Within a variety of theories and paradigms, some linguists have handled the anaphoric expressions *it* and *this* as oppositional, referring to different entities (i.e. *this* refers to a proposition whereas *it* refers to a noun phrase) and establishing different foci/attentional states (i.e. *it* signals topic continuation and *this* signals topic shift) (4, 8, 11, 12, 15). For others, however, *it* and *this* are indistinguishable with respect to the antecedent preferences and the foci they establish (1, 9, 10). Existing psycholinguistic studies focus on comparisons of the deictic *that* and the anaphoric pronoun *it*, or on comparing deictic expressions with the use of personal pronouns in German or French (2, 3, 7). The cognitive functions of these expressions in establishing coherence and in shifting foci in text processing, however, have not been explored with online methods. This study differs in terms of the anaphoric expressions we handle, our focus on textual deixis, and our use of both eye-tracking reading experiments and norming experiments.

Here we report 3 eye-tracking experiments and 3 norming experiments designed to test the antecedent preferences of *it* and *this* and the foci they establish. Eye-tracking Experiment 1 (40 participants; 40 items) compared how *it* and *this* refer to the proposition and the noun phrase in the preamble. Preferences were measured by referential expressions after the adjective following *it* and *this*. In norming Experiment 1, (16 participants; 40 items), blanks replaced the words following *it*/*this* and participants were asked to complete the sentences. Eye-tracking Experiment 2 (40 participants; 40 items) compared how *it* and *this* refer to two noun statuses (i.e. subject/NP1 and object/NP2). Preferences were measured by mismatching/matching referential expressions with the features of noun phrases. In norming Experiment 2 (16 participants; 40 items), we used the same stimuli as in Experiment 2 but we removed the phrases after *it* and *this* and asked participants to complete the sentences. Eye-tracking Experiment 3 (40 participants; 40 items) compared how *it* and *this* refer to two noun phrases in the object positions. In norming Experiment 3 (16 participants; 40 items), we used the same stimuli as in Experiment 3.

Contrary to the similarity account, Experiments 1, 2 and 3 and the norming experiments showed that *this* and *it* refer to different entities and establish different attentional states. References with *this* to a noun phrase led to longer fixations than did references to *it*. In Experiments 2 and 3, fixations when referring to the first NP were longer in the *this* condition than in the *it* condition. Our results will be interpreted in relation to a time-course model of anaphora processing. This combines the focus processing theory of Sidner (1983), the two-stage model (bonding and resolution process) of Sanford et.al. (1983) and of Garrod and Sanford (1994), and the late filter model of Sturt (2003). The regressions-out analyses in Experiments 1,2 and 3 indicate that participants resolve ambiguity by taking into account the semantic overlap among referential expressions, anaphoric expressions and the preamble.

**Eye-tracking Experiment 1**

**Condition 1: it referring to the proposition**

Alice **pruned the bonsai tree.** / It was/ a splendid **idea** and she/ forgot all her stress

**Condition 2: this referring to the proposition**

Alice **pruned the bonsai tree.** / This was/ a splendid **idea** and she/ forgot all her stress

**Condition 3: it referring to the noun phrase**

Alice **pruned the bonsai tree.** / It was/ a splendid **plant** and she/ forgot all her stress.

**Condition 4: this referring to the noun phrase**

Alice **pruned the bonsai tree.** / This was/ a splendid **plant** and she/ forgot all her stress.
Alice pruned the bonsai tree. /This was/ a splendid plant/ and she /forgot all her stress

Eyetracking Experiment 2

Condition 1: *it* referring to the subject/NP1
The room was small and had a large jug in the centre. / It had/ a large window/ and looked stylish.

Condition 2: *this* referring to the subject/ NP1
The room was small and had a large jug in the centre. /This had/ a large window/ and looked stylish.

Condition 3: *it* referring to the object/ NP2
The room was small and had a large jug in the centre. /It had/ a large handle/ and looked stylish.

Condition 4: *this* referring to object/ NP2
The room was small and had a large jug in the centre. /This had/ a large handle/ and looked stylish.

Eyetracking Experiment 3

Condition 1: *it* referring to the object/NP1
Joseph put the wine glass next to the bottle. Before washing up, he/ grasped it/ by its stem/ and put it on the sideboard.

Condition 2: *this* referring to the object/NP1
Joseph put the wine glass next to the bottle. Before washing up, he/ grasped this/ by its stem/ and put it on the sideboard.

Condition 3: *it* referring to the object/ NP2
Joseph put the wine glass next to the bottle. Before washing up, he/ grasped it/ by its cork/ and put it on the sideboard.

Condition 4: *this* referring to the object/ NP2
Joseph put the wine glass next to the bottle. Before washing up, he/ grasped this/ by its cork/ and put it on the sideboard.

References:


