Is that it? A cross-linguistic approach to the semantic features coded by the *só/*tó demonstratives in Proto-Indo-European

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The reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) demonstrative system in general -and of *só-/*tó- in particular- is still a matter of debate and offers a considerable number of challenges. One of them is the question whether the PIE demonstrative system was organized into three or four categories (I-deixis; thou-deixis; that-deixis; yonder-deixis or 'over there'). The existence of an ample collection of reconstructible demonstratives gives no clear space to the specialization of *só/*tó as any of the above types, and this has led scholars to classify these forms as some kind of neutral deixis. Another debate that has a direct impact on the understanding of *só/*tó is whether PIE demonstratives followed a tripartite gender system (m./f./nt.) or a bipartite one (animate, inanimate), as there is evidence in favor of both features.

To approach (once again) the understanding of these demonstratives, we consider cross-linguistic investigations such as Diessel (1999) in order to analyse what we can or cannot expect regarding the codification of features in demonstratives. Thus, the aim of this talk is to reconsider how many and which semantic features were coded by *só-/*tó-, not only according to a comparative basis but also from a typological approach. Following cognitive and typological approaches such as Aikhenvald & Dixon (2017), as well as cross-linguistic studies as Diessel (1999), we will discuss some other alternatives that exist beyond the well-known classification of spatial deixis and how they would work within a reconstructed demonstrative system.

As expected results, we aim to demonstrate, first, that the PIE demonstrative system may have not been restricted to spatial deixis. Secondly, we will claim that the comparative analysis of IE cognates of *só- and *tó- suggests that *s- and *t- were different roots at the PIE stage and that they were in complementary distribution regarding the feature of obviation, which was coded in the root. Lastly, we aim to contribute to the discussion about the gender system by claiming that animacy and gender may have been two different features coded by these demonstratives through affixation, probably at different stages of their linguistic history.

Keywords:
Proto-Indo-European reconstruction – demonstratives – semantic change – grammatical change - obviation

Cited works

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