

Semantic Significance of Indexicals in Syntax: A Comparative Study of English and Urdu Deixes

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to find out the relationship between semantics and syntax through pragmatic analysis of indexicals used by Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan in two of his purposively selected speeches; one in Urdu delivered on 23rd December, 2020 on the passing out ceremony of police officers and the other in English delivered on 27th September, 2019 in UNGA. The English speech has been analyzed using *antconc* software while the analysis of Urdu speech has been done manually. A quantitative analysis of the five kinds of deixes in both the speeches strengthened the research results of Samosir and Zainuddin (2013) by providing the proof of the fact that person deixis is the most dominant category of English deixes (45.5%) while spatial is the least dominant (5.1%). The analysis of Urdu speech revealed a similar pattern as the person deixis (51.9%) is the most frequent, spatial being the least (3.9%). The presence of all five kinds of deixes with a similar pattern of relative frequencies in both the languages have provided a useful data for the purpose of Parallel Grammar (ParGram) project (Butt et al., 1999) to find out parallel structures in the grammar of six languages out of which two have been analyzed in this paper.

Keywords: Indexicals, Person, Temporal, Spatial, Discourse, Social Deixis, Syntax, Semantics

Introduction

The relative importance of syntax and semantics is not new in linguistics. Pragmatics has fueled the debate in recent years by emphasizing the role of language in communication. Deixis is an important concept in pragmatics (Levinson, 1983) that throws light on the importance of spatial, temporal, social, or contextual interpretation of words being a structural unit of sentences and their significance in generating meanings of utterances. Stapleton (2017) claims the pragmatic awareness to be the most challenging aspect of language acquisition and quotes Levinson (1983) to establish the relationship between deixis and pragmatics.

The present study aims at comparing the role of five categories of indexicals in two (English & Urdu) of the six languages under analysis by the Parallel Grammar (ParGram) project (Butt et al., 1999) employing parallelism in the tradition of Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG) using two of the speeches of Imran Khan, the Prime minister of Pakistan. This article presents a quantitative analysis of the types of deictic words used in both the languages. Making use of the two speeches of the same speaker in a public setting in front of international media allows for the more focused analysis by contrasting the use of deixis in two languages as it controls most of the variables involved. To find out the relative frequencies of five types of deixis in Urdu and English languages, the corpora of two speeches is to be analyzed using *antconc*. Describing parallel structure of languages helps in using different languages in same applications (Butt et al., 1999) and machine translation can be simplified (Frank, 1999).

Lavinson (1983) finds the etymology of the term Deixis in the Greek word ‘Deiktikos’ meaning ‘to point to’ or ‘to indicate’. George Yule (1996) describes it as primary thing that the user of a language uses an utterance for. He calls it ‘pointing’ with the help of language Stephen C. Levinson (1983) points out that the term is concerned with the interpretation of the context of an utterance.

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Fillmore (1971) explained the basic three categories of deixis as person, place and time deixis and grouped them under a single heading “major grammaticalized types”. As the name suggests, the person deixes are used to refer to the persons and they take the form of personal pronouns like I, you, we, they, he, she, it. The place deixis corresponds to the references of the place of interlocutors, such as here and there. Time deixes are also called temporal deixes and they refer to the time of producing utterances. The most common expressions used as time deixis are ‘now’ and ‘then’. These three references define the author’s ‘situatedness’ in the rhetorical space (Ivanova, 2016). Afterwards, Fillmore (1977) and Lyons (1977) discussed the two more categories of deixis named discourse deixis and social deixis that have caught the attention of researchers in the recent past. Some verbs may also be deictic too, e.g., ‘come’ and ‘go’ – give evidence of location, and thus qualify as spatial deictic expressions. Lewandowski (2007) elucidates the importance of deictic verbs (come and go) relying on their ability to describe the phenomenon of ‘psychological shifting’. Mohammad Hamdan calls them ‘psychological shifting verbs’ and claims them to be ‘the spot of research’ done by Fillmore (1971), Lyons (1977), and Levinson (1983). In short, all linguistic expressions used to accomplish ‘pointing’ are called deictic expressions.

Indexicality is the philosophical corresponding term used for deictic expressions (Abdullah, 2015). John Lyons (1977) talks about spatio-temporal context of utterances in which an essential role is played by the speaker, second being addressee. Stapleton (2017) describes the five categories of deixis as temporal, discourse, spatial, social and personal deixis. The present study is to explore these five categories and find their relative importance in English and Urdu languages.

Person Deixis

Person deixis as part of ‘pointing devices’ are the expression used for referring to persons involved in discourse. Lyons (1977) asserts that a speech act must include two persons, the speaker and the addressee. He calls them ‘active participants’ while in his opinion the third person is not an active participant (but a part of the speech act). Trask (1999) asserts that person deixis distinguish the speaker from the addressee as well as the ‘others’. The three personal pronouns, first second and third person correspond to three participants described by Lyons. Stapleton (2017) calls them speaking, hearing and narrated participants. She presented them in the form of a table given below:

Table 1

Personal Pronouns in English

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
	<i>Nominative</i>	<i>Accusative</i>	<i>Nominative</i>	<i>Accusative</i>
<i>1st person</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>We</i>	<i>Us</i>
<i>2nd person</i>	<i>You</i>		<i>You</i>	
<i>3rd person</i>	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>They</i>	<i>Them</i>
	<i>He</i>	<i>Him</i>		
	<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>		
	<i>She</i>	<i>Her</i>		
	<i>Neuter</i>			
	<i>It</i>			

Source: Stapleton (2017)

In order to employ parallelism we may construct a similar table to point out Urdu personal deixis. It will be helpful in finding similarities in the uses of person deixis in the two languages and enable the readers to mark the deviations.

Table 2

Personal Pronouns in Urdu

	<i>SINGULAR</i>		<i>PLURAL</i>	
	<i>NOMINATIVE</i>	<i>ACCUSATIVE</i>	<i>NOMINATIVE</i>	<i>ACCUSATIVE</i>
<i>1ST PERSON</i>	<i>MEIN</i>	<i>MUJHE</i>	<i>HUM</i>	<i>HUMEIN</i>
<i>2ND PERSON</i>	<i>TUM/TU/AAP</i>		<i>TUMHE/ TUJHE/AAP</i>	
	<i>MASCULINE</i>	<i>MASCULINE</i>		
<i>3RD PERSON</i>	<i>WO</i>	<i>USSE</i>	<i>WO</i>	<i>UNHEIN</i>
	<i>FEMININE</i>	<i>FEMININE</i>		
	<i>WO</i>	<i>USSE</i>		
	<i>NEUTER</i>			
	<i>WO</i>			

grammaticalized types (Youwen, 2011). He asserts that the expressions that refer to the point in time at which the 'portion of discourse' is perceived to be occurring and gives the examples of non-deictic terms like 'earlier' or 'later'. Here are some of the examples which elaborate the use of spatial or temporal deixis in terms of discourse.

- iv. *I'm sure she hasn't attended that class.*
- v. *This is the cleverest girl in the class.*
- vi. *That was a difficult task to accomplish.*
- vii. *Here's an interesting story published in the magazine.*

Cornish (2007) establishes the relationship between anaphoric use of demonstratives and discourse deictic expressions which point to a discourse entity contextually. This 'anadeictic' use of demonstratives is a reflex of proximal or distal pointing through these demonstratives (Cornish, 2007). In the following example the part in bold is a discourse entity referred to by the demonstrative '**this**' which serves the function of anadeictic discourse deixis.

- viii. *The first wave of covid-19 pandemic caused much disaster and **the second wave, at hand, is expected to be more lethal.** May Allah the Almighty not let **this** expectation prove true!*

Webber (1988) asserts that the concepts of **discourse entity** and of **discourse segment** are the fundamentals in the discussion about discourse deixis. He gives the credit of introducing the very idea of discourse entity for the first time, to Lauri Karttunen (1976) who used the term **discourse referent** for the concept. Simplifying the discussion elaborated by Webber (1988) about the two concepts, the discourse entity may refer to the **NPs** while discourse segment to sentences or clauses.

In Urdu language, we use two different deictic expressions **Aap** and **Tu** for Allah the Almighty. Both the expressions (**aap** and **unho**) conventionally used as plurals, when used for rhetoric purposes for a singular noun; contribute to giving an expression of respect and authority. The expression **App** emphasizes the might while **Tu** the oneness of Allah the Almighty.

- ix. *Jab Ap (SAW) ne Islam ki dawat di.*
- x. *Unho ne kufaar k sath Shafqat se bharpoor rawaiya rakhai.*

The plural terms "**app**" and "**unho**", here, are referring to a single a person the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in order to highlight respect, while the expression "**jab**", which is a temporal dietic expression is referring to the time mentioned in example 'x' which is a rhetorical use of the term.

Social Deixis

Hatch (1992) points out that linguistic expressions referring directly or indirectly to the social status or relationship between interlocutors are called social deixis. Shah et al. (2020) asserts that relative deictic terms like my brother, my mother, his sister or her daughter are lexical deictic terms. They are of the opinion that the absolute social deixis do not depend upon the social status of the speaker rather they correspond to the social roles and give the examples of His Highness, Your Honour, Your Majesty and Mr. President. Another distinction of social deixis has been made by T/V forms that signify honorific terms (Shah et al., 2020). **T** refers to Latin word '**tu**' meaning familiar while **V** to '**vous**' meaning unfamiliar. In T/V distinction a language employs two deictic terms for the single pronoun "you" depending upon the familiarity between interlocutors (Shah et al., 2020). Sabir (2019) categorizes relational social deixis into five categories: personal nouns, T/V forms of pronouns, occupational titles, kinship terms and expressions of endearment.

The social status or familiarity between interlocutors is highlighted with the help of certain deictic expressions which are called social deixis. In the Urdu, the two terms "**tum**" and "**tu**" may be used to call a classmate depending upon the intimacy. The expression "**tu**" is not appropriate in formal situations and with less intimate relations. It can only be used in case of close acquaintances. Another expression "**Aap**" is also used for seniors in terms of both age and rank. In **Punjabi** also, the expressions used in similar social contexts are "**tun**" or "**tussi**". This phenomenon is not same in all languages. For example in **English**, we do not have any expression to be used in context of **Aap** or **Tussi**.

Research Objectives

To find out

1. if the deictic expressions of Urdu and English have any similarities.
2. more dominant types of deixis in English and Urdu syntactic structure.
3. Relative importance of semantics and syntax?

Research Questions

- Q1. Are deictic expressions of Urdu syntax similar to those used in English?
- Q2. Which type/types of deixis is/are more dominant in English and Urdu syntactic structure?
- Q3. Is semantics more important than syntax or vice versa?

Literature Review

In linguistics, pragmatics is a prominent field that studies the meaning of the context of the visible meaning. Pragmatics deals with the interpretation of linguistic meanings in context (Fromkin et al., 2003). Many sentences in various languages are difficult to comprehend without the knowledge of a person talking, to whom, when and where (Yule, 2014). The term 'deixis' has been derived from Greek word meaning 'to point out, pick out, or indicate' (Imai, 2009). These words are also known as deictic expressions or deictics or indexicals (Yule, 1996). This trend of deixis is a central part of both spoken and written communication. Depending on the context of the demonstrators, personal pronoun, time, and local metaphors, they are included in this category of deixis (Shah, 2015). Some studies (Bala, 1996; Imai, 2009; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996) claim that all words and impressions that depend on the context of the language they refer to are included in the deixis. These deictic words can only be interpreted in context because once we change the context they may have different references.

In literature, there are three usually recognized classifications built on three axes, namely, temporal-socio-spatial axes (Imai, 2009). Discourse deixis suggests texts or stories and social deixis help to explain certain realities of social situations. Furthermore, Yule (1996) states that Impressions are respectful which indicates an upper position. Then the conversation of the conditions/surroundings that conduct the choice of one of these procedures rather than another is occasionally described as social deixis.

Yule (1996) makes a significant difference between his impressions: proximal and distal. These terms refer to impressions that are near or far from the speaker, respectively. This division is very clear in English in the words like now, here, this. These words are examples of proximal deixis because they denote something that is near to the speaker. On the other hand, there, that, and then are distal deixis since they suggest something that is away from the speaker. Lyons (1995) highlights that the 'here' and 'now' of the speaker are very substantial as deixis are based upon them.

Methodology

Data Collection

For the purpose of comparing the use of deictic words in English and Urdu languages, two speeches of Imran Khan were purposively taken from YouTube (Urdu speech) and Dawn's official website (English speech). The English speech being an address to UN assembly and due to its forceful arguments as well as the strategic importance of the content has become very famous and its transcript is easily available on internet. Urdu speech's transcript not being available is a task to be accomplished manually. Both the transcripts then were trimmed to get two texts of almost equal length required for empirical data analysis.

This paper aims at providing an insight into the two languages Urdu and English for the relative importance of various categories of deictic words. The researchers have employed the documentary technique for data collection and analysis. Documentary technique, as suggested by Nita Bonita Samosir and Zainuddin (2013), involves reading, studying, and analyzing data by identification and classification. The technique for analyzing data for the present study consisted of (1) identifying deixis in the two selected speeches, (2) classifying them into five categories discussed in preceding sections, (3) counting the occurrences of each category of deixis and (4) finding the most and least dominant type of deixis in both the languages.

Data Analysis

Converting the English speech into plain text, 'antconc' software will be used for finding out the frequencies of the three grammaticalized categories of deixis. The two modern types; social and discourse deixis, will be manually sorted out from the two texts. The Urdu speech was also analyzed manually.

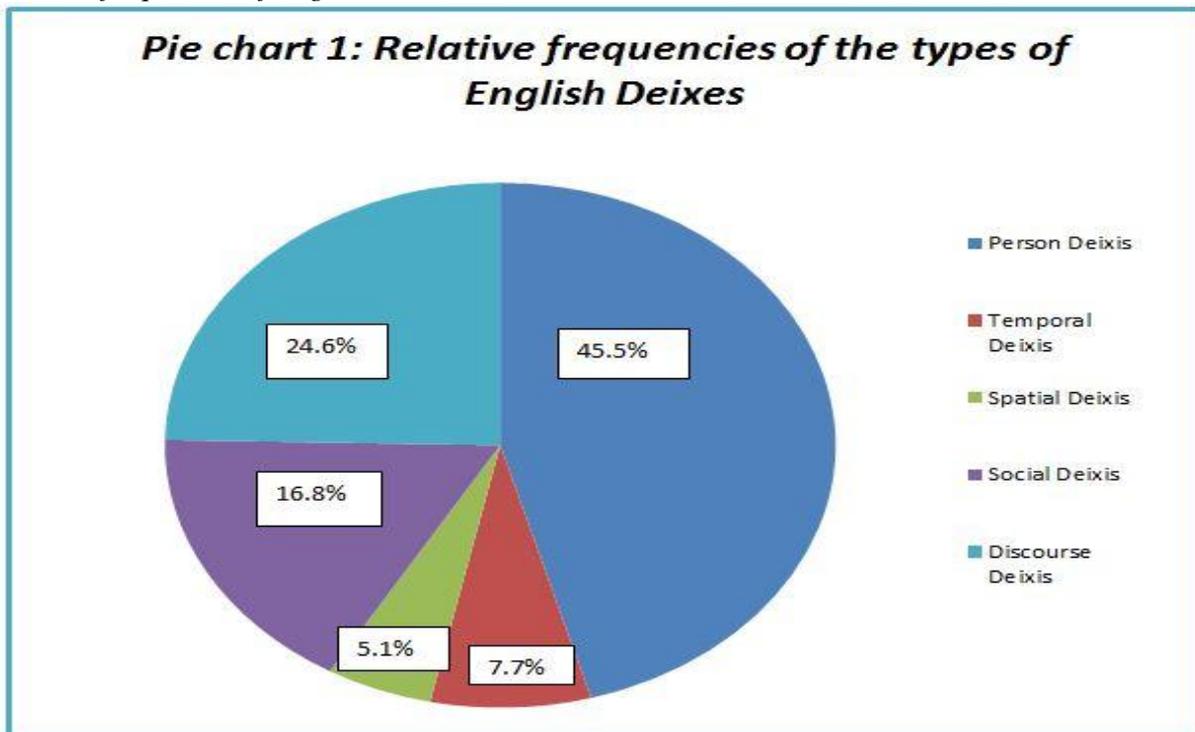
Results and Discussion

Keeping in view the aim of the present research, a comparison table has been constructed to show the occurrences and the frequencies of the five kinds of deixis, in Urdu and English languages. Separate

pie charts have also been constructed to demonstrate the relative frequencies of various kinds of deixis within a single language.

Figure 1

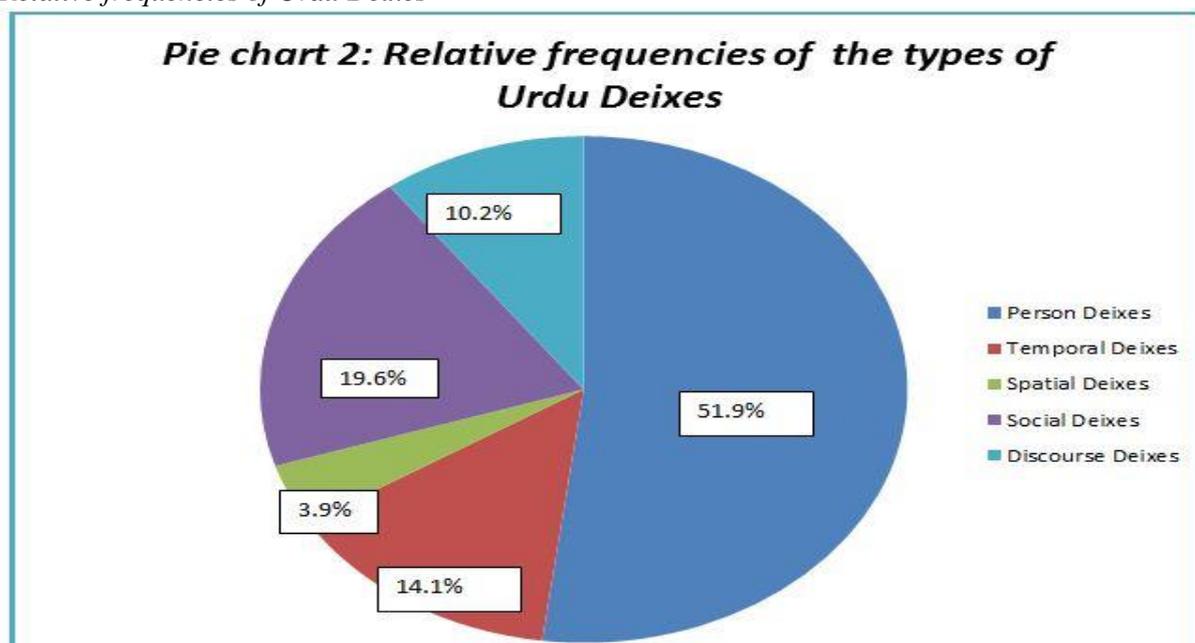
Relative frequencies of English Deixes



The pie chart 1 clearly reflects a trend in relative frequencies of the five kinds of deixis used in English language. Person deixis, is the most dominant category of deixis (45.5%), spatial (5.1%) being the least dominant. Social, temporal and discourse deixes comprise 16.8%, 7.7% and 24.6% respectively. This quantitative comparison of the kinds of deixes used in the English language reflects the same results as demonstrated by Nita Bonita Samosir and Zainuddin (2013), who calculated the frequencies of the five types of deixes in the five newspaper articles and found that the person deixis in English language is most dominant category, spatial being the least one. Rests of the three categories were also in the similar intermediate range.

Figure 2

Relative frequencies of Urdu Deixes



The pie chart 2 demonstrated the similar kind of trend that the most dominant type of deictic expressions in Urdu again is Person deixis (51.9%) while spatial deixis (3.9%) is the least dominant category. Social, temporal and discourse deixes comprise 19.6%, 14.1% and 10.2% respectively.

Cross-Linguistic Comparison of Five Kinds of Deixis

To answer the first research question of this paper, the data collected revealed that all five types of deixes are employed by both Urdu and English languages. The table 3 answered the rest of the two questions in a considerable detail:

Table 3

A comparison of the relative frequencies of the types of deixes in English and Urdu languages

		<u>TYPES OF DEIXES</u>					<u>OCCUR</u>	<u>PERC</u>
		<u>PERSON</u>	<u>TEMPORAL</u>	<u>SPATIAL</u>	<u>SOCIAL</u>	<u>DISCOU</u>	<u>RENCES</u>	<u>ENTA</u>
						<u>RSE</u>		<u>GES</u>
<i>ENGLISH</i>								
<i>DEIXES</i>		35	6	4	13	19	77/539	14.3%
<i>PERCENTAGES</i>		45.5%	7.7%	5.1%	16.8%	24.6%		
<i>URDU DEIXES</i>								
		66	18	5	25	13	127/542	23.4%
<i>PERCENTAGES</i>		51.9%	14.1%	3.9%	19.6%	10.2%		

It is evident from the table 3 that there is a clear-cut similarity between the use of person and spatial deixes in the two languages. Person deixis is the most dominant while the spatial is the least in both the languages. Person deixis in English as well as in Urdu comprises almost half (45.5% & 51.9%) of the total number of deictic expressions used. Spatial deixis in both the languages contribute less than 10% to the deictic set up. Social deixis contribute 15%-20% of the total deictic words, Urdu being 19.6% with 25 occurrences while in English comprises 16.8% with 13 occurrences in total. Temporal and discourse deixes are slightly deviant. The use of Temporal deixis in Urdu (14.1%) is almost double the frequency of temporal deixis in English (7.7%) while discourse deixis in English have a frequency of 24.6% which is more than double the frequency of Urdu discourse deixis (10.2%).

Another interesting comparison demonstrated by the table 3 is between the total number of deictic expressions used in both the speeches and their relative frequencies. English deixes comprise 14.3% of the total number of words of the English speech with 77 occurrences out of 539 words. Urdu deixis, on the other hand, contribute 23.4% of the total number of words occurring 127 times in a speech of 542 words. This shows that the Urdu speech employed more deictic expressions than English speech albeit the relative use of five kinds of deixes in both the languages demonstrated a similar trend indicated by the figures used in this section.

Conclusion

Deictic expressions are very important in communication because to get the essence of an utterance, it is very important that the addressor as well as the addressee should focus exclusively on a single deictic referent (Hanks, 2017). Deictic expressions comprise a considerable part (14.3% in English & 23.4% in Urdu) of most formal events of language use as the speeches of the head of an estate, on most formal occasions.

The results accentuated that the person deixis in both the languages is the most dominant kind, spatial being the least. These results intensified the results of a previous research done by Nita Bonita Samosir and Zainuddin (2013) on the types of deixis used in English language. The rest of the three types also reflect similar kind of trend in relative frequencies though the overall use of Urdu deixes is more frequent than the English deixes.

Research Gap

The present study has focused on indexicals from only two languages while the discussion has revealed that deixis is an intricate term and its use is socio-cultural context dependent. As languages are engrained in culture, the use of deixis in different languages demonstrate deviations from general understanding of the types involved. Therefore, it would be an interesting topic to explore various languages for the types of deixis used and their comparative analysis will also be quite apt to scrutinize. With 7117 different languages spoken in the world (Eberhard, 2020), the scope of the comparative analysis of indexicals is vast. At least, 23 of the 7117 languages spoken by more than half of the world’s population (Eberhard, 2020) are worth examining for the types of deixis used.

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