

**Pronominal reference in discourse:  
Ambiguity resolved by form and position**

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This paper discusses how parallel apparent referential ambiguity of anaphors are resolved by means of different strategies cross-linguistically. More specifically, we explore parallels between the placement of pronominal objects with propositional antecedents in Norwegian, and the use of pronouns *es* (it) and *das* (that) in German.

In Norwegian, while pronominal objects with nominal antecedents typically undergo so-called *Object Shift* (OS), i.e. shift across adverbs and negation, pronominal objects with propositional antecedents generally do not undergo OS. However, when these elements refer to a proposition that constitutes the *continuing topic* in the discourse, OS is available. This potentially explains the position differences of the two instances of *det* in (1).

(1) **John gikk til jobben.** (Norw.)

*John walked to work.the*

Maria forventet **ikke det**<sub>1</sub>. Susanne forventet **det**<sub>2</sub> **heller ikke**.

*Maria expected not it      Susanne expected it either not*

‘John walked to work. Maria didn’t expect that. Susanne didn’t expect it either.’

This is reminiscent of a pattern observed in German. However, in German the pattern does not concern object *position*, but rather the *form* of the pronominal element referring to a clausal antecedent. While the pronoun *es* typically refers to a (neuter) nominal antecedent, the pronoun *das* is generally used to refer back to propositional antecedents: However, *es* is also sometimes available for propositional antecedents, as shown in (2):

(2) Sie meint, **dass Johannes tüchtig ist.** (Germ.)

*she thinks that Johannes clever is*

Ich sehe **das**<sub>1</sub> nicht so, und Karen sieht **es**<sub>2</sub> auch nicht so.

*I see that not so and Karen sees it also not. so*

‘She thinks that Johannes is clever, but I don’t think so, and Karen doesn’t think so either.’

In this study, we find parallels between the use of OS and *es*, on the one hand, and lack of OS and *das*, on the other. Based on judgements of dialogues, we propose that –OS/*das* is preferred when referring to a proposition that is not yet established as part of the common ground, as in B’s response below. In contrast, when referring to a proposition that *is* part of the common ground in the discourse OS/*es* is preferred, as in A’s follow-up.

(3) A: Did Vera get fired?

B: **Norwegian:**

Ja, visste du **{?det} ikke {det}**?

*yes knew you that not that*

‘Yes didn’t you know?’

**German:**

Ja, wusstest du **??es/das** nicht?

*yes knew you that not*

A: **Norwegian:**

Hun forteller **{det} vel ikke**

*she tells it probably not*

**{??det}** til noen ennå

*it to anyone yet*

‘She has probably not told anyone.’

**German:**

Sie hat **es/?das** wohl

*she has it probably*

niemanden erzählt

*no one told*

Thus we propose a unified account for the distribution of ±OS in Norwegian and *es* versus *das* in German based on the discourse status of the antecedent of the anaphor.