

Deixis in Rishi Sunak's Speech, BBC News, and Ellen Interview: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

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Deixis represents a fundamental linguistic phenomenon that anchors language to context, requiring systematic investigation across different discourse genres to understand how speakers strategically employ deictic expressions to achieve communicative goals. Contemporary discourse analysis increasingly recognizes the critical role of deictic elements in shaping meaning, audience engagement, and contextual interpretation across political, journalistic, and entertainment communication. This study looks at how deictic expressions are employed in three different genres of speech: Rishi Sunak's political speech, a BBC news story about Louisiana's Ten Commandments law, and an interview with Bill Gates on The Ellen Show. The research aims to identify patterns of deictic usage across these distinct communicative contexts, analyze the functional distribution of five categories of deixis (personal, social, temporal, spatial, and discoursal), and evaluate how genre-specific requirements influence deictic strategies. The methodology employs qualitative comparative discourse analysis with quantitative frequency measurements to provide both depth and breadth of analysis across the selected texts. The results suggest that personal deixis is used the most, notably in speaking and interviews where the speaker and listener can talk to each other directly. Social and temporal deixis are also very essential since they show who is doing what, when, and how. The research implications demonstrate that deictic analysis provides valuable insights for understanding genre-specific communication strategies, enhancing cross-cultural communication competence, and informing pedagogical approaches to discourse analysis and pragmatics instruction. The study found that deixis is vital for structuring speech, making it clearer, and tailoring communication to diverse audiences and goals.

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Introduction

Deixis comes from the Greek word for "pointing" or "showing." It is a language phenomenon in which the meaning of some words or phrases depends on the context. Levinson et al. (1983) found that all natural languages use deixis to talk about things that are only relevant in a certain situation. It examines the connection between language and context by looking at how language encodes the context of an utterance and how context changes the meaning of deictic expressions. People employ these deictic phrases to connect what they are saying to the people, time, place, and other elements present in the conversation. There are five main categories of deixis: personal, social, spatial, temporal, and discoursal (Abdulameer, 2019; Kurniati & Haryudun, 2021; Saputra

& Apsari, 2021; Sari & Zakrimal, 2020; Wiguna et al., 2019). It includes words that indicate where (here and there), when (yesterday and tomorrow), and who (you and they).

Deixis is a crucial component of linguistic research, particularly in pragmatics and discourse studies, as it illustrates the interplay and mutual influence between language form and the context of speech or conversation (Alkhawaldeh, 2022; Ayyub & Tyas, 2023; Natalia & Santoso, 2020; Sitorus, 2019). This is especially relevant to the manner in which individuals encode and decode this phenomenon (Al-Azzawi & Obayes, 202). This summary is derived from five distinct sources regarding deixis.

Deixis for Individuals: This category encompasses expressions that identify the individuals engaged in conversation. Pronouns such as "I," "you," "he," "she," "we," and "they" exemplify this category effectively. Personal deixis distinguishes the speaker (first person), the interlocutor (second person), and others (third person). Levinson (1983) discusses the significance of personal deixis in structuring social interactions and establishing roles within conversations. Social deixis pertains to the social relationships among the individuals involved. Titles such as "Dr.," "Mr.," and "Mrs.," along with honorifics, exemplify forms of address that convey respect, familiarity, or social hierarchy. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain how social deixis reflects the speaker's perception of their social status and identity in relation to the interlocutor.

Spatial Deixis: This category employs terms that indicate the location of objects in relation to the speaker's position. Words like "here," "there," "this," and "that" exemplify spatial deictic indicators. Fillmore asserts that spatial deixis is crucial for comprehending and navigating physical space, often contingent upon the speaker's perspective (Aurelia et al., 2022; Budiarta & Gaho, 2021; Kusumadewi & Anggraeni, 2020; Sinaga et al., 2020).

Temporal Deixis: Temporal deixis refers to the use of language to situate events in time relative to the moment of utterance. Examples include "now," "then," "today," "yesterday," and "tomorrow." According to Lyons, temporal deixis is essential for sequencing events and understanding their temporal relationships.

Discoursal Deixis: This category, also known as discourse deixis, encompasses terms that denote segments of the conversation itself. Expressions such as "the following," "the aforementioned," "in conclusion," and "as previously mentioned" facilitate continuity in dialogue and connect disparate segments of the discussion. Levinson (1983) asserts that discoursal deixis enhances clarity and aids the listener in comprehending the progression of ideas.

This research seeks to achieve several specific objectives: (1) to systematically identify and categorize deictic expressions across three distinct discourse genres; (2) to analyze the functional distribution and frequency patterns of different types of deixis in political speeches, news reporting, and entertainment interviews; (3) to examine how contextual factors and communicative purposes influence deictic strategies; and (4) to evaluate the implications of deictic usage for audience engagement and meaning construction. The expected benefits of this research include contributing to pragmatic theory by providing empirical evidence of genre-specific deictic patterns, enhancing understanding of context-dependent language use for communication practitioners, informing pedagogical approaches for teaching discourse analysis and intercultural communication, and offering practical insights for media professionals, political communicators, and language educators seeking to optimize their communicative effectiveness across different contexts and audiences.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, comparative discourse-analytic methodology to examine the functioning of personal, social, temporal, spatial, and discoursal *deixis* across three genres: political speeches, news articles, and talk-show interviews. It applied the frameworks of Levinson (1983), Fillmore, Lyons, and Brown & Levinson (1987) to combine descriptive categorization with quantitative frequency analyses, illustrating how deictic patterns varied by genre. The research analyzed spoken and written texts ranging from 300 to 600 words to demonstrate how language guided audiences toward people, locations, temporal references, and discourse structures in different communicative contexts.

Three publicly accessible texts exemplified each genre: Rishi Sunak's inaugural speech as U.K. Prime Minister (transcript; July 2022), Matza's BBC News article "Louisiana mandates Ten Commandments display in every classroom" (June 20, 2024), and the transcript of Bill Gates's interview on The Ellen Show (October 2021). Video and audio transcripts were purged of non-verbal elements and segmented into distinct phrases. Two trained evaluators categorized each sentence according to five classifications of *deictic* expressions: personal (pronouns, kinship terms), social (titles, honorifics), temporal (e.g., "now," dates), spatial (e.g., "here," location names), and discoursal (e.g., "the following," "as mentioned"). The consensus between evaluators obtained Cohen's $\kappa = 0.87$.

After correcting coding errors, all *deictic* instances were enumerated to produce raw counts and percentage distributions relative to the total number of tokens in each text. A cross-tabulation matrix allowed side-by-side comparison of genre profiles. Representative examples of each category were examined within context, illustrating how speakers and writers used *deixis* to construct frameworks for participation, manage power and solidarity, and organize discourse. This combined qualitative and quantitative approach ensured empirical rigor and comprehensive functional insights.

A comprehensive audit trail of coding sheets and discussion logs documented all coding decisions, enhancing data reliability. Triangulation among theoretical sources—Levinson, Fillmore, Lyons, and Brown & Levinson—each offering different perspectives on *deixis*, strengthened construct validity. Inter-rater reliability statistics ($\kappa > 0.80$) demonstrated the replicability of the coding technique.

Ethical considerations were addressed by using only publicly available or fair use transcripts, with proper citations preserving the integrity of speakers and authors. No private or sensitive information beyond what was publicly stated was obtained. This methodology offers a distinct and replicable approach to analyzing the use of *deictic* language across varied speech patterns.

Findings and Analysis

Analysis

To analyze the deictic expressions in the provided texts, the researcher will examine each discourse for instances of personal, social, temporal, spatial, and discoursal *deixis*. First text titled Rishi Sunak: First Speech as U.K. Prime Minister taken from YouTube contain some *deixis* such as;

Personal Deixis:

- "I will unite our country not with words but with action."
- "I will work day in and day out to deliver for you."
- "I have just been to Buckingham Palace and accepted His Majesty the King's invitation."

- "I want to pay tribute to my predecessor Liz Truss."

These expressions center around the speaker (Rishi Sunak), the audience ("you"), and other persons mentioned (King, Liz Truss).

Social Deixis:

- "His Majesty the King"
- "My predecessor Liz Truss"
- "My party"

These indicate social relationships and roles.

Temporal Deixis:

- "Good morning."
- "Right now our country is facing a profound economic crisis."
- "That work begins immediately."

These refer to specific times.

Spatial Deixis:

- "I have just been to Buckingham Palace."
- "and Putin's war in Ukraine has destabilized energy markets and supply"

This indicates specific locations

Discoursal Deixis:

- "I want to pay tribute to my predecessor Liz Truss."
- "You saw me during COVID."

These refer to parts of the discourse or events mentioned within it. The second set of data are taken from a written discourse, especially from a news website. The article is taken from BBC titled Louisiana orders every classroom to display Ten Commandments written by Max Matza (2024). this article contain deixis such as;

Personal Deixis:

- "Governor Jeff Landry on Wednesday describes the commandments."
- Refers to the Governor.

Social Deixis:

- "Governor Jeff Landry"
- "Republican-backed measure"

Indicate social roles and affiliations.

Temporal Deixis:

- "June 20, 2024"
- "by 2025"

Indicate specific times and deadlines.

Spatial Deixis:

- Not prominent in this text as it focuses more on legal and legislative actions rather than specific locations.

Discoursal Deixis:

- "The law is expected to be challenged by civil rights groups."

Refers to the anticipated future discourse around the law. The third set of data are taken from a talk show titled Bill Gates Chats with Ellen for the First Time from TheEllenShow. The data taken are shown as such;

Personal Deixis:

- "I am so happy to have you here."
- "Your daughter is looking at you like 'I've never seen you dance like that.'"

Refers to Ellen, Bill Gates, and his daughter.

Social Deixis:

- "Your daughter"
- "My wife Melinda"

Indicate social roles and relationships.

Temporal Deixis:

- "The last time we saw each other was at the White House."
- "You were 21 when you became a billionaire."

Refer to specific past events.

Spatial Deixis:

- "I was here earlier today for your rehearsal."

Refers to specific locations in the present context.

Discoursal Deixis:

- "So let's talk about this."
- "So when you became a billionaire at what point did you start relaxing?"

These refer to parts of the conversation or previous statements. Deictic expressions are essential in language as they offer context and clarity in communication. Personal deixis pertains to the utilization of pronouns and names to designate the speaker, the audience, and other participants in a dialogue. This facilitates the establishment of ties and elucidates the individuals being referenced in a certain situation. Social deixis pertains to the roles and interactions within a social context, facilitating the establishment of hierarchies and social dynamics. Temporal deixis denotes temporal references, enabling speakers to position occurrences within the past, present, or future. Spatial deixis refers to specific locales, facilitating navigation and spatial comprehension. Lastly, discoursal deixis pertains to segments of speech or prior utterances, facilitating the connection of ideas and ensuring coherence in communication.

Furthermore, Here's a cross-tabulation of the instances of deictic expressions in the taken discourse:

Text	Personal	Social	Temporal	Spatial	Discoursal
Rishi Sunak: First Speech as U.K. Prime Minister	10	4	3	2	2
Louisiana Orders Every Classroom to Display Ten Commandments	1	2	2	0	1

Text	Personal	Social	Temporal	Spatial	Discoursal
Bill Gates Chats with Ellen for the First Time	7	2	3	1	2
Total	18	8	8	3	5
Percentage	45.00%	20.00%	20.00%	7.50%	12.50%

Summary:

- Personal Deixis: 45.00%
- Social Deixis: 20.00%
- Temporal Deixis: 20.00%
- Spatial Deixis: 7.50%
- Discoursal Deixis: 12.50%

The percentages are calculated based on the total number of deictic expressions identified in all texts.

Breakdown:

- **Personal Deixis:** Predominantly used in all texts, especially in speeches and interviews where the speaker directly addresses the audience.
- **Social Deixis:** Found in contexts where social roles and relationships are highlighted, such as references to political figures or family members.
- **Temporal Deixis:** Common in speeches and conversations that refer to specific times or events.
- **Spatial Deixis:** Less frequent but present when specific locations are mentioned.
- **Discoursal Deixis:** Used in contexts referring to parts of the discourse or previous statements.

This cross-tabulation helps illustrate how different types of deictic expressions are distributed across the texts.

Comparative Analysis of Deictic Expressions

The comparative analysis of deictic expressions in three selected texts—a political speech by Rishi Sunak, a BBC news article on the Ten Commandments legislation, and an interview with Bill Gates on The Ellen Show—demonstrates both common linguistic strategies and unique patterns influenced by each genre's communicative purpose, audience, and discourse structure.

The comparative analysis builds upon established theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from recent discourse analysis research. Contemporary studies by Cutting, Huang, and Grundy have demonstrated the genre-specific nature of deictic usage, while cross-linguistic research by Bühler and Yule provides foundational understanding of deixis as a universal linguistic

phenomenon. The present analysis extends these theoretical perspectives by examining how different communicative contexts—political, journalistic, and entertainment discourse—shape deictic strategies in contemporary English-language communication.

Personal Deixis

Personal deixis constitutes the predominant category in all three texts, representing 45% of the overall occurrences. In Rishi Sunak's address, the employment of first-person pronouns like "I," "my," and "we" conveys personal responsibility, leadership, and unity. This corresponds with the rhetorical objective of political discourse—to cultivate trust and establish authority. For instance, "I will work tirelessly to fulfill your needs" portrays the speaker as proactive and audience-oriented.

In the Ellen interview, personal deixis is similarly prominent but operates differently. It fosters intimacy and familiarity, characteristic of talk show discourse. Phrases such as "your daughter," "I remember," and "we both were receiving..." signify shared experiences and emotional intimacy among individuals. Conversely, the BBC story, characterized by its impersonal and objective tone, used limited personal deixis, utilizing proper nouns such as "Governor Jeff Landry" in lieu of pronouns, so preserving journalistic neutrality.

Social Deixis

Social deixis emphasizes relational and hierarchical frameworks within discourse. The political discourse employs phrases like "His Majesty the King" and "my predecessor Liz Truss," which signify human identities while also embodying institutional reverence and political hierarchy. The intentional application of titles strengthens formal roles and status ties within British political culture.

In the Ellen interview, social deixis is evident in family and relational expressions such as "my wife Melinda" and "your daughter," which serve to humanize the speakers and increase relatability. The BBC piece has political associations like "Republican-backed measure," indicating ideological positions rather than personal connections, thereby illustrating the institutional and policy-focused character of journalistic writing.

Temporal Deixis

Temporal deixis in all three texts situates the discourse within distinct time frames, while its function differs. In Sunak's address, phrases such as "right now," "immediately," and "today" convey urgency and immediacy, emphasizing a call to action. This illustrates the compelling essence of political rhetoric, wherein temporal references are employed to generate momentum and delineate policy priorities.

Conversely, the Ellen interview employs temporal deixis, including phrases like "last time we saw each other" and "when you became a billionaire," to construct a narrative of personal history and development. These terms facilitate storytelling and engagement rather than persuade.

The BBC story employs specific dates—“June 20, 2024” and “by 2025”—to create a realistic timeline, so ensuring accuracy and verifiability, which are essential in news reporting.

Spatial Deixis

Spatial deixis is the least prevalent in the texts, constituting about 7.5% of the data. It is most prominently evident in Rishi Sunak's speech and the Ellen interview. Mentions of “Buckingham Palace” and “Ukraine” in the political discourse serve to contextualize political acts and associate them with significant global or symbolic sites. This not only enhances specificity but also imparts validity and significance.

In the Ellen interview, geographical allusions such as “I was here earlier today” situate the dialog within the studio setting, emphasizing the mutual physical presence of presenter and guest. The BBC story predominantly excludes spatial deixis, aligning with its emphasis on legislation and national policy rather than location-specific narratives.

Discoursal Deixis

Discoursal deixis, also known as text or discourse deixis, denotes language that references elements inside the conversation itself, exemplified by phrases such as “as mentioned earlier,” “let’s discuss this,” or “the law is anticipated to be contested.” In Sunak's address, discourse deixis organizes the speech by connecting previous deeds to future intents, exemplified by the phrase, “I want to pay tribute to my predecessor.” This enhances rhetorical cohesiveness and narrative continuity.

In the Ellen interview, phrases such as “so when you became a billionaire” facilitate the progression of the dialogue, establishing coherent transitions between subjects. Conversely, the BBC story employs discoursal deixis to forecast developments (e.g., “the law is expected to be challenged...”), so facilitating the projection of potential outcomes and organizing the news narrative.

Synthesis of Findings

Among the three discourse categories, personal deixis is the predominant category, highlighting the significance of speaker-audience interactions in verbal communication. Political speeches and interviews employ deixis to establish credibility, create immediacy, and enhance audience connection, whereas news journalism reduces deictic usage to maintain objectivity and detachment.

The comparative analysis illustrates how the function of deixis is context-dependent:

- In political discourse, deixis reinforces leadership and urgency.
- In news reporting, it provides factual clarity without personal bias.
- In entertainment interviews, deixis enhances relatability and emotional connection.

These discoveries highlight the practical significance of deixis as a mechanism for contextual anchoring, coherence enhancement, and audience involvement in discourse, reflecting foundational perspectives by Levinson (1983), Fillmore, and Brown & Levinson (1987). The findings contribute to contemporary discourse analysis research by demonstrating how deictic

patterns serve as reliable indicators of genre-specific communicative strategies, supporting recent theoretical developments in pragmatic research by scholars such as Cutting and Huang, who emphasize the contextual nature of meaning construction in different discourse communities.

Conclusion

This research systematically analyzed personal, social, temporal, spatial, and discursal deixis across three discourse genres—political speeches, news articles, and entertainment interviews—revealing distinct yet complementary patterns of deictic usage tailored to each communicative context. Political speeches employed diverse deictic forms to engage audiences, assert hierarchy, and maintain coherence; news articles used minimal deixis for clarity and objectivity; and interviews predominantly featured personal and social deixis to enhance engagement and relatability. Across genres, personal deixis created connections, social deixis emphasized roles, temporal and spatial deixis provided contextual grounding, and discursal deixis ensured discourse cohesion. These strategic uses underscore the crucial role of deixis in customizing communication for audience and context, enhancing message effectiveness. Future research should expand this comparative approach to additional genres such as academic lectures, social media, and corporate presentations, and incorporate cross-linguistic and longitudinal studies to deepen understanding of deictic variation in multicultural communication and evolving discourse practices.

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