

Deixis in the Language of Nursing

Suhair Safwat M. Hashim, University of Sulaimani, Iraq

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Abstract

This paper outlines semantic and pragmatic phenomenon which is called "Deixis". Deixis is a technical term (from Greek) for one of the most basic things we do with utterances. It means 'pointing' via language and the linguistic form is called a deictic expression. (Yule 1996: 9). Deictic expressions, such as 'this, that, here, there' are typically used for information and even for education in relation to the indexical ground of utterance context.

In order to determine the conventional meanings of deictics in language, deictic expressions will be analysed in certain English nursing texts and what influences they may have on the interpretation of the texts. Deictic expressions in English nursing texts depend on the contents and the formulations of nursing texts.

This paper will focus on the use of deixis in nursing texts. By analysing the deictic expressions in a number of case studies taken from a nursing book called "Communication for Nurses" (2009), it will show how these pragmatic features are used in relation to different contexts. That is to say, how the expressions may be used in a way, where their reference is determined in relation to the point of the origin of the utterance in which they occur.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Deixis, Language of Nursing.

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The Notion of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and their users. According to Levinson (1983: 3) pragmatics is the study of the relationship between language and the context, which is a basis in understanding the meaning of language. Referring to the statements, pragmatics is the study of the aspect of the relationship between language and context that are relevant to the writing of grammar (i.e. it deals with language use and the relationship between language form and language usage. Kreidler (1998: 18) states that pragmatics is another branch of linguistics that is concerned with meaning. While Peccei (1999: 5) and Yule (1996: 5) state that pragmatics concentrates on the aspect of meaning that could not be predicted by linguistic knowledge alone and take into account our knowledge about the physical and social world. The focus of pragmatic analysis is on the meaning of words or sentence. The theory of deixis is part of pragmatics and part of what have been called linguistic performance.

From the definitions above, it is concluded that pragmatics is the study of meaning conveyed by the speaker or writer and interpreted by listener or reader. From the speaker view, pragmatics is an analysis of meaning of the speaker utterance rather than the meaning of a word or phrase that is used themselves. From the contextual point of view, pragmatics is the interpretation of the meaning of a person in a particular context and the influence of context to his or her statement. So, pragmatics is an approach used to explore the way of listener to infer an utterance that is uttered by the speaker in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning.

The Concept of Deixis

In all languages there are many words and expressions whose reference relies entirely on the circumstances of the utterance and can only be understood in the light of these circumstances. The phenomenon of deixis is considered the most obvious and direct linguistic reflection of the relationship between language and context. (Levinson 1983: 54). This phenomenon of deixis constitutes the singlemost obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of languages themselves.

The term " Deixis" originates in the notion of gestural reference: that is, in the identification of the referent by means of some bodily gesture on the part of the speaker. (Deixis means "pointing" or "showing" in Greek). (Lyons 1995: 303 and Verschuren 1999: 18).

The most primitive way of referring to something is to point to it. Of course, this kind of reference can only be accomplished with people and concrete things in one's immediate environment. Some words actually point to the entity that they refer to. If the referring expression points to the referent in the context, it is known as deixis. Therefore, deixis means reference to different things and different people. (Kreider 1998: 144, Cruse 2000: 319, and Cutting 2002: 7).

Deixis has a referring function where the context is important. It deals with the words and expressions whose reference relies entirely on the circumstances of the utterance. For that reason these special expressions and their meaning in discourse can only be understood in the light of these circumstances. Deixis is the linguistic property which

forges the link between a sentence or utterance, and its context. (Thornborrow and Wareing 1998: 197). Any linguistic form used to accomplish “pointing” is called a *deictic expression*. (also known *indexicals*).

Deictic Expressions

Deixis appears to be best accounted for in pragmatics. Within pragmatics, deixis concerns the use of certain linguistic expressions, called *deictic expressions*. Deictic expressions are meaningful contextually as the speaker and listener have to share the same context. Speakers and writers use deictic expressions to situate their words or their texts within a particular context, and the meaning of these expressions can not be fully recovered from the text itself, but from contextual elements outside the text.

In English, such deictic expressions typically include first, second, and third person pronouns, demonstratives, tense, certain place and time adverbials and some verbs such as, "come, go, bring, take, and fetch". Such deictic expressions encode specific aspects of the speech event and can not be interpreted unless contextual parameters are taken into account. (Marmaridou 2000: 65 and Grundy 2000: 272).

Deictic expression is one that has an indexical use, that is, a literal use to refer to something in virtue of its relation to the actual physical utterance.

In other words, deictic expressions pick out their referents like pointers, that is, in virtue of some relation to the context of utterance. They are unlike names, which are given to persons, places, and things, and unlike definite descriptions (the+ noun), which refer by describing their referents.

Finally, deictic expressions are slots, place –holders for referring expressions which in turn are provided by the context, that is by the situation, previous discourse, and pointing.

Kinds of Deixis

Deixis is the reflection of the situational knowledge in the words and grammar of a language. Culture often plays a significant role in specifying the types of deixis available within a language.

In English, Deixis makes considerable use of pro- forms, such as pronouns, but it can also make deictic use of certain syntactic categories. The categories of deixis in all languages are *person deixis*, *place deixis*, and *time deixis*. These clearly relate to the discourse participants and to the setting. (Chimombo and Roseberry 1998: 106). Levinson (1983: 62) identified five major types of deictic markers: *person deixis*, *place deixis*, *time deixis*, *discourse deixis*, and *social deixis*.

Person Deixis

Person Deixis means the use of expressions to point to a person, with the personal pronouns "*I, you, he, she, it, we, and they*". e.g.

We are not assumed.

So *you* went to Arram.

We got back.

They were like this.

He feels so weak and ill. (Cutting 2002: 7)

In other words, person deixis involves basically the speaker, known as the *first person*, the addressee, known as the *second person*, and other significant participants in the speech situation, neither speaker nor hearer these are known as *third person*. There is a kind of dominance relation holding among the terms: first person dominates second and third, and second person dominates third (Cruse 2000: 319- 20).

Pronouns

- Grammatical category of a person: Personal pronouns.
- All languages have personal pronouns or at least words, that refer to the participants of the speech act.
- The pronouns of the first (I, my, mine) and second person (you, your, yours) are deictic:
- Reference to the speaking person.
- It is also possible to have deictic pronouns for the third person.
- Definite and specific pronouns: *this, that, those, these*.
- Indefinite and specific pronouns: *somebody, something, who, that, what*.
- Indefinite and non- specific pronouns: *someone, something, nobody, nothing*.
- Honorifics: *your majesty, sir*.

Spatial/ Place/ Space Deixis

Spatial deixis is words used to point to a location, the place where an entity is in the context, as in the form of demonstrative adverbs, "There", "Here", and demonstrative determiners and adjectives such as "This, that, these, those".

- (1) They were like *this*.
- (2) *That* was great.

In other words, *Place deixis* concerns the locations relative to points in the speech event (speaker= center). There are two basic ways referring to objects: by describing or naming them and by locating them. Locations can be specified relative to other objects:

- (1) The station is *two hundred yards from the college*.

Locations can be specified relative to the location of participants:

- (1) It's *two hundreds yards away*.

English has a relatively impoverished spatial deictic system, with only two terms, usually labelled *proximal* and *distal*.

The proximal term *here* means something like "region relatively close to the speaker", and *there* means "relatively distant from the speaker". *Here* may represent an area less than the square metre on which the speaker is standing, or it could be something much vaster, such as:

- (1) *Here* in our local galaxy cluster
(Cruse 2000: 320- 1 and Cutting 2002: 8).

In other words, place deixis stems from two facts: *first*, given egocentricity of deixis in general, a speaker is an entity in space and, as such, his utterances are produced in that space. Thus, participants roles, their social identification and their construction in and through discourse are inscribed in space. *Second*, to the extent that the speaker's

location may be different at different times, place deixis automatically incorporates a temporal aspect of the speech event. The importance of space in utterances is made obvious by the ways in which languages refer to objects: either by naming or describing them, or by locating them in space.

There is an obvious parallelism between *time deixis* and *place deixis*. In the same way that "now" and "then" may be paraphrased as *at this time* and *at that time* respectively, "here" and "there" may be paraphrased as *at this place* and *at that place*, respectively. Hence, *this* and *that*, which are primarily construed as place deictic terms, in that they typically express *proximity to*, or *distance from*, the speaker, can also be used to indicate time deixis: a temporal span including or excluding coding time.

Place deixis is relational rather than absolute. Rather than specifying the location of objects or places in terms of latitude and longitude absolute measures, we locate them in terms of each other and the speaker, as in (1) and (2) below:

- (1) The post office is two kilometres from the school.
- (2) The post office is 500 metres away.

The understanding of (2) crucially involves the location of the speaker at coding time. In the same way, the time deictics "now" and "then" may make reference to exact points of the timescale or longer time spans, the deictics "here" and "there" may refer to specific points by the location of the speaker or away from her, or pragmatically specified space that includes, or does not include, the location of the speaker at coding time verbs "go" and "come" are also categorized as place deixis. The verb "come" as movement close to the location of speaker and verb "go" as movement away to the location of speaker.

Based on the definition above, place deixis is the words which refer to the location of speech events, and deal with the distance either proximal or distal of speaker's location.

Temporal/ Time Deixis

Temporal deictics function to locate points or intervals on the time axis, using the moment of utterance as a reference point. Time deixis makes reference to the ways participants of particular cultures conceptualize and measure time (Marmaridou 2000: 82). There are thus three major divisions of time axis: (1) before the moment of utterance, (2) at the time of utterance, (3) after the time of utterance. The most basic temporal deictics in English are *now* and *then*.

The most basic expressions in encoding time deixis in English are the adverbs "now" and "then", also "soon" and "recently" and verb tenses. When time deixis interacts with calendrical units of time, words like "today", "tomorrow" and "yesterday" are used to locate an utterance relative to time. However, the use of these terms is flexible in that it can indicate the entire time span specified or just a relevant part of it, as in the following examples:

- (1) *Today* is a holiday.
- (2) Johnny broke his plate *today*.

The understanding of either option seems to depend on a variety of contextual parameters including sociocultural knowledge. The following examples illustrate this point:

- 1- Turn around *now*.
- 2- She is in the office *now*.
- 3- She is a Deputy Director *now*.

Now in (1) is interpreted as referring to coding time because it is part of an order with a particular content, so that to comply with the order involves immediate action. In (2) and (3) the adverbial is interpreted against wider concentric cycles because it is part of our cultural knowledge that if one is in an office, she is likely to be there for some time, whereas being a Deputy Director spans over a period of time and is not a momentary property of an individual.

The adverb "*then*" indicates distance from the deictic centre either towards the future or towards the past, and it has been claimed that it is really an anaphoric element to a span of time that has been previously established in discourse, as in the example below:

- (1) I'll see her *tomorrow* and I'll ask her *then*.

Apparently, "*tomorrow*" is time deictic, and "*then*" refers back to the time span that *tomorrow* established as a referent.

- (1) I was just a kid *then*.

It is claimed that it is part of the meaning of *then* that it is a relational term in that it takes its value from a previously established reference to a point, or period, in time, and as such, it is also used anaphorically. In the above example, *then* refers to the same period. Like *now*, *today* can make reference to more mediate or wider time spans away from the deictic centre, as in (1) and (2) below:

- 1- *Today* is pay- day
- 2- *Today* youngsters behave strangely sometimes.

In (1) coding time is within the 24 hours span, whereas in (2) coding time is within a wider and indefinite time span. Similarly, with "*tomorrow*" and "*yesterday*": "*tomorrow*" may be glossed as "in the future with respect to coding time" and "*yesterday*" as "in the past with respect to coding time".

Apart from the adverbials, time deixis is often expressed with adjectives such as "*next*" and "*last*" and the demonstratives "*this*" and "*that*" when attached to specific time cycles and their names, as in "*next week*", "*last Monday*", "*this month*", "*that December*" (Marmaridou 2000:84).

According to the above time expressions, it is important to note that their collocation with calendrical or non- calendrical renderings of time yields culturally significant results. For example, "*this year*" might mean the space of time between 1st January and 31st of December, or the space time, starting from the day including coding time, which is the calendrical rendering of the expression, or the space of time, starting from the day including coding time and ending after 365 days, that is, the non- calendrical rendering of the expression. More importantly, "*this year*" might refer to

the time between 1st September and 31st August including coding time in an academic context, or it might refer to the time between 1st April and 31st March including coding time in a British annual revenue context. Similarly, "*this week*" or "*this month*" refers to the week or month including coding time. Furthermore, "*this December*" refers to the December of the calendar year including coding time, but preferably when this December lies in the future of coding time rather than the past. Interestingly, in day time spans "*this morning/ afternoon/ evening*" make future or past reference to a larger unit, that of the 24- hour day.

Language of Nursing

According to Crystal (2006: 470), the field of medicine, more than any other, forces a confrontation between scientific and everyday language.

In general, language is the medium by which communication is both conveyed and received. Language provides our human life style with a rich tapestry of ways to communicate meaning and understanding within our present day society. Communication is a universal word with many meanings. Many definitions describe it as a transfer of information between a source and a receiver. In nursing, communication is a sharing of health- related information between a patient and a nurse, with both participants as sources and receivers of information. Communication occurs in many ways and may be verbal or nonverbal, written or spoken, personal or impersonal, issue specific, or even relationship oriented. It also occurs on two levels: the relationship level and the content level . The relationship level refers to how the two participants are bound to each other. The content level refers to the words, language, and information that are exchanged by the participants (Sheldon 2009: 5).

In nursing, language is used to facilitate quality care and inform and educate recipients of that care. It is essential that what is transmitted is commonly interpreted by nurses and patients alike. Questions are posed relating to an elitist language for nurses and its placement for communicating with other health care professionals.

Language develops as communication and conveys meaning and understanding within a framework of practical application, commonality of understanding, and professional nursing accountability (Allen 2007: 47- 51).

Communication is defined as the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing or signs. It is an essential component of professional nursing having relevance to currency of care for each individual patient. The language contained in the documentation must be commonly understood by all nurses. Communication therefore is not only required to be succinct, relevant, and current, but must convey meaning and understanding to all nurses irrespective of where they are working; this is evidenced by nursing being accepted as a global occupation (Johnstone 2004: 20).

Words alone can be meaningless; it is through the characterization of words that meaning and understanding is conveyed. Language imparts knowledge for professional nurses to share thus guiding practice through a commonality of understanding and meaning.

The Analytical Framework:

The data of this research include case studies from a book entitled; 'Communication for Nurses' (2009). The collected data are analysed to explain pragmatically how deixis; place, time, and person deixis operate in the language of nursing. Communication through deixis is very important in referring to what is tied to the nurse and the patient sharing the same context.

In analysing the data, a descriptive method is used to frame the research. It covers four main points of the research, namely, (1) Type of the study, (2) Object, Data, and Source of data, (3) Method of data collection, and (4) Technique of data analysis.

Type of the study

The qualitative research is employed in analysing the data. Qualitative research is a research, which has a result of descriptive data in the form of written or oral form observing people or behaviour. Then the steps of conducting this qualitative research are: (1) determining the object of the research, (2) determining the source of data, (3) determining the method of data collection, (4) determining the technique of data analysis.

Object of the Study, Data, and Data Source.

The object of the research is deixis; the data are kinds of deixis: person deixis, time deixis, place deixis while the source of data is "Communication for Nurses" book.

Method of Data Collection.

- 1- Reading and observing the case studies in the book.
- 2- Analysing the data and finding the three types of deixis.
- 3- Displaying the data.

Technique of Data Analysis.

The data are analysed through classifying the three types of deixis; person deixis,

Analysis of Deixis in the Language of Nursing.

Person Deixis

Person deixis is a word that functions as personal pronoun. It is related with personal pronoun and can be used with reference to the context of situation.

The criteria of personal deixis are the actor in the event, such as first person, second person, and third person. In this case, the first person refers to the speaker, and second person refers to the audience or addressee and the third person refers to someone or something else. For example;

"Good Morning, Mrs. T. My name is Jay Kennedy, and I will be your nurse today.

We have a full day today with some tests.

How about getting washed up now? Is it all right to call you Mrs. T.?

In the above example, the utterance is uttered by the nurse "Jay Kennedy" who is the speaker to the patient "Mrs. T." That is the listener. The deictic words "I, My, and We" refer to personal pronouns and the referent is "Jay Kennedy". The type of deixis is the first personal pronouns. "I and We" are the subjective case, while "My" is the possessive case. The deictic words "Your and You" refer to second personal pronouns and the referent is Mrs. T. "You" is the subjective case while "Your" is the possessive case. The deictic word "Mrs." refers to honorifics which is a category of personal pronouns.

Nurse: "Mrs. R. I am Laurie Snow, and I will be the nurse working with you today. What do you like to be called?"

Patient: " Hello. Call me Sue; that's what everyone else calls me. This is my husband, Andrew."

Nurse: (She shakes hands with the patient and her husband.) "it's nice to meet both of you. Sue, I'd like to explain what's going to happen today, ask you a few questions, and answer any questions that you may have about your surgery."

In the above example, Laurie Snow is the nurse who is the speaker and the patient is Mrs. R or Sue. Who is the listener. The deictic words "I am, I, me, my" refer to personal pronouns and the referent is the nurse " Laurie Snow". The type of deixis is the first personal pronouns. While "you and your" are the type of deixis which refer to the second personal pronoun to address the listener/ listeners.

" You" is the subjective case while "your" is the possessive case. "She, her, it" are another deictic words which are the third personal pronoun. "She and it" are the subjective case while "her" is the possessive case. "Everyone" is a deictic word which is indefinite and non- specific pronoun.

Place Deixis

Place deixis is a deictic reference to a location relative to the location of a participant in the speech event, typically the speaker. E.g.

*It is her second day **in the hospital** after developing a fever and cough.*

In the above example, "in the hospital" refers to place deixis which is the location of speech event.

*When he **comes** in to bring her morning medications, he says "Mrs. T., I have your medications."*

In the above example, the verb "comes" is categorized as place deixis. The verb "come" is a movement close to the location of speaker.

*Nurse: "How long have you had **these** problems?"*

*Mrs. S.: " Since my husband died, but I feel worse since I raked the lawn **this** morning."*

In the above example, place deixis can be seen from the use of demonstrative pronouns such as: "these and this". Demonstrative pronoun "This" can mean an object close to the speaker's event. While "these" is a plural form of "this" that have the same concept.

*Nurse: "It is common to feel nervous about surgery. My goal is to help you through today. I will explain everything as we **go** along and answer any questions you and Andrew may have."*

*Patient: "I am glad that you will be **there**. May my husband **come** with me?"*

Nurse: "Of course."

In the above example, place deixis is used through the use of distal term “*there*” which means “relatively distant from the speaker. Also the use of two verbs “*go*” and “*come*” which refer to the movement close or away from the speaker during the speech event.

Based on the examples above, place deixis is the words which refer to the location of speech events, and deal with the distance either proximal or distal of speaker’s location.

Time Deixis

According to Levinson (1983: 217) time deixis refers to the time which is relative to the time of speaking or an utterance spoken. While Hatch (1992: 217) states that time deixis refers to time relative to time of speaking. E.g.

*Nurse: “Hello, Mrs. S. I am Laurie Gardiner, and I am the nurse Who will be taking care of you. How are you feeling **tonight**?”*

In the above example, the word “*tonight*” can not be categorized as time lexeme. It is caused by the planet position in the earth toward with the position of sun. Time lexeme can be deixis if the speaker is the standard of utterance.

*Nurse: “**Good morning**, Mrs. R. Are you ready to get started?”*

Mrs. R. : “Ready? What good does this do for me? You think I want to have this?”

*Nurse: “You sound upset **today**.”*

In the example above, time deixis is referred to through the use of calendrical units such as “*Good morning*”. The word “*today*” is used to locate the utterance of the nurse which is relative to the time of speaking.

*“what am I supposed to do, take those **now** just because you say so?”*

***Now**, he is recovering from a below- the- knee amputation.*

In the above example, “*Now*” marks proximal time. It reflects an interminable time period within the relevant span.

Time deixis is an adverbial of time that its reference always changes in response to the time of speaking.

The Results.

Deixis refers to the phenomenon wherein understanding the meaning of certain words and phrases in an utterance requires contextual information. The frequency of deixis in nursing texts is 270.

Person deixis concerns itself with persons involved in the utterance and it is considered a distinctive feature since it has 217 occurrences of all types of deixis which constitutes 80.37%. Place deixis refers to the locations relevant to an utterance. It has 25 occurrences which represents 9.25% of all types of deixis.

Time deixis refers to various times involved in and referred to in an utterance. It has the frequency of 28 which makes up 10.37% of all types of deixis.

Conclusion and Suggestion.

In this paper deixis in nurse- patient interaction has been analysed. Some words or phrases are said to be deictic. These words and phrases have a fixed semantic meaning, but their exact meaning depends on the context of situation. Some also describe these words or phrases as ones that change according to “time, person, or place”, but the underlying idea is that additional contextual speech determines the exact meaning of deictic utterances. Such terms may contribute both properties and relations to the propositions in which they occur.

Based on the data analysis and discussion, it is concluded that there are three types of deixis that are used in the nursing texts; person, place, and time deixis.

From this study, it is implied that all types of deixis can be applied to nursing texts. It is observed that person deixis is predominant in the interaction while place deixis seldom occurs.

The function is to find out the participants’ roles in the language of nursing. Furthermore, by using deixis it will make the patients understand the message easier. It is also useful to provide the phsycological support that the parient needs by developing a close relationship to the nurse.

Based on the implications, it is suggested that all kinds of medical communication, e.g. doctor- doctor, doctor- nurse, nurse- nurse desrve special study for a better understanding of their respective characteristics and of the roles of language in medical communication in general. Communication through language forms an integral part of conveying meaning and understanding for nurses.

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suhairsh2000@yahoo.com
suhairsh2000@gmail.com