

That straight talk: Sarah Palin and the sociolinguistics of demonstratives¹

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Abstract

Drawing on previous analyses of the social meaning of demonstratives and other function words, we argue that the semantics of demonstratives facilitates affective uses that can be characterized as attempts by the speaker to foster a sense of shared perspective and common ground with other discourse participants. We present large-scale quantitative evidence that this strategy is widely used and communicatively effective. We then conduct a focused case study of the demonstrative use of U.S. politician and public figure Sarah Palin, situated in the wider context of Palin's persona, style, and place in the social landscape. An analysis of television interview data shows that Palin is a distinctive and prolific user of affective demonstratives. Palin's usage highlights the context-dependence of demonstratives' social meaning and leads to a deeper understanding of her rhetorical strategies and the polarized reactions they have received.

Keywords: Demonstratives, social meaning, perspective, style, social media, Sarah Palin

1 INTRODUCTION

Function words and phrases, the nuts and bolts of language, seem at first to be an unlikely source for rich social meaning, but previous research has traced a wide variety of pragmatic, stylistic, and perspectival effects to these expressions and the role they play in interaction, in building common ground, and in achieving reference in context (Talbot, 1992; Stubbe and Holmes, 1995; Dixon and Foster, 1997; Erman, 2001; Campbell and Pennebaker, 2003; Cheshire, 2005; Moore and Podesva, 2009; Acton, 2010; Potts, 2011).

Lakoff's (1974) analysis of English demonstratives (*this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*) is an early and influential example of this line of investigation. Lakoff suggests that demonstratives can be used as a tool for 'achieving camaraderie' (p. 347) and 'establishing emotional closeness between speaker and addressee' (p. 351), and claims that these effects arise from the basic semantics and use conditions of demonstratives. The central goal of this paper is to substantiate and refine Lakoff's characterization of this component of demonstratives' social meaning, through a combination of semantic and pragmatic analysis, large-scale corpus analysis, and a situated case study of one particularly distinctive user of demonstratives: U.S. politician and public figure Sarah Palin.

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In the next section, we review Lakoff's claims in more detail and synthesize them with more recent commentaries on the social effects of demonstratives (Chen, 1990; Bowdle and Ward, 1995; Wolter, 2006; Liberman, 2008, 2010; Potts and Schwarz, 2010; Davis and Potts, 2010). This leads to the core hypothesis that demonstratives can be used as a resource for fostering a sense of common ground and shared perspective between interlocutors — an effect we trace to the semantics and pragmatics of demonstratives, which require a special degree of coordination and perspectival alignment between discourse participants in order to refer successfully.

In Section 3, we test for this effect with a quantitative analysis of demonstrative usage across over 200,000 user-supplied texts from the online social network Experience Project (EP). At the time of our data collection, EP allowed community members to annotate each other's texts with (among other things) markers of shared experience and perspective. This provides us with the means to identify and study the social effects of demonstratives on a large scale, across multiple linguistic exchanges. We find that, as predicted, demonstrative usage on EP correlates with responses expressing a sense of common ground and shared perspective.

The EP analysis supports the claim that, across a vast number of language users, demonstratives can be used to enhance discourse participants' sense of shared perspective and common ground. We seek to balance this high-level perspective with a close examination of use at the level of the individual, situated in the context of a broader persona, linguistic style, and social landscape. To that end, in Section 4, we turn our focus to Sarah Palin. Palin, the once little-known governor of Alaska, first received wide media attention when she was named Senator John McCain's running mate in the 2008 U.S. presidential election and, along with her 'informal,' 'colloquial' speech style, has been the subject of much public commentary and disagreement ever since. Building on work by Liberman (2008, 2010) and McWhorter (2010), we show that Palin is a prolific and distinctive user of demonstratives, and we argue that this is part of her more general linguistic strategy of portraying herself as being 'one with the "everyday American people"' (Pinker 2008; see also Labov 2008).

Palin is an ideal case-study not only because of her public prominence and frequent use of demonstratives, but also because the political realm in which she operates stands in contrast to the EP community. The latter is a generally supportive environment, a place for users to share and connect, where appeals to shared perspective are likely to be well received. The world of politics, however, is a place of division and opposition, and reactions to Palin's speech are impassioned and polarized (Section 5). Listeners who share her social and political attitudes tend to regard her linguistic style as relatable and warm, whereas listeners who disagree with her tend to find her speech grating and objectionable. This highlights the fact that, while demonstratives support attempts to foster a sense of shared perspective and common ground, they do not guarantee success in this social strategy. On the contrary, a speaker's demonstratives can be socially repellent if they clash with the addressee's conception of her relation to the speaker. That is, the overall social and pragmatic effects are facilitated by the underlying semantics, but they are ultimately determined jointly by the discourse participants during interaction (Clark, 1996).

2 AFFECTIVE DEMONSTRATIVES

The idea that demonstrative use bears on the social relations between interlocutors goes back at least as far as Lakoff (1974) (see also Fillmore 1975). Lakoff claims that, in addition to their

perhaps more canonical functions of picking out an entity in physical space or referring anaphorically, demonstratives are also tools for ‘establish[ing] emotional closeness between speaker and hearer’ (p. 351). Since then, a picture has emerged of demonstratives as potentially conveying complex, multidimensional social meanings involving exclamation (Lakoff, 1974; Potts and Schwarz, 2010; Davis and Potts, 2010), presumptions about shared attitudes and perspectives (Bowdle and Ward, 1995; Wolter, 2006), and emotional closeness or distance (Kitagawa, 1979; Naruoka, 2003; Ono, 1994).

A central theme in this literature is the idea that demonstrative use bears a presumption of common ground and shared perspective. According to Lakoff (1974: 353), ‘emotional-deictic *that*,’ for instance, ‘is a means of reaching out to other people, saying, “We share this — we’re in this together.”’ She provides examples like (1) as said by a garage mechanic to a customer, claiming that the mechanic’s choice of the demonstrative (1a) over the possessive pronoun (1b) could serve as a small gesture of solidarity in light of the customer’s predicament.²

- (1) a. **That left front tire** is pretty worn. Lakoff (1974: ex. 32)
b. **Your left front tire** is pretty worn. Lakoff (1974: ex. 33)

Lakoff further suggests that, if said by a police officer writing the addressee a ticket, (1a) would likely evince a sort of sarcastic ‘ironic-buddyship’ derived from the solidarity effect seen in the more cooperative garage situation.

Solidarity and shared perspective can also be important when discussing attitudes and emotions. Lakoff (1974: 352) observes that the morphologically marked demonstrative on the proper name in (2) could ‘establish emotional solidarity [...] by implying that both participants in the conversation share the same views toward the subject of discussion.’

- (2) **That Henry Kissinger** sure knows his way around Hollywood! Lakoff (1974: ex. 45)

Chen (1990) discusses similar cases, labeling them ‘camaraderie-*that* and -*this*.’ Wolter (2006), too, proposes that what she calls ‘emotive demonstratives’ presuppose shared knowledge or emotion between interlocutors concerning the subject under discussion. Liberman (2008, 2010), discussing Sarah Palin’s speech, introduces the term *affective demonstratives* for these socially complex uses. Affective demonstratives, he says, ‘invite the audience onto a common ground of shared knowledge,’ and can make a previously unmentioned discourse referent ‘seem like comfortable common ground.’ He notes examples from Palin like (3), from the 2008 U.S. vice presidential debate:

- (3) Two years ago, remember, it was John McCain who pushed so hard with the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac reform measures. He sounded **that warning bell**.

²Concerning the matter of solidarity, we have noticed that demonstratives are often employed by people directing quasi-compulsory group activities. For example, it seems that flight attendants often opt for demonstratives over definite articles and possessive pronouns in their advisory messages: ‘get those bags under that seat in front of you,’ ‘make sure that tray table is up.’ Similarly, the first author’s yoga instructor often urges students to ‘get that right arm up over that head’ when the pose is particularly challenging. Barbara Partee observes (Potts and Schwarz 2010: 22) similar dynamics in public radio pledge drives: ‘Don’t put it off any longer – make that phone call right now,’ which is insistent but also has a tone of cooperation and unity. One might argue that, in these particular cases (and the case of Lakoff’s worn tire), it is simply the choice not to use the speaker-exempting *your* that engenders the purported effects. The discussion and analysis to come, however, show that the solidarity effects of demonstratives are available even where *your* is not a viable alternative.

‘We all know the warning bell she’s talking about, right?’, asks Liberman (2010) rhetorically, ‘That one over there, always in the back of our shared experience.’ Barbara Partee, in a comment on Liberman’s (2008) assessment, offers a similar take. Such uses, she says, presuppose ‘shared familiarity with the referent.’ Partee further suggests that affective demonstratives at times seem to refer to ‘private shared knowledge’ between speaker and addressee (Joshi, 1982; Bowdle and Ward, 1995), offering the following contrasting examples from Gregory Ward:

- (4) A: Why so sleepy?
- a. B: **The neighbors** had a loud party.
- b. B: **Those neighbors** had a loud party.

According to Ward, ‘In the first case, the neighbors could be the inferable neighbors that any urban denizen can be presumed to have, while the latter requires that A and B have discussed those particular neighbors on a previous occasion.’ Thus, the latter example, with the demonstrative, depends on ‘private shared knowledge’ in a way that the former does not.

In the next section, we provide quantitative evidence for these intuitions about demonstratives and ‘solidarity,’ ‘shared knowledge/familiarity,’ and ‘comfortable common ground’. Assuming for the time being that these intuitions are correct, let’s consider how the basic semantics and use conditions of demonstratives might lead us to predict these effects.

Leading semantic accounts of demonstratives relate them to the definite article *the* and to definite third-person pronouns like *she* and *it* (King, 2001; Roberts, 2002; Wolter, 2006; Elbourne, 2008). Broadly speaking, these approaches say that a phrase *the NP* presupposes that there is a unique salient individual bearing the property denoted by the *NP* in the relevant contextual domain and, where felicitous, picks out that individual. Thus, where felicitous, *the NP*, together with the relevant contextual domain, provides all the information needed to identify the intended referent. To illustrate, suppose that two individuals, Jerry and Elaine, are talking in a kitchen, Jerry facing the refrigerator and Elaine with her back to it. Jerry, getting hungry and looking up toward the top of the refrigerator, says to Elaine:

- (5) Could you turn around and get me **the box of cereal**?

In such a scenario, Jerry’s referring term should be enough for Elaine to pick out the intended referent: given the semantics of *the*, Elaine should, generally speaking, expect to find one and only one box of cereal when she turns around. If she finds no cereal boxes, or more than one, she will likely find Jerry’s request infelicitous.

Demonstrative determiners generally work in a similar fashion, but they place more demands on the shared discourse context.³ Broadly speaking, a speaker’s use of a demonstrative will presuppose three things: (i) the speaker has in mind a unique referent *x*, (ii) *x* satisfies the phrase’s descriptive content, and (iii) the addressee can identify *x* by considering the speaker’s relation (physical, attitudinal, epistemic, etc.) to entities in the shared discourse context — i.e., the speaker’s *perspective* — along with any gestural cues accompanying the phrase’s use. Where felicitous, the phrase picks out that individual *x*. These requirements are in force for both phrasal uses (‘Have you read

³The English proximal forms *this* and *these* can function as indefinite determiners in English (Prince, 1981). Such uses are less easily related to definites, but they share the perspectival requirements that are important for the current discussion.

this book?') and pronominal uses ('Have you read *this*?'). Pronominal ones, which lack an NP expressing descriptive content, typically depend more heavily on context.

To see the significance of the perspectival requirements of demonstratives, we can contrast (5) above with a demonstrative version:

(6) Could you turn around and get me **that box of cereal**?

Here, unlike the case of (5), the descriptive content of the NP alone may not be enough to establish reference, and Elaine should not assume that there is only one box of cereal behind her. For, as stated above, demonstratives don't presuppose that there is a unique individual in the context satisfying the descriptive content of the NP. Instead, they presuppose that there is a particular individual that satisfies the descriptive content of the NP and that the addressee is equipped to identify it by consulting the speaker's perspective. If Jerry utters (6), there may be multiple salient cereal boxes in the context, but he presupposes that Elaine can identify the one he intends based on their shared understanding of the physical environment, the prior discourse context, Jerry's tastes and attitudes, and so forth.

This dependence on speaker perspective is a primary force in explaining the social effects of interest. First, the very act of considering a speaker's perspective, of trying to see things as she does, provides an opportunity for the addressee to develop a sense of empathy and mutual understanding with her. Second, a speaker's use of a demonstrative indicates to the addressee a belief that the two have enough shared experience and perspective that it is reasonable to expect the addressee to be able to consider the speaker's point of view. Thus, where felicitous, the act of invoking and relying on perspectival alignment in using a demonstrative can engender or reinforce a sense of shared perspective between interlocutors. As we will see in the case of Sarah Palin, however, where the condition of perspectival alignment is not met, or simply deemed unmerited or presumptuous by the addressee, the use of a demonstrative can be jarring; not only might the referential act fail, but disparities in perspective are brought to the fore.

Based on the theoretical discussion above, all demonstrative uses have the potential to occasion the social effects of interest. With each use of a demonstrative, the speaker instructs her addressee to consider her perspective and indicates confidence that their common ground and perspective are rich enough for the addressee to do so. At the same time, however, certain demonstratives do seem to pack a stronger shared-perspective punch than others. We identify two leading contributors.

First, using a demonstrative to introduce into the discourse something that is not physically present, as in (3) and (4b), might be expected to add to the demonstrative's social impact. Such uses presuppose that the addressee can access the speaker's perspective in a relatively broad domain, one that extends beyond the conversation they are engaged in and their immediate physical environment, and hence that the speaker and addressee have a nontrivial degree of common ground and perspectival alignment.

Second, where the demonstrative is morphosyntactically unnecessary for the purposes of securing reference, it may, by basic Gricean principles (Grice, 1975), come off as especially affective. Perhaps the clearest case of this kind is the use of a demonstrative as the determiner of a proper name, as in (2) above. In English, proper names never require a syntactically independent determiner, so using one is almost always a marked choice: it makes the phrase longer without contributing directly to the act of reference. Thus, the demonstrative in an example like (2) is referentially superfluous. The speaker of (2) is in effect going out of her way to use a demonstrative. But addressees generally do not expect a person to say more than is necessary for no reason at all

(Horn, 1984; Levinson, 2000). If the demonstrative is not there by mistake or to clarify what is being asserted, and the speaker is being cooperative, it likely has some other purpose. One clear candidate is that the speaker desires the addressee to access her perspective, or the speaker wishes to indicate a belief that the addressee is capable of doing so, thereby providing an opportunity to develop or strengthen a sense of perspectival alignment. By the same logic, demonstratives ought to have a similarly elevated potential for shared-perspective effects when used where a less marked determiner, such as *the*, would serve the referential purposes of the speaker just as well, as in the following examples from the 2008 vice presidential debate, the first from Palin and the second from her opponent, Senator Joe Biden:

(7) ‘And the American workforce is the greatest in **this world**...’

(8) ‘We should be helping them build schools to compete for **those hearts and minds** of the people in the region.’

In both examples, the use of a demonstrative rather than *the* is referentially unnecessary — Palin is not contrasting the world we live in with any other, so the less semantically complex *the* would do just as well. And Biden opts for the demonstrative *those* in employing a familiar political stock phrase traditionally headed by *the*, invoking shared perspective in a way that his referential purposes do not require.⁴

3 DEMONSTRATIVE USAGE AT THE EXPERIENCE PROJECT

The central generalization that emerges from the previous section is that demonstratives presume perspectival alignment between interlocutors and hence can foster a sense of common ground and shared perspective. This generalization seems sound to us. However, it has not been directly tested quantitatively before, as far as we know. Potts and Schwarz (2010) and Davis and Potts (2010) study demonstratives in large corpora, but their experiments are geared more towards assessing the heightened emotion that often goes along with emotional deixis (Lakoff 1974: 354). The corpora they study are not especially well suited to investigating what we regard as the core social significance of demonstratives.

Fortunately, the social-networking website Experience Project (EP) provides the right kind of data for assessing this claim quantitatively. At the EP, users can post stories about themselves, add comments to others’ stories, and annotate each other’s stories with their opinions and reactions. The community seems to us tight-knit as online communities go, with extensive overlap between the people who comment and the people who write stories, numerous sub-communities built around particular special interests, and a steady flow of new user-generated content. The overall tenor of the site is sympathetic, supportive, and community-minded, meaning that it has the potential to stimulate a lot of richly affective uses of demonstratives. Our sample consists of 200,533 confessions totaling over 21 million words.

Here, we look in particular at the ‘confessions’ portion of the site. EP confessions are short, personally revealing stories and musings. The events described evoke a wide range of emotions —

⁴In terms of frequency, Biden’s determiner choice is clearly the marked one: whereas *the* is about 58 times more common than *those* in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008), *the hearts and minds* is roughly 117 times more frequent than *those hearts and minds* in that corpus.

Confession: Do you ever have one of those days where you just sit around and think about how much your life sucks? I'm having one of those days.

Reactions: 'sorry, hugs': 2; 'you rock': 0; 'teehee': 0, 'I understand': 10, 'wow, just wow': 0

Comment: Know the feeling.

Comment: I feel the same today. Good luck getting through it.

Comment: Totally.

Confession: I saw a sign, saying, "I dream of a better world when chickens can cross the road w/o having their motives questioned."

Reactions: 'sorry, hugs': 0; 'you rock': 2; 'teehee': 7, 'I understand': 0, 'wow, just wow': 0

Comment: hahahahaha. oh poor chickens, suspicious creatures....hahahaha!!!

Comment: This is hilarious!

Comment: Hahaha I like it!

Confession: Someone unknown person paid for my meal today in the drive thru, so I paid for the person's order behind me and gave the cashier the change

Reactions: 'sorry, hugs': 0; 'you rock': 11; 'teehee': 0, 'I understand': 0, 'wow, just wow': 0

Comment: I love that!

Comment: That is soo awesome!!! Kudos to both of you!!!

Comment: Paying it forward makes the world feel brighter when you do it, I have the belief that if you do good things there is that karmic vibration that comes back to you, what you put in is what you receive back in various ways. Kudos to you all!

Table 1: Sample Experience Project confessions with associated reaction data and comments.

the content is at times embarrassing, sad, shocking, funny, heart-warming, and mixtures thereof. At the time of our data collection, EP community members could respond to individual confessions by posting text comments or, separately, by choosing from five different preset reaction categories: ‘you rock’; ‘teehee’; ‘I understand’; ‘sorry, hugs’; and ‘wow, just wow’. Table 1 provides some sample confession texts with associated reaction distributions and reader comment texts. At the site, each of the reaction categories was associated with a cartoon face conveying something about the social meaning of these categories. ‘You rock’ showed a smiley face with sunglasses, indicating a positive, cheerful reaction. The ‘teehee’ face seemed to be smiling even more broadly. The ‘I understand’ emoticon was also smiling, but with a knowing wink. ‘Sorry, hugs’ was portrayed with a frown. And the ‘wow, just wow’ face looked shocked, aghast.

The meanings of these reaction categories are vague, socially complex, and particular to the EP context. To gain additional insight into what they meant to the community members who chose them, we can examine the numerous reader comments on the confession texts. These comments are not tied to specific reaction category choices, but we expect general alignment between the comment texts and the distribution of reaction category choices for a given confession. For example, the first confession in Table 1 elicited primarily ‘I understand’ reactions, and its comments primarily express understanding. The middle confession received a majority of ‘teehee’ responses, and its comments mostly express amusement. The third confession elicited ‘you rock’ responses only, and the comments are cheering and supportive.

For a more comprehensive perspective on the social meaning of the reaction categories, we can study the broader patterns in how the comments and reaction categories align. To do this, we build a simple probability model. If x is a phrase and c is one of the reaction categories, then $\text{Count}(x, c)$ is the number of c reactions for texts containing x . For example, if Table 1 is our entire corpus, then $\text{Count}(\textit{kudos}, \text{‘you rock’}) = 22$, because *kudos* occurs once in two comments associated with the third confession, which received 11 ‘you rock’ reactions. From these counts, we calculate $P(x | c) = \text{Count}(x, c) / \sum_{x'} \text{Count}(x', c)$, where x' ranges over all phrases of the same type as x . These numbers are tiny and hard to compare with each other, so we make them more intuitive by normalizing to obtain $P(c | x) = P(x | c) / \sum_{c'} P(x | c')$, where c ranges over the five reaction categories. This determines, for each phrase x , a conditional probability distribution over the reaction categories.

	‘sorry, hugs’	‘you rock’	‘teehee’	‘I understand’	‘wow, just wow’
1	for your loss	you rock !	ha ha !	used to feel	a favor and
2	sorry about your	awesome !!	lmao !!	am going through	would you feel
3	so sorry for	happy birthday !	made me laugh	i understand completely	to your wife
4	am so sorry	happy for you	made my day	you least expect	that way but
5	sorry for your	i agree !	lmfao !!	exact same way	between the two
6	im so sorry	i’m happy for	to be careful	i’m the same	you feel if
7	so sorry to	too short to	ha ha ha	the time is	would you do
8	get through this	to come out	i haven’t had	am the same	i can just
9	and your family	thank you !	on the couch	feeling the same	shame on you
10	i’m sorry for	keep up the	on !!	same way and	sex with her

Table 2: Top comment trigrams by category.

Table 2 shows the top trigrams (phrases of length 3) associated with each of the five reaction categories. The ranking for a category c is determined by sorting the entire vocabulary of trigrams x by $P(c | x)$. The phrases themselves are sometimes fragmentary, but we think they are illuminating nonetheless. ‘You rock’ correlates with encouraging, positive reactions. ‘Teehee’ conveys amusement. ‘Sorry, hugs’ aligns predominately with reactions of sympathy. And, importantly, ‘I understand’ aligns with comments expressing shared experience and shared perspective. The picture for these four is remarkably coherent. By comparison, ‘wow, just wow’ seems muddled. It is the least chosen category on the site, and it seems to have been used largely for the rare instances in which readers felt compelled to react with open disapproval. We think it is fair to characterize it as negative and disapproving, but nothing we say hinges on this interpretation. Our focus is almost exclusively on ‘I understand’.

With this understanding of the reaction categories, we can turn to the confession texts themselves. Potts (2011) shows that there are many intuitive correlations between the authors’ word choices in their confessions and readers’ reaction responses. For example, positive words correlate with ‘you rock’, because stories in which one uses these words are likely to be perceived as positive (especially as compared to the usual EP fare). The more positive the term, the stronger the correlation. Conversely, negative words correlate with ‘sorry, hugs’ and ‘I understand’: when an author describes something with these negative terms, readers react with sympathy and empathy.

In Section 2, we recruited semantic and pragmatic theory and previous research on demonstratives to arrive at the claim that demonstratives provide a tool for fostering solidarity and shared perspective. Together with the above observations about how words associate with reaction categories on EP, this leads to a hypothesis: there should be a strong association between demonstrative use in users’ confessions and reactions from the ‘I understand’ category. Users who employ demonstratives in their confessions presuppose perspectival alignment with their potential readers, and the supportive EP community is likely to be receptive to this kind of gesture.

To test this hypothesis, we employed the same basic probability model we defined above for using the comments to understand the social meanings of the reaction categories. The difference here is that we apply the model to the confessions themselves, so that $P(c | x)$ now corresponds to the association between the use of word/phrase x in a confession and reactions of category c . Figure 1 reports these values for each of the five reaction categories for both phrasal (determiner) and pronominal demonstratives, as categorized by parsing the data with the Stanford Parser (Klein and Manning, 2003). The gray vertical line at 0.2 depicts an informal null hypothesis — the expected probability if the association between a word’s usage and a given reaction category is neither especially high nor especially low — and the probability estimates have bars on them representing 95% confidence intervals (though, because the corpus is very large, these intervals sometimes look like small dots). The results confirm our hypothesis: the value of $P(\text{‘I understand’} | x)$ is significantly higher than the neutral value of 0.2 for both phrasal demonstratives (0.214) and pronominal demonstratives (0.215). That is, there is a significant association between demonstrative use in users’ confessions and reactions expressing shared experience and perspective.

Unfortunately, there is not space here to show the corresponding figures for phrasal and pronominal *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* considered individually. Broadly speaking, the individual demonstratives show the same profile as in the aggregated data of Figure 1. However, there are three noteworthy points of variation. Among the phrasal data, the pattern appears to be weakest for *that*, though it is robust for pronominal *that* and for phrasal *those*, its plural counterpart. We suspect that the weakness of the effect for phrasal *that* is partly the result of the parser confusing demonstrative

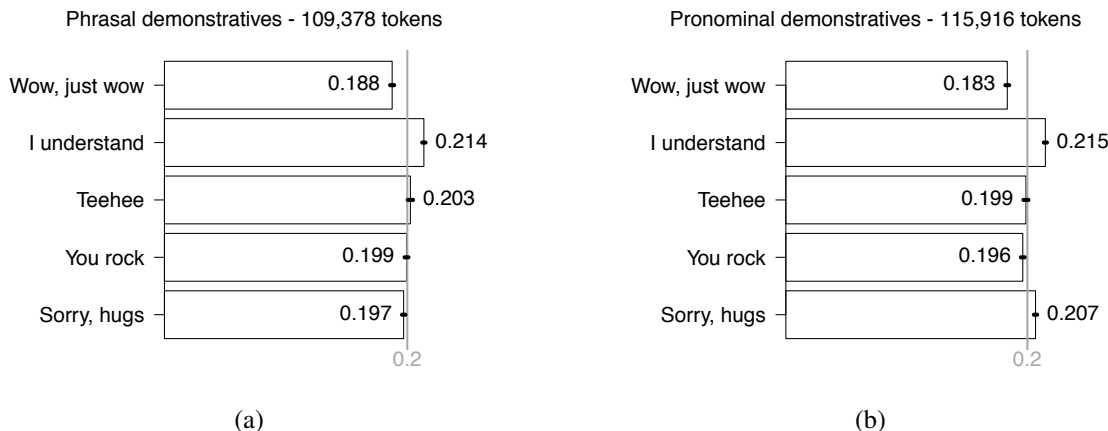


Figure 1: Demonstratives in the EP data.

uses of *that* with complementizer and relativizer uses (a non-issue for the other demonstratives). Similarly, though the effect is robust for phrasal *these* and *those*, we do not get evidence for the effect for their pronominal uses. We offer the following two explanations. First, pronominal *these* and *those* are infrequent in the corpus; there are fewer than 4,300 tokens of each, compared with more than 50,000 tokens of pronominal *this* and *that*. More interestingly, we may be witnessing something of a trade-off in the affective profile of the plural pronominal forms, which show highly elevated ‘you rock’ reactions, perhaps related to the exclamation effects identified by Lakoff (1974) and studied by Potts and Schwarz (2010) and Davis and Potts (2010).⁵ These considerations notwithstanding, the overall picture is clear: demonstrative use in EP confessions, on the whole, is strongly associated with ‘I understand’ reactions.

Figure 1 suggests that phrasal and pronominal uses are equally likely to stimulate ‘I understand’ reactions. However, we think it does not follow from this fact that the two are equally capable of supporting highly affective interpretations. At the end of Section 2, we argued that the affective strength of a use of a demonstrative depends in part on the nature of the expressions that could have been used in its place. This suggests that, to gain a fuller understanding of the emotive effects of demonstratives, we should look at them with respect to their comparison classes: all determiners in the case of phrasal demonstratives, and all pronouns in the case of pronominal ones.

To do this, we conducted two sampling experiments. For the first, summarized in Figure 2(a), we calculated all of the values $P(\text{‘I understand’} \mid \textit{det})$ for all of the determiners *det* represented in our data (excluding demonstratives). Call the vector of values V . Then, we sampled four values from V and took their mean, repeating this sampling 10,000 times. The distribution of the resulting values is depicted as a histogram in Figure 2(a). For reference, we have also included the 97.5th percentile mark. If we define the null hypothesis as saying that, in comparison to other determiners, phrasal demonstratives have merely average association with ‘I understand’, then this experiment gives good reason to reject that hypothesis, since the demonstrative estimate (marked with ‘DEMONSTRATIVES’) is above this mark.

The second experiment, summarized in Figure 2(b), followed the same procedure, but the comparison vector V contained the values $P(\text{‘I understand’} \mid \textit{pro})$ for each pronominal form *pro* (ex-

⁵The data and code for all the analyses in this paper are available from the authors’ websites.

cluding demonstratives). Here, pronominal demonstratives do not appear especially affective relative to their comparison class. They are above average but not above the 97.5 percentile mark. We hypothesize that this is due to the fact that pronominal forms, many of which introduce the social complications of person and gender, are so richly emotive on their own (see e.g., Campbell and Pennebaker 2003). Whereas choosing a phrasal demonstrative over, say, a definite description might be the marked choice emphasizing shared perspective, the relation between demonstrative pronouns and other pronouns is less clear. We return to this issue briefly in Section 6.

In sum, both pronominal and phrasal demonstratives exhibit robust solidarity and shared perspective effects, but phrasal ones may generally be more affective in virtue of their position within the larger class of determiners. Having examined a macro-level picture of the shared-perspective effects of demonstratives, we turn now to a focused case study of Sarah Palin's demonstrative usage. Our goal is ultimately to bring all of this evidence together (in Section 5) to better understand the affective character of demonstratives, and why Palin's speech receives such varied responses.

4 SARAH PALIN'S DEMONSTRATIVES

Previous linguistic commentary and research has characterized Sarah Palin's speech as 'colloquial,' 'informal,' and 'casual,' and has generally focused on her phonology and use of euphemisms like *heck* and *darn*. Purnell, Raimy and Salmons (2009), for instance, write that 'The register of Palin's speech has been seen as strikingly informal, even during the vice presidential debate,' citing her coronal pronunciation of *-ing* as a major factor in this effect. Pinker (2008) offers a similar analysis of this feature, saying that Palin, 'pronounced her "ens" more conspicuously in the debate than in the Couric interviews, a [sic] part to emphasize that she was one with the "everyday American people, Joe Six-Pack, hockey moms across the nation."' Labov (2008), too, commenting on the speech of both Palin and Joe Biden, says of this feature that, 'it's a political way of reaching out to people and being casual.'

The EP experiments above show that demonstratives provide a resource for promoting a sense of shared perspective and commonality. Affective demonstratives thus offer a tool for constructing a broader linguistic style of 'reaching out' to and expressing oneness with one's addressees. We might then expect affective demonstrative use to play an important role in Palin's style. Example (9), from the 2008 vice presidential debate, illustrates.

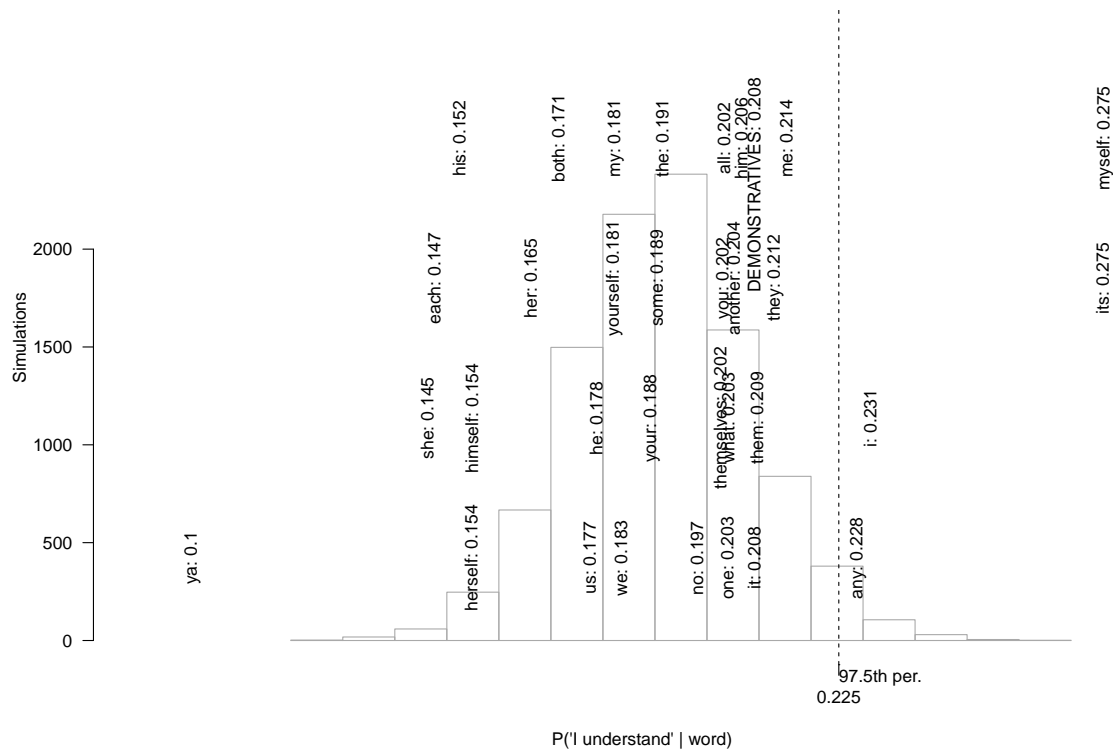
- (9) 'I think Americans are craving something new and different and **that new energy** and **that new commitment** that's going to come with reform.'

Offering her take on the desires of Americans at large, Palin refers to a 'new energy' and a 'new commitment,' previously unmentioned in the discourse, as though they are familiar and readily accessible to her audience. Examples like (9) are, intuitively, a prominent feature of Palin's speech.

In this section, following the lead of Liberman's (2008) look at Palin's demonstrative usage in the 2008 vice presidential debate, we analyze guests' speech on Fox News talk shows with the goal of substantiating the intuition that she is an especially distinctive and prolific user of affective demonstratives. The analysis reveals that Sarah Palin uses demonstratives at a rate far higher than the average among her fellow guests and that she stands out vis-à-vis other guests in the affectivity of her demonstratives.



(a) Phrasal demonstratives compared with other determiners.



(b) Pronominal demonstratives compared with other pronouns.

Figure 2: Sampling experiments.

4.1 The data

The corpus for our analysis is comprised of television interviews from four political talk shows on the U.S.-based Fox News Channel, and was collected as follows. First, we obtained the first four interviews of Sarah Palin that we could find from *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Hannity*, *On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*, and *Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace*. We chose these talk shows as the source of our data because they have all featured Palin as a guest on multiple occasions and provide plenty of interviews with various other guests for comparison. Second, for each of the sixteen resulting interviews, we collected the nearest two interviews from the same show, one before and one after (excluding those with two or more simultaneous guests, which have a qualitatively different conversational dynamic). We sought interviews adjacent to Palin's to try to informally control for the topics under discussion and the socio-political climate of the interviews. All interviews in the corpus occurred between January 24, 2010 and October 12, 2012.

The transcripts were part-of-speech tagged with the Stanford Part-of-Speech Tagger (Toutanova, Klein, Manning and Singer, 2003). We then annotated the transcripts by hand, bracketing all full noun phrases with a demonstrative as their determiner and correcting any mistakes concerning the syntactic category of tokens of *that*. Building on the results of Section 3, we isolated demonstrative determiners because they show far greater shared-perspective and solidarity effects relative to their comparison class. Unfortunately, there is not space for us to analyze pronominal demonstratives here. The overall picture is that Palin's use of pronominal demonstratives as a proportion of all pronouns is not especially noteworthy, in part because of her high rate of first-person plural forms; see Section 6 for discussion.

4.2 Differences in frequency

For each transcript, we calculated the guest's number of demonstrative determiners as a proportion of the total number of determiners he or she spoke. Figure 3 provides five box plots: one for each of *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*, and one for all four combined. Each one compares Palin's rate of demonstrative determiners across the 16 Palin-interviews collected to that of the guests in the 32 other interviews. Though the distributions overlap to some degree in each of the plots, all five suggest that Palin uses demonstrative determiners at a higher rate than the general population of guests on Fox News talk shows. As the fifth of the five plots shows, when all four demonstratives are pooled together, the 25th percentile of the distribution for Palin is higher than the 75th percentile of the distribution for all other guests in the sample.

Regression modeling shows that these distributional differences are statistically significant in every case. For each demonstrative determiner *dem*, we constructed and tested the statistical significance of a linear model as follows. For each Palin interview, we calculated Palin's tokens of *dem* as a proportion of all determiners in the interview. We then pooled the texts of the two adjacent interviews in our corpus — i.e., the interview with the same host immediately preceding the Palin interview, and the interview with the same host immediately following the Palin interview — and calculated the number of tokens of *dem* as a proportion of all determiners among those pooled utterances. The difference between the proportion for Palin and the proportion for the other two guests was our dependent variable. We obtained 16 such difference scores by this method, one for each of the Palin interviews in our corpus. Our null hypothesis, then, was that these difference scores are drawn from a normal population with a mean of zero — that is, that Palin would have the

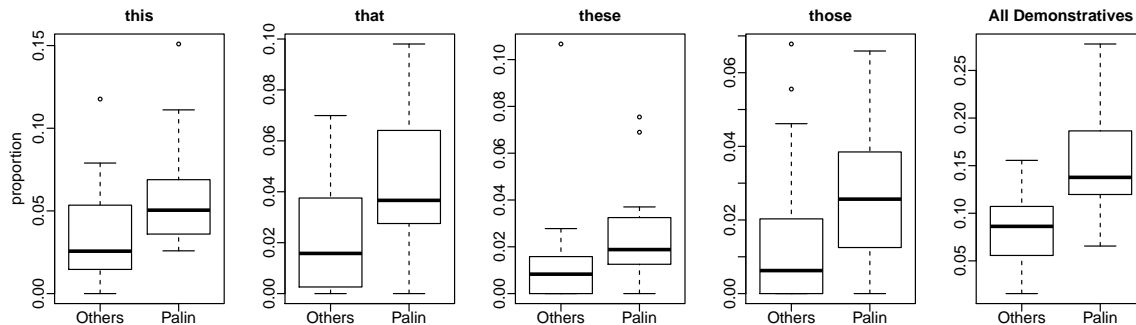


Figure 3: Guests’ demonstrative determiners as a proportion of all determiners.

same rate of demonstrative determiners as others interviewed by the same host at around the same time. We tested this null hypothesis for each of the demonstratives with a simple linear regression in R, with the intercept as the independent variable.

Table 3 provides a summary of the results of this analysis.⁶ Positive intercept values indicate that Palin’s average rate of the demonstrative determiner in question is higher than that of the other guests. This is the case for each of the four demonstratives. Moreover, each of the differences is significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level. The difference is particularly striking when all demonstratives are taken together. This difference is reflected in the last row of the table, and is significant at the $\alpha = 0.001$ level. Taking all of this together, it is clear that Palin’s use of demonstrative determiners stands out with respect to other guests on Fox News talk shows in quantitative terms.

Demonstrative	Intercept	Std. Dev.	<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i>
this	0.025	0.010	2.49	0.025
that	0.020	0.006	3.13	0.007
these	0.014	0.006	2.34	0.034
those	0.016	0.005	3.20	0.006
All demonstratives	0.075	0.015	4.83	< 0.001

Table 3: Linear models of the differences between Palin’s and other guests’ rate of demonstrative determiners (df = 15).

In the sample of interviews used above, 30 of the 32 interviewees were men. This likely reflects a skewed gender distribution of guests on Fox News shows. However, it might also lead to concerns that Palin’s high rate of demonstratives is not unique to her, but reflects usage patterns among women more generally. We do not have theoretical reasons to expect gender-based differences in demonstrative use, but, in light of the low representation of women in our sample, we collected

⁶In addition to these fixed-effects models, we also fit mixed-effects models (Baayen, Davidson and Bates, 2008; Jaeger, 2008) for each demonstrative, with ‘host’ as a random effect. For each of these models, as with the fixed-effects models, the intercept term is significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level or lower, with the exception of the intercept for *this*, which is marginally significant, with $p = 0.069$. Because these models lead to the same conclusions as the fixed-effects models, and because the error explained by the host term is small in each model (less than one-half of the residual error in every case), we focus on the more straightforward fixed-effects model in Table 3.

and analyzed an additional 16 interviews with female guests to see if Palin’s rate of demonstratives was high relative to those guests as well.

The sixteen additional interviews were collected in a manner similar to the one we used for our initial sample (Section 4.1). For each of the original 16 Palin interviews, we searched for the single nearest interview of a female other than Palin on the same program by the same host. As in the original sample, interviews with two or more concurrent guests were not considered. Table 4 shows the percent of determiners that were demonstratives across (i) the original 16 interviews with Palin; (ii) the original 32 interviews with other guests; and (iii) the additional 16 interviews with female guests. For each demonstrative, the difference between the rate for Palin and for the additional 16 female guests is more than five times the difference for the two sets of non-Palin guests. When all demonstrative determiners are considered together, for instance, the rates for the two sets of non-Palin interviews are 8.88% and 8.84%, whereas for Palin, it’s 14.93%.

Set of Interviews	this	that	these	those	All demonstratives
Original 32 other	4.04%	2.42%	1.08%	1.34%	8.88%
Additional 16 female	3.77%	2.48%	1.12%	1.47%	8.84%
Palin	5.34%	4.08%	2.52%	2.99%	14.93%

Table 4: Demonstrative determiners as a percentage of all determiners.

As an additional check to ensure that Palin’s rate of demonstrative use stands out with respect to both female and male guests, we reran the linear regression models discussed above comparing Palin’s speech to (i) just the additional 16 female interviews, and (ii) the speech of the guests in all 48 of the non-Palin interviews we collected. For (i), we lose statistical power relative to the analysis in Table 3, since it is based on much less data, but the model looks effectively the same, and the result for all demonstrative determiners pooled is significant at the $\alpha = 0.01$ level. For (ii), we see statistical significance in every case, with the result for all demonstrative determiners pooled achieving significance at the $\alpha = 0.001$ level. In brief, Sarah Palin uses demonstrative determiners at a significantly higher rate than other guests on Fox News talk shows, female or not. But a crucial question remains: are Palin’s demonstratives different in character from those of other guests? We now argue that the answer to this question is yes.

4.3 Differences in character

In this subsection, we will examine the differing nature of Palin’s demonstrative determiners and those of the other guests. Our analysis is based on the 355 phrasal demonstratives from Palin and the 462 from the other guests in our set of 48 non-Palin interviews.

The central fact guiding this discussion is that there is a stark difference in the lengths (in words) of Palin’s and the others’ demonstrative phrases. In non-Palin speech, 71.2% of all demonstrative phrases were two words only, as in *this country* or *that sense*. For Palin, on the other hand, this number was far lower, at 46.5%. Moreover, while only 13.6% of the others’ demonstrative phrases were longer than four words, 30.4% of Palin’s were. The demonstrative from Palin in (10) is among the longest in our data.

- (10) ‘... somebody who wants to protect our constitution. . . should speak out on behalf of this individual, whose business is being harmed by **those who are intolerant and are bigoted and are hypocritical because they don’t agree with this man’s personal opinion and the sentiment that he shared. . .**’⁷

In all, the average demonstrative-phrase length for Palin was 1.5 words greater than the average for the others (4.7 and 3.2 words, respectively). These differences in length bear on the relative affectivity of the two groups’ demonstratives. Crucially, longer demonstrative phrases generally pack in more content than shorter ones as regards the identity and character of the intended referent. This has a number of relevant consequences. For one, it means that Palin’s demonstrative determiners in the corpus are more likely to be introducing a new referent into the discourse, because longer referring expressions, being more informative, carry information that would likely be superfluous in anaphoric usage, but useful in first mentions of a referent (Ward and Birner, 2004). The examples from Palin in (11) illustrate. The first, two-word demonstrative phrase is anaphoric, made with reference to a question about her use of the term ‘blood libel.’ The second introduces a new referent into the discourse and is hard to imagine as being anaphoric. The demonstrative phrases in (12), from Michele Bachmann and Elisabeth Hasselbeck, respectively, portray the same kind of length/newness contrast:

- (11) a. ‘I think the critics, again, were using anything that they could gather out of **that statement. . .**’⁸
b. ‘But, you know, I think one of my problems in this whole process is, I don’t live for **that game of the punditry, of the opining and speculating on who is doing what. . .**’⁹
- (12) a. ‘It is a state issue and it’s a federal issue. It’s important for your viewers to know that federal law will trump state law on **this issue.**’¹⁰
b. ‘But unfortunately, when you get into **this grand scheme of sort of media television et cetera**, the conservative woman is now judged.’¹¹

As noted in Section 2, demonstratives that introduce new referents into the discourse have especially high affective potential because they presuppose common ground and shared perspective that extends beyond the context of the conversation.

The second consequence of Palin’s longer demonstrative phrases is that her demonstratives are more likely to be morphosyntactically unnecessary and, hence, as noted before, more affective:

- (13) ‘Well, anybody who is a protection — somebody who wants to protect our Constitution, all of our constitutional rights, including **that freedom of speech**, should speak out on behalf of **this individual. . .**’¹²

⁷*On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*, July 31, 2012.

⁸*Hannity*, January 17, 2011.

⁹*Hannity*, May 18, 2011.

¹⁰Michele Bachmann on *Fox News Sunday*, June 26, 2011.

¹¹Elisabeth Hasselbeck on *Hannity*, January 19, 2011.

¹²Palin on *On the Record with Greta Van Susteren*, July 31, 2012.

Here, the descriptive content provided by *freedom of speech*, especially in the context of a statement about constitutional rights, provides all of the information needed to determine the intended referent. Thus, using *the* or no determiner at all would have been referentially sufficient. In opting for the demonstrative determiner *that* despite its referential superfluity, Palin foregrounds presumed shared perspective between herself and her addressee(s).

Finally, longer demonstrative phrases are more likely to contain evaluative content than shorter ones. To see whether Palin's demonstrative phrases do in fact contain more of such content than those of the other guests in the corpus, we examined a random sample of 50 demonstrative phrases from Palin and another 50 from the other guests. The resulting list of 100 demonstrative phrases was randomly sorted and presented to two graduate students in linguistics (with no information identifying the speakers of the phrases), who were independently asked to identify any of the 100 that they judged to 'contain language that is evaluative.' Though there was not perfect alignment between the two judges, both identified a far larger share of Palin's demonstrative phrases as being evaluative. One judge found 13 (26%) of Palin's demonstrative phrases to be evaluative, compared with five (10%) of the others'; and for the other judge, the values were 16 (32%) and seven (14%), respectively.

We, too, find far more evaluative and potentially controversial language in Palin's tokens than in the others. Consider the following two examples from Palin, which we find to be among the most evaluative in our entire sample:

- (14) a. 'that *goofy game* that has been played now for *too many years* with the *leftist lamestream media* trying to *twist* the candidates' words and intent and content of their statements'
- b. 'these *good, hard-working, average, everyday, patriotic* Americans who want to see the *positive change* in our country that they *deserve*'

These are chock-full of evaluative language. Example (14a) identifies a 'goofy game,' played by the 'leftist lamestream media,' which tries to 'twist' candidates' words and have been doing it for 'too many years.' Similarly, (14b) refers to a group of Americans who are 'good, hard-working, average, everyday, patriotic' and who want 'positive change' that they 'deserve.'

The relatively high level of evaluativity of Palin's demonstratives brings us back to the fact that demonstratives presuppose that there is an entity that the addressee will be able to identify in part on the basis of the properties denoted by the descriptive content of their complement NP. So, for example, when a speaker refers to 'that box of cereal,' she presupposes that there is something that the addressee will be able to identify as such. This presupposition holds when we are in the evaluative or emotional realm as well. Thus, when Palin refers to 'that craftiness from the left,'¹³ it is taken for granted that what she is talking about is identifiable and aptly described — evaluativity and all. In this way, demonstratives with evaluative content presume perspectival alignment not only in physical or epistemic terms, but also in terms of attitude and sentiment, as suggested by Lakoff (1974). With each of her many evaluative uses of demonstratives, Palin evokes these very dynamics.

To summarize, in this section we showed that Palin's demonstrative phrases tend to have more words than those of other guests, and provided evidence that, in turn, they are more likely to introduce new referents into a discourse and to be morphosyntactically unnecessary — the two

¹³On the Record with Greta Van Susteren, August 21, 2012

traits identified in Section 2 as corresponding to high solidarity-related affectivity. In addition, we provided evidence that Palin's demonstratives are more likely to carry evaluative content and thus presuppose greater shared sentiment between speaker and addressee. We now consider reactions to Palin's speech in light of the foregoing discussion. Our aim is to show that Palin's demonstrative usage helps explain the polarized nature of these reactions, and, at the same time, that the nature of these reactions enriches our understanding of the social meaning of demonstratives.

5 REACTIONS TO SARAH PALIN'S SPEECH

The previous section showed that Palin's demonstrative determiners are unusually frequent and unusually affective. This aspect of her speech has been the subject of professional commentary, most notably in Language Log posts by Liberman (2008, 2010) and in an editorial by McWhorter (2010), but it has not, to our knowledge, been widely discussed by non-linguists, or at least not explicitly so. We trace this not to a lack of saliency, but rather to the fact that it is challenging for non-linguists to consciously identify demonstrative usage as an element of linguistic style. For example, Liberman's and McWhorter's posts received numerous comments; once the linguists had identified the phenomenon and provided some terminology, people were able to provide and discuss relevant examples from Palin's speech.

Clear evidence of the salience of Palin's demonstratives can be found in parodies of her speech. On the sketch comedy television show *Saturday Night Live*, actress Tina Fey impersonated Palin in the 2008 vice presidential debate, with actor Jason Sudekis as her opponent Joe Biden. Purnell et al. (2009) observe that Fey employed some of Palin's phonological features in her impersonation, including high rates of the coronal realization of *-ing*, and fronting of /ɔ/, but she did not incorporate others, such as prelateral merger. The authors take this as potential evidence for the perceptual relevance of the former relative to the latter. In a similar vein, we note that Fey as Palin used twelve demonstrative determiners. Some examples:

- (15) a. 'You know, John McCain and I, we're a couple of mavericks. And, gosh darnit, we're gonna take **that maverick energy** right to Washington.'
- b. 'Gwen, we don't know if **this climate change hoozie-what's-it** is man-made or if it's just a natural part of the "End of Days."'
- c. 'Oh, and for **those Joe Six-Packs out there playing a drinking game at home** — Maverick.'

Fey as Palin spoke 620 words in the sketch, for a demonstrative-determiner rate of $12/620 = 0.019$. In contrast, Sudekis, as Biden, used only two demonstrative determiners, both of which had clear discourse antecedents. His rate of demonstrative determiners was just $2/491 = 0.004$.

Similarly, Garry Trudeau, in his November 29, 2008, edition of *Doonesbury*, plays up Palin's demonstrative use, with one affective demonstrative for each of the cartoon's four cells. The text of the Palin character's utterances from this comic strip is given in (16); the context is a character watching her on television.

- (16) a. So I've been teamin' up with some of our great governors to talk about **those good solutions for America** ...
- b. ...because there's **that wantin' to progress the nation forward and also shake things up** ...
- c. ...so in 2012, if God were to, you know, open **that door** and give me a shout-out, then I wouldn't blink!
- d. Ya' couldn't call God out on that 'cause he's got **that mightiness there** ...

In Section 2, we identified lacking a clear discourse antecedent and demonstrative optionality as factors that amplify the affective tone. The demonstratives in this cartoon play up both of these elements: *those good solutions for America* could be given with no determiner, *that wantin' to progress the nation forward* ... is the pivot of an existential, a position normally reserved for indefinites but often occupied by indefinite demonstratives (*There was this guy* ...; Prince 1981). And none of the demonstratives has a discourse antecedent.

The prominence of demonstratives in such parodies — alongside the phonological and lexical choices often cited in discussions of Palin's speech — suggest that Palin's characteristic use of demonstratives does not go unnoticed by the American public. Even if this feature of her speech is not consciously recognized as unusual, it clearly plays a role in the public's conception of what makes Palin Palin.

We now turn to metalinguistic reactions to Palin's speech. As suggested in Section 1, Palin's supporters on the political right generally react positively to her informal style, which they view as intimate and pleasingly familiar, whereas commenters on the left read those same cues as insincere and unwarranted. The following reactions to the 2008 vice presidential debate are representative of the sort of public responses one finds. The first group of reactions are positive, they come from conservative media outlets, and they convey a belief that Palin won the debate.

- (17) a. 'Sarah won ... She talked like real people to real people. She will fight for us.'¹⁴
- b. 'She spoke RIGHT TO ME!! She SO won this debate!'¹⁵
- c. '... very proud of Sarah ... excellent job ... this middle class girl knows you were speaking for her ...'¹⁶
- d. '... I am a proud [sic] american that we still have folks that can talk to us and not be a politician.'¹⁷

The following examples are negative, they come from liberal media outlets, and they seem to convey that Palin was unsuccessful in the debate.

¹⁴Tori, commenter on FoxNews.com, October 4, 2008.

¹⁵Barbara, commenter on FoxNews.com, October 2, 2008.

¹⁶Jeannie, commenter on FoxNews.com, October 2, 2008.

¹⁷Jeff, commenter on FoxNews.com, October 2, 2008.

- (18) a. ‘(In Palin’s) straight-talking points, many of us saw a repeat of George W. Bush’s pseudo-folksiness and fundamental dishonesty...’¹⁸
- b. ‘The folksy style is a way of stooping to voters, presuming that they are not intelligent enough to understand the Queen’s English.’¹⁹
- c. ‘What I’m wondering is if the, urk, Joe Six-Pack will see that or will buy the illusion of straight-talking. I guess we’ll see ...’²⁰
- d. ‘...it would not matter what she says as long as she says it “folksy” and with a wink. It is ridiculous.’²¹

Among the positive reactions, the commenters laud Palin for being ‘real,’ and relatable, ‘speaking to/for’ her audience. The first and fourth of the comments use unrestricted first-person plural forms, themselves contributing to a sense of solidarity and interpersonal alignment. Similarly, the second and third comments employ demonstratives of their own — *this debate* and *this middle class girl* — further reinforcing the tone.

The second set of comments, on the other hand, presents a far different picture of Palin and the debate. In the first of these comments, RJ Eskow depicts Palin as inauthentic and even dishonest, mocking the term *straight talk*. Eskow’s partitive use of the first-person plural form is less inclusive than those of the proponents of Palin. Michael Herbert characterizes Palin’s speech as insincere ‘stooping’. The third and fourth comments also suggest that Palin’s manner of speaking is insincere: the third again plays on the theme of ‘straight talk’ and, as in Fey’s impersonation, mocks Palin’s plain-folks *Joe Six-Pack* trope, and the fourth employs scare quotes around the word *folksy* to suggest that Palin’s tone is disingenuous.

From these reactions, we see two clear themes: proponents view Palin as relatable and as sharing their perspectives and values, while opponents find her familiar tone to be artificial and illusory. The account we gave above can explicate these reactions. We presented quantitative and qualitative evidence that demonstratives presuppose shared perspective among the discourse participants. Moreover, when the demonstratives refer to emotional or subjective concepts, they not only presuppose epistemic or physical shared perspective, but shared perspective in terms of sentiment and attitude, as well. In Palin’s case, her demonstratives are so frequent, and so strongly marked and evaluative, that her speech constantly presupposes this rich sense of commonality and perspectival alignment. For those who share her outlook, these gestures strengthen the social connection they feel. But the solidarity and shared-perspective effect of demonstratives is not automatic: for those who do not share Palin’s outlook, these gestures are a constant affront, a barrage of failed, offensive, or otherwise undesirable presuppositions and undue familiarity.

We think demonstratives are just one of the many devices that Palin uses to achieve these ultimately divisive effects. Her phonology and her lexical choices also contribute. For example, in Campbell-Kibler’s (2007) work on the suffix *-ing*, she finds that the coronal ‘-in’ form can index an unpretentious, easygoing attitude or persona, but can just as easily be perceived as insincere or condescending, depending on the social relationships of the interlocutors. This is presumably part of the same swirl of familiar language and underlying fellow-feeling. In all these cases, because

¹⁸RJ Eskow, HuffingtonPost.com, October 3, 2008.

¹⁹Michael Herbert, Open.Salon.com, October 3, 2008.

²⁰Anonymous, commenter on WashingtonPost.com, October 2, 2008.

²¹shiningstar1, commenter on HuffingtonPost.com, October 4, 2008.

the language both depends upon certain social connections and makes them more salient, it comes to occupy an important place in the social dynamic, as both a signal of the social connections and a reinforcer or even progenitor of them.

6 CONCLUSION

Demonstratives might seem at first to be unlikely vehicles for establishing and maintaining social bonds, since they appear to be bland functional elements. However, when we look closely at their context-dependent semantics, we find rich potential for social meaning. In particular, we have shown that the use of demonstratives both presumes and, when welcome, reinforces a sense of shared perspective between interlocutors. It is this dynamic, we argue, that explains why linguists and lexicographers alike have characterized certain uses of demonstratives as ‘colloquial’ (Lakoff, 1974) or ‘informal’ — just like taboo words, certain phonetic features, terms of address, etc., affective uses of demonstratives require a degree of familiarity and fellowship between speaker and hearer to be licensed.

We have also shown that Sarah Palin is an extraordinary user of demonstratives. Though affective demonstratives are a widely used stylistic resource, Palin uses them with especially high frequency, in especially affective ways. In turn, Palin’s speech tends to presuppose a great deal of shared perspective and common ground with her audience. This helps explicate the particular ways in which Palin’s voice is so divisive: those who are aligned with her political and cultural attitudes hear her tone as genuine and warm, whereas those who disagree with her views hear her style as disingenuous and untoward.

As noted from the outset, demonstratives are far from being the only linguistic resources available for, to borrow Lakoff’s phrase, ‘achieving camaraderie.’ Thus, under our analysis, we should expect to find that the use of affective demonstratives correlates with other resources of this kind. Analysis of such correlations is beyond the scope of this paper, but we offer a few preliminary findings as a first step in that direction.

First, concerning Palin’s use of informal euphemisms like *heck* and *darn*, pointed out by Purnell et al. (2009) among others, we find in our corpus of Fox News interviews that three of Palin’s five uses of *heck* have at least one demonstrative phrase in the very same sentence, as in (19), and one of the other two uses occurs with a demonstrative phrase in the immediately preceding sentence.

(19) ‘*This “ObamaCare” mandate, **this decision that was made today** – heck, Obama even proposing it and ramming it through and down our throats through Pelosi and Reid’s embracing of it – **that’s** a harbinger of things to come.*’²²

Similarly, one of Palin’s two uses of *darn* is accompanied by a demonstrative phrase in the same sentence.

Second, we have preliminary evidence that Palin is a relatively frequent user of first-person plural indexicals like *we*, *us*, and *our*, which Talbot (1992) argues can contribute to a sense of closeness and alignment between speaker and hearer by referring to both as part of the same collective.²³ For instance, in (20), from the 2008 vice presidential debate, Palin uses five first-person

²²*On the record with Greta Van Susteren*, June 28, 2012.

²³Such indexicals may be polarizing in much the same way as affective demonstratives: those who feel aligned with the speaker may be warmed by such linguistic gestures to solidarity, while those who see themselves as being at odds with the speaker may find them presumptuous.

plural indexicals in a single sentence, in addition to the affective demonstrative *that first credit card*:

- (20) ‘... **Let’s** do what **our** parents told **us** before **we** probably even got **that first credit card**: don’t live outside of **our** means.’

In the debate as a whole, whereas 267 (3.49%) of Palin’s words were first-person plural indexicals, only 166 (2.21%) of Biden’s were.

Finally, it appears that perhaps even Palin’s phonetic ‘informality’ and use of demonstratives may correlate with each other. Examining her realization of the *-ing* suffix in the debate, Purnell et al. (2009: 5) report that ‘Palin’s g-dropping is widespread in highly frequent verbs and basically absent in lower frequency vocabulary.’ They identified only two exceptions, both on the infrequent word *craving*, which Palin pronounced with the coronal variant. The first token can be found in our example (9), repeated here as (21), and the second is provided below in (22), in which Palin questions Joe Biden’s war-related voting record:

- (21) ‘I think Americans are cravin’ something new and different and **that new energy** and **that new commitment** that’s going to come with reform.’
- (22) ‘Americans are cravin’ **that straight talk** and just want to know, hey, if you voted for it, tell us why you voted for it and it was a war resolution.’

Both of Palin’s tokens of *craving* have affective demonstratives as their objects. The latter example, the source of the title of this paper, epitomizes Palin’s linguistic style. In a single sentence, she employs a first-person plural form (*us*), constructed dialog, speech on behalf of the American public, an unexpected coronal variant of *-ing*, and a potently affective demonstrative. Together, Palin crafts a highly familiar tone, perhaps an example of the very brand of ‘straight talk’ to which she refers. Of course, the confluence of all of these features — from the phonetic to the pragmatic to the syntactic — could just be a coincidence, but we are confident that future research will uncover patterns of this kind running through Palin’s speech, and that of others.

We hope in this paper to have enriched our collective understanding of the relation between the basic semantics and use conditions of linguistic forms and their social significance. We see the present work as part of a broader project of relating truth-conditional and social meaning along these lines. We further hope to have added to the growing evidence that context and meaning are multifaceted and inextricably linked. In the present case, information about Sarah Palin’s public persona, the environment in which she operates, and the reactions she evokes, all come together to illuminate what she intends to convey and how her audience responds. Language use is a social, deeply contextual phenomenon; the better we understand the social landscape in which it is used and the social purposes to which it is put, the deeper our understanding of it will be.

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