cynan bwaergiex yexu xi saca-m ca tygura,*
 but 3S-GEN eye-PL-MATflow-PRS water stop-FOC NEG obey-IMPF
ysh t’aehw-t’aehwa lysta yegura.
 3P-ABS one-after-another thick fall-IMPF

‘But the tears coming from his eyes would not stop, they were falling down continuously.’

- b. *Beshtuo a, cuo shiega baexnarg a dyhwaltysura,*
 Beshtuo & 3S-ERG 3S.RFL-ALL say-PST-NML & appear-IMPF
hara ch'oogha duoxkuojaelliera,
 this greatly regret-REM
toxxara Beshtuoga jedda maarie cajaxarna.
 long.ago Beshtuo-GOAL run-PSTN marriage-ALL not-go-DAT

‘Beshtuo_k and what he_k had told her_i kept appearing (to Busana_i), and this one_i greatly regretted, that she_i had not gone off to marry Beshtuo_k long ago.’ (Baduev 1991:259)

To make the point clear it may be good to give one more example where the demonstrative is used to refer back to a participant introduced in the immediately preceding *clause* instead of the immediately preceding *sentence*. This example is the first sentence in a new chapter. The previous chapter finished with Busana as the topic. Now this sentence, shown in (7), starts with Busana’s neighbor Eesharp as topic. Syntactically the sentence can be divided into two major parts, where the first major part is translated as ‘When Eesharp, having finished putting on her slippers and her socks, was busy putting on her yellow scarf’. Here Eesharp is the subject, and also the topic since it comes in the sentence initial position. The demonstratives in the second major part of the sentence refer back to the first major part’s subject Eesharp.

- (7) a. *Eesharp, k'arxash a, pazatasha t'edyyxina a jaella,*
 Eesharp slippe-PL & SOCK-PL & on-dress-PSTN & finish-PSTN
shien mozha kuortali dwaatyllush joollush,
 3S.RFL-GEN yellow scarf on-dress-PTC be.occupied.with-PTC
hara jolchu chuvelira gynan shicha a,
 this-ABS J-REL-ALL enter-PSTR this-GEN nephew&
Beshton duottagha a volu zhima stag Beta.
 Beshtuo-GEN friend & V-REL young man Beta

‘When Eesharp, having finished putting on her slippers and her socks, was busy putting on her yellow scarf, this one’s nephew Beta, a young man who was Beshtuo’s friend, entered this one’s house.’ (Baduev 1991:270)

The usage of a demonstrative is not restricted to the *subject* of the previous sentence or clause. The previous referent can have other grammatical roles, like the indirect object (8)a, (8)b and (10)a,b the direct object (9)a,b and the goal (10)b,c. In all these instances, however,

the previous referent is the topic about which a comment is made in its clause or sentence. For instance the demonstrative in (10)c points back to the goal in (10)b, which is in the postverbal topic position.⁶

- (8) a. Xizrina naaxa q'uo^unaxa vu aalar hara bwaermecig voocii daac.
 Xizar-DAT people-ERG lad V-PRS say-NML this greedy V-NEG D-NEG

‘That people tell Xizar (he) is a good lad is not because this one is not greedy.’
 (Baduev 1991:261)

- b. Ocu tajpana surt Busanina kiest-kiesta huttura,
 this-OBL kind picture Busana-DAT often position-IMPF

hara qieraløj muohw a hwoqii, wadiicha sannajysura.
 this-ABS become.afraid-& shout & strike-& fear.struck-WHEN like stay-IMPF

‘Something like this often presented itself to Busana, this one would become afraid, shout, and be left fearstruck.’
 (Baduev 1991:267)

- (9) a. “Shovda” c’e jolu hara kruz^hok quollajella 25 sho sov xaan ju.
 Shovda name J-REL this-ABS group create-INC-PSTN25 year more time J-PRS

- b. Hara quollajalar jyhwanca dyyna redakcin kyygalxuojn dwaaduoluorca
 this create-INC-NML begin-INS from.off redaction-GEN leader-PL-GEN away-begin-NML-INS

xilira.
 happen-PSTR

‘This group_i called “Shovda” was established over twenty-five years ago. From the very beginning, the establishment of this one_i happened at the initiative of the management of the editorial staff.’
 (Almirza 2005)

- (10) a. Niderlandie vyedush Weelina_idoqqa gho leecira vajⁿ direktora
 Netherlands-GOAL go-PTC Ali-DAT great help extend-PSTR IP.INC-GEN director-ERG

Walamada aaxchanca a, texnikaca a.
 Alamad-ERG money-INS & equipment-INS &

- b. Shien doolahw jolu kamera a jelira qynga_i.
 3S.RFL-GEN possession-LOC J-REL camera INT give-PSTR this-GOAL

- c. Ishtta, qunna_i taruo jolu gho dira te'atran direktora Olxazara_m a.
 likewise this-DAT possibility J-REL help do-PSTR theatre-GEN director-ERG Olkhazar-ERG &

‘When he_i was going to the Netherlands, Director Alamad_k rendered Ali_i great help with money and equipment. He_k also loaned this one_i his_k own camera. Theatre Director Olkhazar_m also rendered all possible help to this one_i.’
 (Aelgira 2005)

That topichood is the yardstick (and not the syntactic notion of subjecthood) may become clear from example (11). Sentence (a) in this example clearly has Busana as topic (and subject). The next sentence (b) has ‘tears’ as subject, and according to the information structure principles this is the topic too, since it comes before the pre-verbal slot. However, the references ‘her eyes’ and ‘her cheeks’ point back to the owner of the eyes and the cheeks, which is Busana from sentence (a). This means that Busana still is a higher level topic in sentence (b). In sentence (c) Beshtuo is the subject and the overall topic. The demonstrative *qynan* ‘of this one’ which is used in the subordinate clause in (c) does *not* refer back to the subject of the matrix clause (which would be Beshtuo), but it refers back to the implied higher level topic of the previous clause (b)—to Busana.

⁶ Chechen has two topic positions: one sentence-initial, and one postverbal—they correspond to different kinds of topics. The immediate preverbal slot is reserved for focus in Chechen (Komen 2007).

- (11) a. *Busana jeexxa laettira Beshtuona t'aehwa hweyzhush.*
 Busana long stand-PSTR Beshtuo-DAT after look-PTC
 'Busana remained long looking after Beshtuo.'
- b. *Cynan bwaergiex yexu daqqiira,mela xin t'adamash*
 3S-GEN eye-PL-MATflow-PRS large-PL warm water-GEN drop-PL
cynan gorgachu besniesht'exula kerchash uohwa'yegura.
 3S-GEN round-OBL cheek-PL on roll-PTC down-fall-IMPF
 'The large warm tears from her eyes rolled on her round cheeks and fell down.'
- c. *Beshtuo,qin juxa hwaezhna qynan duog dika ca*
 Beshtuo more back look-PSTN this-GEN heart good NEG
diesh,q'ajlaveelira.
 D-do-PTC disappear-PSTR
 'Beshtuo disappeared, not having turned around to let this one feel better.'
 (Baduev 1991:261)

All this shows that it is more likely for the near demonstrative to show up as referring to the main character than it is to find it referring to minor characters, since the main characters will appear more in topic positions.

There are some situations where the near demonstrative seems to be used in order to disambiguate between participants, while it does *not* refer back to the subject or topic of the preceding sentence (that is point *e4* in the outline at the beginning of this chapter). One such situation is shown in (12). If a pronoun would have been used instead of the near demonstrative in (b), then it would be referring back to Maelx-Aezni's father in (a), which is not what the author wanted to do. In order to refer back to Alkhast he uses the demonstrative pronoun, which connects with the participant that ranks second on the salience hierarchy.

- (12) a. "Hoqu san maxka vaan ve'anarg hun adam du,
 this-OBL 1S-GEN country-ALL come-INF come-PST-NML what human D-PRS
 hun eeqa du?" aella, xaettina Maelx-Aeznin daas.
 what animal D-PRS say-PSTN ask-PSTN Malx-Azni-GEN father-ERG
 "What human or what animal is it that came to this my country?" asked Malx-Azni's father.'
- b. "Alxast vu hwan maxka ve'anarg", aella quo.
 AlkhastV-PRS 2S-GEN country-GOAL come-PST-NML say-PSTN this-ERG
 "Alxast is the one who came to your country", said this one.' (Teptar 2007)

4. Conclusions

I have shown that the independent near demonstrative is used in narrative to point back to the syntactical topic of the preceding sentence or clause. This topic will in most cases be expressed as the subject of the preceding sentence or clause, but instances have been shown where the topic was a direct or indirect object.

The near demonstrative fulfils a discourse function. There are many instances where it could be used grammatically, but it is not. In those situations where it *is* used, it refers back to one of the main characters in the narrative.

In general the Chechen near demonstrative can be used to keep track of, confirm or even recover the topichood of a participant.

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