



SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF DEIXIS IN LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Deixis is one of the most important phenomena in linguistics, reflecting the interaction between language and its context. The term derives from the Greek word *deiktikos*, meaning “to point” or “to indicate.” Deictic expressions are context-dependent and cannot be fully understood without reference to the situation of utterance. This paper discusses deixis in terms of its semantic and pragmatic dimensions, analyzes its main categories, and highlights its role in communication and interpretation. The study also explores some challenges posed by deixis in cross-cultural communication and translation.

Keywords: deixis, semantics, pragmatics, personal deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis.

Introduction

Language functions not only as a system of abstract signs but also as a dynamic tool for human interaction. In real communication, the meaning of words and expressions often depends on situational context. One of the clearest examples of this phenomenon is deixis. Without considering deixis, it is difficult to achieve a complete understanding of how meaning is constructed and interpreted in discourse. The purpose of this paper is to explore the semantic and pragmatic aspects of deixis and to show how it operates in communication.

Theoretical Background of Deixis

Deixis refers to words and expressions whose interpretation relies on contextual information such as time, place, and participants in communication. Lyons (1977) describes deixis as a “reference by means of an expression whose interpretation is relative to the context of utterance.” Similarly, Levinson (1983) emphasizes that deixis is crucial to understanding how language anchors itself to the real world.

Types of Deixis

Linguists usually distinguish five major categories of deixis:

1. Person Deixis – refers to participants in the speech situation, typically



expressed through personal pronouns such as I, you, he, she, we, they. For example: I am speaking to you now.

2. Spatial Deixis – refers to location, expressed by adverbs (here, there) or demonstratives (this, that). Example: Come here, not there.

3. Temporal Deixis – relates to time expressions such as now, then, today, tomorrow, yesterday. Example: We will meet tomorrow.

4. Discourse Deixis – points to elements within discourse, e.g., as mentioned earlier, in the next section.

5. Social Deixis – reflects social roles and relationships, often expressed by honorifics, titles, or levels of formality (Mr., Professor, Your Excellency).

Semantic Aspect of Deixis

Semantically, deictic expressions are “incomplete” because they lack fixed reference. Their meaning becomes clear only when placed in context. For example, the pronoun I has no stable meaning outside a speech situation—it simply refers to the current speaker. Similarly, the adverb now always shifts depending on the moment of utterance. This context-dependence highlights the dynamic nature of linguistic semantics.

Pragmatic Aspect of Deixis

From a pragmatic perspective, deixis reveals how speakers and listeners coordinate communication. It shows the speaker’s perspective and helps establish shared understanding. For instance, when a speaker says, I will meet you here tomorrow, the listener interprets I as the speaker, you as the addressee, here as the place of speaking, and tomorrow as the next day relative to the utterance. Pragmatics thus emphasizes the role of deixis in managing interaction.

Deixis in Literature and Translation

Deixis plays an important role not only in everyday conversation but also in literature. Writers use deictic expressions to create perspective, voice, and narrative positioning. In translation, deixis often causes difficulties, since reference points may differ across languages and cultures. For example, spatial deixis (this/that) may not always have a direct equivalent in another language, leading to ambiguity.

Conclusion

Deixis is a central phenomenon linking language to context. Its semantic aspect shows how expressions depend on situational factors for meaning, while its pragmatic aspect highlights the speaker’s role in orienting communication. The categories of deixis—person, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social—demonstrate the wide scope of this linguistic feature. Understanding deixis is essential not only for linguistics but also for translation studies, literature, and discourse analysis.



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