DEIXIS AND MEANING IN DISCOURSE

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Abstract; *Deixis is a core concept in pragmatics that explains how meaning in discourse is shaped by contextual factors. Deictic expressions derive their meaning from the situation of utterance, including the speaker, the addressee, time, place and the surrounding discourse. This article examines the role of deixis in the construction of meaning in discourse, focusing on its theoretical foundations, major types and communicative functions. The study argues that deixis is essential for interpreting spoken and written discourse, as it links linguistic forms to context and enables coherent interaction. Understanding deixis provides deeper insight into how meaning is negotiated and interpreted in real communicative situations.*

Keywords: *Deixis, discourse, meaning, pragmatics, context, communication, coherence, relevance, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, discourse deixis*

Language meaning is fundamentally shaped by the context in which it is used. Effective communication depends on speakers' and listeners shared knowledge as well as situational cues that guide the interpretation of utterances. A key linguistic mechanism that links language to context is deixis. Through deictic expressions, speakers refer to participants, locations, time and elements of the discourse itself, thereby grounding meaning within a particular communicative situation. In discourse, deixis plays a crucial role in maintaining coherence and relevance. Without deictic reference, communication would become imprecise and unclear. Consequently, the study of deixis is essential for understanding how meaning is constructed and interpreted in real-life language use. The term 'deixis' originates from the Greek word meaning 'pointing' or 'indicating'. In linguistics, deixis refers to expressions whose interpretation depends on contextual information. These expressions do not have fixed reference but change depending on who is speaking, when and where [3; 91]. Pragmatic theories emphasize deixis as a fundamental aspect of meaning. According to Levinson, deixis encodes aspects of the context of utterance directly into language, highlighting the inseparable link between linguistic form and contextual meaning [4; 63].

Several types of deixis have been identified in linguistic research. These include person, spatial, temporal, discourse and social deixis. Each type contributes uniquely to the organization of meaning in discourse [5; 36]. Person deixis refers to the roles of participants in a speech event and is commonly expressed through personal pronouns such as 'I', 'you', and 'they'. The reference of these forms shifts according to the speaker and the addressee [1; 124]. Person deixis is crucial for establishing

perspective and interpersonal relations in discourse. Spatial deixis encodes the location of entities relative to the speaker or another reference point. Expressions such as 'here', 'there', 'this', and 'that' guide the listener's interpretation of spatial relationships within discourse [6; 79]. Temporal deixis situates events in time relative to the moment of speaking. Adverbs such as 'now', 'then' and 'today', as well as verb tense, are key markers of temporal deixis. These elements are essential for narrative structure and chronological coherence in discourse [2; 61]. Discourse deixis involves linguistic expressions that refer to elements within the discourse itself rather than to external entities. Examples include phrases such as "this section," "the following discussion," or "that argument mentioned earlier." These deictic expressions guide readers and listeners through the structure of a text by signaling how different parts of the discourse are connected. In both spoken and written communication, discourse deixis helps speakers highlight key points, refer back to previous statements or introduce upcoming information, thereby enhancing textual cohesion and ensuring the logical flow of ideas. Social deixis refers to linguistic forms that encode the social relationships between participants in a communicative interaction. It is commonly realized through titles, honorifics and specific forms of address that indicate relative status, levels of politeness, or degrees of social distance. For example, the use of titles such as "Professor," "Doctor," or "Your Honor" signals respect and institutional hierarchy, while choices between informal and formal pronouns, such as "tu" and "vous" in French, reflect varying degrees of familiarity. Through social deixis, speakers adjust their language to align with social norms and cultural expectations, thereby managing interpersonal relations effectively. Deixis plays a central role in the construction of meaning in discourse. By using deictic expressions, speakers position themselves and others within a shared contextual framework. These choices influence how utterances are interpreted and how social relationships are managed [4; 71].

In spoken communication, deixis facilitates quick and effective interaction by allowing speakers to rely on the immediate physical and social context. For instance, expressions such as "here," "now," or "this" can be easily understood through shared situational awareness. In contrast, in written discourse, deictic expressions play a crucial role in maintaining coherence and guiding readers through the text by referring to previous or upcoming sections, as in phrases like "this chapter" or "the argument above." Moreover, the choice of deictic forms often reflects the speaker's or writer's intentions, attitudes and evaluative stance toward the message, such as emphasizing proximity, distance, certainty or involvement in relation to the content being discussed. Although deixis is most evident in spoken language, it also plays a significant role in written discourse. Writers employ discourse and temporal deixis to lead readers through the structure of a text and the progression of its arguments. In spoken discourse, deixis is closely tied to the immediate physical and social context. The contrast between spoken and written deixis highlights the adaptability and

flexibility of deictic systems across different modes of communication. In spoken interaction, deictic expressions such as "here," "now," or "this" rely heavily on the shared physical context between speakers, whereas in written texts they often refer to textual elements, as in "this section" or "the previous chapter." These differences illustrate how deictic systems adjust to the communicative needs of each medium while continuing to support clarity and coherence.

Deixis is a vital component of meaning in discourse, linking language to context and enabling effective communication. Through person, spatial, temporal, discourse and social deixis, speakers and writers construct coherent and meaningful messages. The study of deixis reveals how meaning is not fixed but dynamically negotiated in discourse. A deeper understanding of deixis enhances our comprehension of pragmatic meaning and discourse structure. Therefore, as language continues to evolve, particularly in digital communication, the study of deixis remains essential for understanding how speakers and writers construct meaning, maintain coherence and navigate social relationships across both physical and virtual contexts.

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