

Cheyenne Demonstratives: A Corpus Study

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This paper investigates the eight demonstratives found in Cheyenne, an Algonquian language spoken in Montana and Oklahoma.¹ Demonstratives, such as *this* and *that* in English, are used to indicate an individual or object being referred to, either something in the speech context (deictic use) or something that was previously mentioned (anaphoric use). In this paper, we discuss ±proximal and ±animate distinctions made amongst the Cheyenne demonstratives, their frequency of use, and the ways they are used, based on a corpus study of 62 texts (Leman 1980b) and the dictionary (Fisher et al. 2006).

Examples (1) and (2) below illustrate two of the Cheyenne demonstratives, animate proximate demonstrate *tsé'tóhe* (1) and proximate inanimate *hé'tóhe* (2), each occurring with a noun. Demonstratives are bolded throughout the paper and the square brackets indicate the constituency, e.g., the noun that goes with the demonstrative.

(1) Móxhoháatanohéhe [**tsé'tóhe** oonáha'é'héhe].

‘[**This** frog] was really scared.’ (The Frog and her Children, Leman 1980b:24)

(2) [**Hé'tóhe** ame] tanó'eohtseo'o! éxhetósesto.

‘ “[**This** pemmican], take along!” he told her.’

(A Man Who Looked for a Son-in-law, Leman 1980b:61)

These two examples are from texts in the corpus study, which we cite by including the name of the text as well as the book or collection where it was published and the page number. When referencing dictionary entries, we include the dictionary citation (Fisher et al. 2006) and the lexical item where this entry is found.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 gives background on the eight Cheyenne demonstratives and our methodology for the corpus study. Section 3 discusses the different uses of the demonstratives, in terms of deictic versus anaphoric. Sections 4 give the results of our corpus study: our findings about frequency of the different demonstratives, then the distribution and order of demonstratives with nouns. Section 5 discusses when demonstratives are and are not used, in comparison to other possible constructions, such as bare nouns. We also discuss an empirical pattern from our findings regarding how nominal anaphora are marked. Section 6 is the summary and conclusion.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In English, the four demonstratives indicate both distance and number, as in Table 1. Proximal forms are near the speaker while distal forms are further from the speaker.

TABLE 1: Four English demonstratives

	PROXIMAL	DISTAL
SINGULAR	<i>this</i>	<i>that</i>
PLURAL	<i>these</i>	<i>those</i>

English demonstratives have both deictic uses, which refer to something in the speaker's

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environment, typically accompanied with a gesture like pointing, as well as anaphoric uses, which refer to something previously mentioned in a text or discourse. Demonstratives also have pragmatic and sociolinguistic functions (e.g., Lakoff 1974; Davis and Potts 2010; Potts and Schwarz 2010).

In Cheyenne, there are eight demonstratives, indicating both distance and animacy, but not number, as shown in Table 2 below (see also Leman 1980a). This contrasts with some other Algonquian languages that do inflect for other categories, including number and obviation (e.g., Proulx 1988; Schupbach 2013).

TABLE 2: The eight Cheyenne demonstratives (Leman 1980a)

	PROXIMAL	PISTAL
ANIMATE	<i>tsé'tóhe, néhe</i>	<i>tá'tóhe, náhe</i>
INANIMATE	<i>hé'tóhe, héne</i>	<i>há'tóhe, háne</i>

There are two demonstratives in each cell: the ones on the left have been described as having both deictic and anaphoric uses, while the ones on the right are only anaphoric (Leman 1984, 1987). Note also that the proximal forms contain the front vowel *e* while the distal forms contain the back vowel *a* (Leman 1984).

In Cheyenne, deictic expressions often co-occur with lip pointing. For Cheyennes, pointing with fingers isn't used — instead lip pointing is used. This practice is described in (3) below, from the authors' work on Cheyenne customs and taboos.

(3) Éohkèsáavé'séhetséhenéstovéhane nemo'eško. Tšeškáhtsená'oo'o!

‘There is not pointing with your finger. Point with your lips!’

Lip pointing can last longer than the duration of the demonstrative or occur several times within the same sentence for a single referent, parallel to pointing with fingers for English speakers.

Some demonstratives are frequently used with these gestures, as we will discuss below.

To investigate the properties of these eight Cheyenne demonstratives, we searched a collection of 62 Cheyenne texts (Leman 1980b) and the Cheyenne dictionary (Fisher et al. 2006) for all instances of the demonstratives. There were 468 total occurrences, which we coded for different features, e.g., order with noun and optionality of noun. Figure 1 below shows an example of how we kept track of the examples and coded them for the various features. The features are as follows. “Noun?” indicates whether a noun appears with the demonstrative, “Dem on L” indicates whether the noun is on the left; “Space?” means whether the demonstrative and noun are adjacent to each other; and “Noun phrase?” indicates whether the demonstrative modifies a complex noun phrase such as “that one who was from the north” as in line 4 of Figure 1. In the database, “1” means yes and “0” means no.

FIGURE 1: Sample of coded database

Text	Line #	Cheyenne	Translation	N?	Dem on L?	Space?	NP?
The Snake and the Mice	27	Hena'háanehe hapó'eveta tséohkéhešhóséstomónéto he'tohe hóhta'áheo'o tséstše'káheto	That is it, likewise, what was told to me this story, when I was young	1	1	0	0
The Corn and Meat	17	Naa he'tohe tséxhóneeo'o'enáonóoma máhtamáhááheéxeséstse	And this, where water comes out, she called me, old woman, he said."	1	1	0	1
The Corn and Meat	28	He'tohe mese éxhetaevósesto ho'évohkótse naa máheemenótse	*"This, eat it" she told them, "meat and corn!"	0	0	0	0
The Corn and Meat	41	Naa he'tohe táanáhoeotsestse ovóehoxomóhéné onóomóhéné	"And this, take it out! Feed it (herd) first! Call it!"	0	0	0	0
The Corn and Meat	50	Éstásé'hovetšéške'eotsenése he'tohe ho'évohkótse naa máheemenótse	It suddenly got smaller, this meat and corn.	1	1	0	0
Sweet Medicine	1	He'tohe hóhta'áheo'o éhóhta'áheóneve	This story, it is a story.	1	1	0	0
The Trek from Oklahoma	13	He'tohe ho'e néá'enánone	This land, we own it.	1	1	0	0
The Hunter and the Badger	67	Hapo'e he'tohe táhestanótse náheto	"Likewise this, take it!" I told him.	0	0	0	0
How Birney Got the Name "Oevemanáheno"	1	Naa tséheškéto nánóhtséstóvo he'tohe tséhmano'eevóse óevemanáheno tséhestohe	*"And my mother I asked her this where they have village, Scabby Place, what it's called,	1	1	0	1

DEICTIC, ANAPHORIC, AND OTHER USES

As mentioned above, four of the demonstratives have both anaphoric and deictic uses while the other four are strictly anaphoric (Leman 1984), shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Deictic and anaphoric uses

	PROXIMAL		DISTAL	
	ANAPHORIC	BOTH	ANAPHORIC	BOTH
ANIMATE	<i>néhe</i>	<i>tsé'tóhe</i>	<i>náhe</i>	<i>tá'tóhe</i>
INANIMATE	<i>héne</i>	<i>hé'tóhe</i>	<i>háne</i>	<i>há'tóhe</i>

A deictic example of the distal inanimate demonstrative from the dictionary is in (4).

(4) Hénáá'e **há'tóhe** (pointing)?
'What is **that**?' (Fisher et al. 2006: *hénáá'e*)

Deictic uses are also found in identificational constructions, such as (5) below.

(5) [Context: a snake just entered the den of a mouse family]
Tsé'tóhe neméšémévo.
'**This** (is) your grandfather.' (*The Snake and the Mice*, Leman 1980b:23)

Several anaphoric examples can be seen in (6), an excerpt from "How to Put Up a Teepee" by James Shoulderblade (Leman 1987:222). This text is from a collection (Leman 1987) that wasn't included in our corpus study, but it shows a number of examples of the proximal anaphoric demonstratives *néhe* (animate) and *héne* (inanimate) in the same excerpt. We have continued bolding the demonstrative and using brackets to indicate the noun or phrase it occurs with. Since these are anaphoric uses, we have added underlining for the antecedent — what the demonstrative is anaphoric to — and subscript numbers to indicate the anaphoric connections. For example, the lodgepoles that were previously mentioned in the text are referred back to with the demonstrative phrase [**néhe** hoóxé'e]₁ 'the lodgepoles' in line (6b).

(6) Excerpt from *How to Put Up a Tepee* (Leman 1987:222)

[Context previously in the text: discussion of the number of lodgepoles₁ and how they are positioned.]

- a. Éohkeméhaehestséevéhaménóvo, sétóhke₂ Éohkeévehestánóvo.
‘They used it (stripped rawhide) for rope, (rawhide) rope₂ they used to call it that.’
- b. **Héne**₂ éohkevé'šetoo'etovo [**néhe** hoóxé'e]₁.
‘They used **it**₂ to tie [**the** lodgepoles]₁.’
- c. Éohkéséhpéhahtsénóvo vee'e₃.
‘They spread out the teepee₃.’
- d. Éohketaeváhánóvo maato tséto'senee'ésté he'nétoonéhéva.
‘They measured it by the lodgepole that’s going to be in the front.’
- e. Naa [**héne** vee'e]₃ maato néhéóhe éohkéséhpéhahtsénóvo.
‘And [**the** teepee]₃, in front, there they spread it out.’
- f. Éohketaevánánóvo [**héne** tséhe'éstóneo'e vee'e]₃.
‘They measure [**the** length of the front of the teepee]₃.’
- g. Néhéóhe (éohketoo'ehe) [**néhe** na'éstse]₁.
‘That’s where [**that** one]₁ is going to be tied.’
- h. Naa néhe'še he'pa'onéomé'e tséxhenove éohkéhóséséhpanánóvo,
‘And then what is called the back part, they spread that out,’
- i. Néhéóhe éohkéhósetaevánánó [**héne** vee'e]₃, tsénésetsese tsétáxéšenátsese.
‘they measure [**the** tepee]₃ there too, where the two poles are together.’

We also find anaphoric uses of the other demonstratives, such as *tsé'tóhe* in (7b), which is the continuation of (7a).

(7) a. No'ka éhvéehoo'o oonáha'é'héhe tóxeha o'hé'e.

‘Once a frog was camping beside a river.’

b. móxhoháatanóhéhe [**tsé'tóhe** oonáha'é'héhe].

‘[**this** frog] was really scared.’

(*The Frog and her Children*, Leman 1980b:24)

In addition to deictic and anaphoric uses, there are some uses that seem to be neither, such as at the beginning of a story, as in (8), a discourse pragmatic usage of the demonstrative.

(8) [**Tsé'tóhe** hetane] Ma'háahnotóá'e éohkéhestohe.

‘[**This** man], Big Buffalo, he was called.’ (*Flute Playing*, Leman 1980b:11)

Example (8) is not anaphoric, as it is the first sentence of the text, and it is not deictic as it is not demonstrating an individual in the speaker’s immediate environment. Instead, it seems to be introducing the man, who may or may not be familiar to the audience.

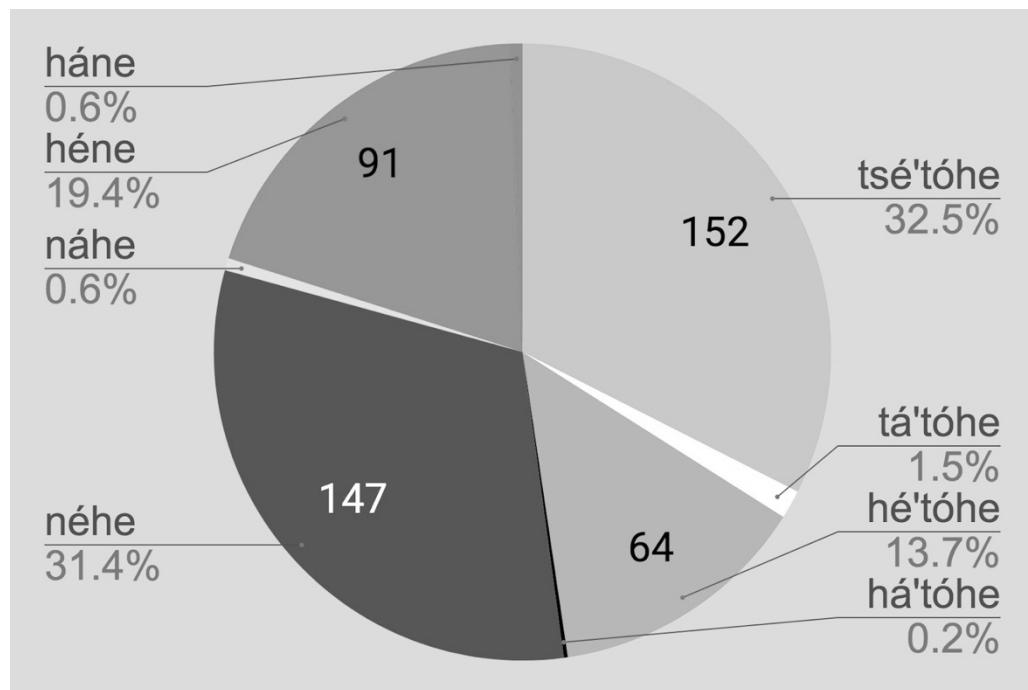
RESULTS

Frequency

Turning now to the results of our corpus study, of the 468 total occurrences of the 8 demonstratives in the corpus, the most frequent were the proximal animate ones: *tsé'tóhe* (deictic

or anaphoric; 152 occurrences) and *néhe* (only anaphoric; 147 occurrences). The next most frequent were the proximal inanimate ones, *héne* (91 occurrences) and *hé'tóhe* (64 occurrences). The other four demonstratives — the four distal ones — were very infrequent. Figure 2 shows the frequency for all 8 demonstratives.

FIGURE 2: Frequency of Cheyenne demonstratives



However, these textual frequencies summarized in Figure 2 do not give us the whole picture: *náhe* is so infrequent now that it is not recognized by some speakers while *há'tóhe* is still very frequent in conversational use, which may tend to be deictic uses and used with lip pointing.

One pattern we found is that the most common demonstratives are the proximal ones; this can be seen more clearly in Table 4 below, where the demonstratives are organized by distance and animacy features.

TABLE 4: Frequency of Cheyenne demonstratives by distance and animacy

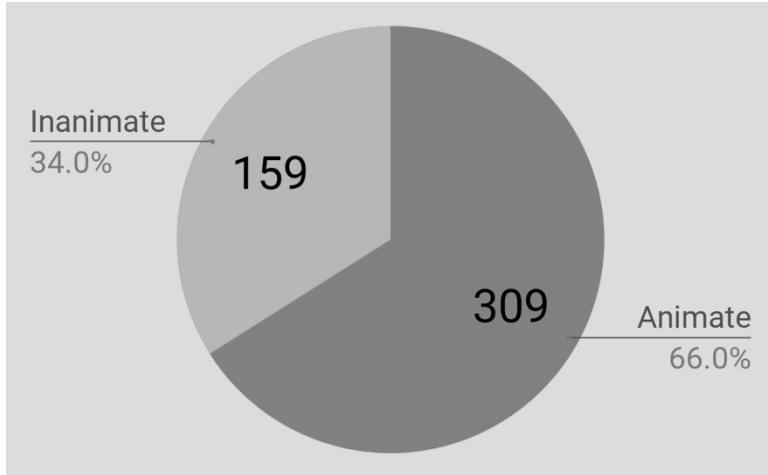
PROXIMAL	ANIMATE	<i>tsé'tóhe</i>	152
		<i>néhe</i>	147
	INANIMATE	<i>héne</i>	91
		<i>hé'tóhe</i>	64
DISTAL	ANIMATE	<i>tá'tóhe</i>	7
		<i>náhe</i>	3
	INANIMATE	<i>háne</i>	3
		<i>há'tóhe</i>	1
		TOTAL	468

That is, 454 of the total 468 occurrences we found were proximal (97%).

The reason for the heavy skew of the distribution towards proximal demonstratives is not known. One possibility is that it could be an artifact of our corpus, which is texts and not conversation. Relatedly, it could be about anaphoric versus deictic use, since we did not code for that feature. Given the nature of the corpus, most instances of the demonstratives were likely anaphoric, though some, especially within quotes, may have been deictic (see also Section 3 above).

Another pattern in our results was that animate demonstratives were about twice as frequent as inanimate ones, as in Figure 3 below.

FIGURE 3: Frequency and animacy



One reason for this pattern may again be the nature of our corpus, in that many of the texts are about people and animals — animate individuals. We did not code for all instances of nouns with and without demonstratives so it could be that inanimate nouns appeared less frequently with demonstratives. Nevertheless, examples of animate and inanimate demonstratives are given below in (9) and (10). In (9), the proximal animate demonstrative *tsé'tóhe* appearing with *kásovááhe* ‘young man’ (animate). In (10) we see the proximal inanimate demonstrative *hé'tóhe* appearing with *ho'e* ‘land’ (inanimate).

(9) Néhē'še [**tsé'tóhe** kásovááhe] móstáhéne'enáotsé'tohéhe.

‘Then [**this** young man] understood it.’ *(Story of a Ghost, Leman 1980b:34)*

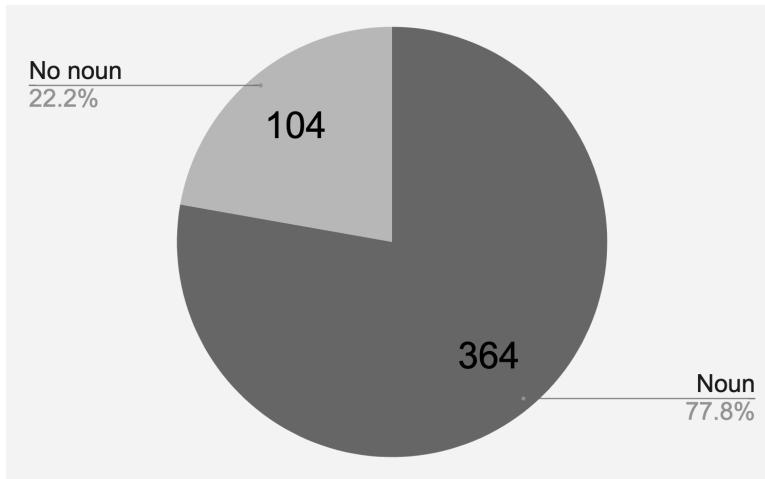
(10) [**hé'tóhe** ho'e] néá'enánone.

‘[**This** land], we own it.’ *(The Trek from Oklahoma, Leman 1980b:9)*

Distribution and order with the noun

In our corpus, the majority of demonstratives occur with a noun, as in (9) and (10) above, though a good number of demonstratives occur on their own; these results are in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: Occurrence with and without a noun



An example of a demonstrative occurring without a noun is given in (11) below, from *The Ground Squirrel and the Turtle*.

(11) [Context: A ground squirrel and a turtle have just been caught and are about to be roasted. The turtle starts walking toward the fire, so the captors throw the turtle into the water.]

Tsé'tóhe móxhéstâhehéhe.

‘This one [the turtle] must be from there [the fire].’

(Leman 1980b:30)

This is an anaphoric use of the proximal animate demonstrative *tsé'tóhe*, where it is clear from the context that the demonstrative is referring to the turtle, previously introduced in the story.

When the demonstrative occurred with a noun, it always occurred to the left of the noun, as in (12) and (13) below.

(12) Éme'tónetóhtáho'tánéstse [**hé'tóhe** menótse]?

‘What color should [**these** berries] be when ripe?’ (Fisher et al. 2006: *-tónetóhtáho'tá*)

(13) Éohketaevánánóvo [**héne** tséhe'éstóneo'eve'e' maato].

They.measure.it that length teepee in.front

‘They measure [**the** length of the front of the tepee].’

(Fisher et al. 2006: *-he'éstóneo'e*)

Some of the examples of a demonstrative occurring with a noun were discontinuous: the demonstrative and its noun were not adjacent, as in (14) below.

(14) [**Tsé'tóhe**] éxhe'aná'o'haesesto [xaóne] hetane.

this.one was.cornered.by.him [skunk] man

‘[**This** skunk] cornered a man.’ (Fisher et al. 2006: *-he'aná'o'h*)

However, this was not common: only 4% (3 tokens) of the examples that contained both a demonstrative and noun referring to the same individual were discontinuous. These discontinuous examples all followed the pattern of the demonstrative occurring on the left of the noun, as in (14) above. Further investigation of features such as prosody would be needed in

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order to determine whether the discontinuous example in (14) is an instance of movement of the demonstrative from the noun phrase, or if it is base generated.

WHEN ARE THE DEMONSTRATIVES NOT USED?

One important question that is not addressed by this corpus study is when a demonstrative is used, with or without a noun, versus just a bare noun or a pronoun. There has been much recent work concerning dimensions of definiteness, the interpretation of bare nouns and the semantic contribution of demonstratives (Schwarz 2009, 2013; Jenks 2018; Moroney 2021). A central question within the aforementioned literature is the distinction between anaphoric and unique definites (see also, e.g., Arkoh and Matthewson 2013; Barlew 2014).

We note that in Cheyenne, the demonstrative is not required in unique situations — that is, situations where there is only a single possible referent in the context, as in (15), assuming our natural context where there is only one sun.

(15) **Éše'he** énèhmé'éhne.

‘The sun is coming up.’

(Fisher et al. 2006: *-mé'éhne*)

Demonstratives are also not required in anaphoric contexts, though as shown above they certainly can occur in such contexts. We see this in (16) below, an excerpt from the text *The Bear, the Coyote, and the Skunk* by Jeannette Howlingcrane. An individual may be introduced by a bare noun, as in line (16b). A bare noun may then be used to refer back to the aforementioned entity, for instance in line (16e). This is an example of a bare noun referring anaphorically.

(16) Excerpt from the beginning of *The Bear, the Coyote, and the Skunk* (Leman 1980b:27)

- a. Nétâhóhta'haovátse.
‘Let me tell you a story.’
- b. Náhkohe₁ éstaamenéheohtsé'tanoho meo'o.
‘A bear₁ was following a path.’
- c. Hápó'e náháóhe ó'kohóme₂ móhnéhnéheohtsé'tohéhe.
‘Likewise there a coyote₂ was following it.’
- d. Néhē'se éstoo'e'ováhtséhoono.
‘Then they met.’
- e. **Náhkohe**₁ éstatséhetóhoono **ó'kohomeho**₂,
‘**The bear**₁ said to **the coyote**₂,’
- f. “No'héhnéstse!
“Move aside!”
- g. Hé'tóhe nameo'o,”
‘This is my path,’”
- h. Éxhetóhoono.
‘he told him.’

Examples (15) and (16) together suggest that bare nouns can be both unique definites and anaphoric definites in Cheyenne. In anaphoric contexts, several strategies can be used, including both bare nouns and nouns with demonstratives. Furthermore, in anaphoric contexts often no noun is used at all — only pronouns or verbal agreement. Examples of this can also be seen in the excerpt in (16): in (16b) the noun ‘path’ is introduced and it is referred back to in line (16c)

with just the verbal agreement/pronoun. Similarly, both the bear and the coyote are referred to by the plural agreement in line (16d), and each is referred back to separately in (16h).

A reviewer points out that the examples in (16) could be instances of narrative or literary usages of the nouns “Bear” “Coyote” and “Skunk”. While this could be possible for this particular story, we found additional evidence of bare nouns that clearly could not be narrative usages, such as in the following example where the bare noun *vee'e* “teepee” refers back to a previously mentioned teepee in (17) (see also (6) above). This is taken from the text *How to Put Up a Teepee*; the bare noun is semantically and grammatically inanimate, and more clearly not a narrative or literary use of this noun.

(17) [Context: after previous mention of the teepee in the story]

Éohkésépēhahtsénóvo **vee'e**.

‘They spread out the **teepee**.’

These data in Cheyenne have important empirical implications. First, we note that it is common crosslinguistically for proximal demonstratives to be used in anaphoric definite contexts (e.g., Arkoh and Matthewson 2013; Jenks 2018; Moroney 2021). This generalization could account for the fact that proximal demonstratives occurred more frequently in the Cheyenne texts as they are used in contexts of definiteness. However, as we have underscored above, proximal demonstratives are not *needed* for a definite interpretation as bare nouns can refer to definite, anaphoric individuals as well. Recent work on A’ingae, a language isolate of Amazonian Ecuador and Colombia, has shown that even though there is an anaphoric determiner in the language, bare nouns can also refer anaphorically to previously mentioned entities

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(Zheng and AnderBois 2021). Cheyenne, too, appears to exhibit optionality in the way that anaphoricity is marked. Further work can determine whether there are certain pragmatic factors governing anaphoric definites with and without a demonstrative in Cheyenne.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, Cheyenne has eight demonstratives that differ in terms of animacy, distance, and whether they have both anaphoric and deictic uses or only anaphoric uses. In our corpus study of 62 texts and the Cheyenne dictionary, we found 468 occurrences of the eight demonstratives. The most frequent were the proximal demonstratives, together accounting for 97% of all occurrences, and animates were about twice as frequent as inanimates. Demonstratives can occur either on their own or with a noun. In our corpus, the demonstrative always occurred to the left of the noun, even when discontinuous, which was rare but attested.

This project provides areas for future investigation. Further investigation of Cheyenne discontinuous noun phrases, as well as the ordering of other elements in the nominal phrase, could tie into other work on discontinuous noun phrases that have been reported within the Algonquian literature (Johnson and Rosen 2015) and beyond. It would also be helpful to code the corpus examples for deictic vs. anaphoric use, since anaphoric uses may be more common in the context of a story, while texts may underrepresent deictic uses, which may be more common in conversations. Future corpus work and fieldwork could focus on comparing when a demonstrative with a noun is used versus when bare nouns alone are used, when no noun is used, and the range of their interpretations, building on the preliminary findings discussed in section 6.

Lastly, on the pedagogical side, demonstratives are a crucial aid for language teaching and learning. They provide important cues for learning animacy in Cheyenne. Some of Dr.

Littlebear's frequent advice to language teachers is to use a demonstrative plus a noun, instead of just the noun alone, to signal the animacy of the noun. For example, using (18) with the animate demonstrative *tsé'tóhe* instead of (19) alone signals that the noun is animate.

(18) **tsé'tóhe** éstse'he
'this (animate) shirt'

(19) éste'he
'shirt'

Whether a Cheyenne noun is inanimate or animate must be acquired — it is not always possible to discern from the form of the noun itself or from the meaning of the noun. Using a demonstrative with a verb (20), instead of a verb alone (21), can help reinforce the animacy of the argument.

(20) **Hé'tóhe** éheóvo.
'This (inan) is yellow.'

(21) Éheóvo.
'It is yellow.'

(Fisher et al 2006: *-heóvó*)

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