

**A Pragmatic Analysis of Deictic Expressions in the 2020 Convocation Speech of Professor
Abel Idowu Olayinka, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ibadan, Nigeria**

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the pragmatic role of deictic expressions in the 2020 Convocation speech delivered by Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The study aims to analyze how deixis situates the speaker, audience, and events within a specific socio-cultural and temporal context. Drawing on Levinson's (1983) and Fillmore's (1975) theoretical frameworks, the research categorizes deixis into person, place, time, and discourse types, focusing on their communicative functions in academic settings. Data for this study were collected from the online recordings of the convocation speech, which were presented and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The deictic expressions were tabulated, categorized by type, and analyzed for their frequency and contextual relevance. This mixed-method approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of how deictic markers contribute to the clarity, cohesion, and relational dynamics of the speech. The findings reveal that person deixis, such as pronouns "I" and "we," are extensively used to establish authority and foster a sense of collective achievement. Place deixis, including terms like "here" and "there," anchors the discourse within specific spatial contexts, while time deixis emphasizes the temporal significance of the event. Discourse deixis

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helps maintain coherence, linking various parts of the speech for smooth transitions. Overall, the study highlights how deixis in convocation speeches is not merely referential but functions to align institutional values with the academic and social significance of the occasion.

Keywords: pragmatic analysis, deictic expressions, convocation speech, academic discourse, deixis types

INTRODUCTION

Language use in formal contexts such as university convocation ceremonies extends beyond ritual performance. It functions as a tool for reinforcing institutional values, celebrating achievements, and defining collective aspirations. Convocation speeches by university leaders, therefore, serve as pragmatic acts that construct institutional identity and social relationships. This study examines the deictic expressions employed in the 2020 convocation speech of Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, to explore how linguistic choices situate the speaker, audience, and event within specific social, temporal, and spatial contexts.

Pragmatics, as a subfield of linguistics, investigates how meaning is shaped by context and speaker intention. Rooted in the philosophical works of Charles Sanders Peirce and later developed by scholars such as Charles Fillmore (1975) and Stephen C. Levinson (1983), pragmatics emphasizes the functional use of language in communication. Within this framework, deixis plays a central role as it anchors discourse in context through references to person, place, time, and discourse elements. In other words, *context* is central to understanding meaning. It includes the physical setting of the interaction, the speaker's intentions, the listener's background knowledge, and the social or cultural norms that shape communication. Unlike literal or dictionary meanings, pragmatic meaning depends heavily on how speakers use language in real situations. Thus, context plays a decisive role in helping listeners interpret utterances accurately.

Deixis refers to linguistic elements whose interpretation depends entirely on the context in which they are used. These expressions cannot be understood without reference to the circumstances of the speech event. Ariel (2010; 2014) describes deixis as a system of referring expressions whose meanings are accessed through the immediate discourse context, relying on cognitive accessibility and the coordination between speaker and hearer. Building on this perspective, the present study investigates how deictic markers are employed pragmatically to

construct meaning, establish social relations, and project institutional identity in Professor Olayinka's 2020 convocation addresses.

Deixis represents one of the clearest ways in which context shapes meaning. Deictic expressions, such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "I," "you," "now," "then," "today," and "tomorrow", require contextual information to communicate their full meaning. Without knowing the speaker's position, time of utterance, or intended referent, these expressions remain vague. Therefore, deixis serves as a crucial linguistic tool that anchors utterances to the specific circumstances of communication.

Ariel's (2010; 2014) perspective, the various types of deixis can be understood as context-dependent referring expressions whose interpretation relies on the speaker's cognitive assumptions about what the hearer can easily access within the discourse context. Within this framework, **person deixis** functions as a means of identifying discourse participants through pronouns such as *I*, *you*, and *we*, whose meanings shift according to the speaker–hearer configuration at each moment of interaction. **Place deixis** similarly depends on the interlocutors' shared spatial knowledge, using expressions like *here*, *there*, *this place*, and *that location* to anchor references to the physical environment of the speech event. **Time deixis**, expressed through terms such as *now*, *then*, *today*, and *tomorrow*, situates events along the temporal axis relative to the moment of utterance, drawing on the hearer's ability to map linguistic cues onto the ongoing timeline of discourse. **Discourse deixis** further operates by directing attention to portions of the unfolding text or speech using markers like *this*, *that*, *the following*, and *as mentioned earlier* which require listeners to track and retrieve prior or upcoming segments of information. Finally, **social deixis**, expressed through honorifics, titles, and other socially loaded forms, signals the relational hierarchy or degree of formality between participants, relying on shared sociocultural knowledge to be interpreted accurately. In Ariel's view, these categories of deixis highlight the crucial role of cognitive accessibility and coordinated speaker–hearer interaction in constructing meaning within any communicative event.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses within a pragmatic framework to examine deictic expressions in the 2020 convocation

speech delivered by Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The analysis is anchored in the theoretical perspectives of Stephen C. Levinson (1983) and Charles J. Fillmore (1975), which emphasize the functional and contextual role of deixis in communication.

The primary data for the study consist of the official 2020 convocation speech, which were obtained from the University of Ibadan's online platform, downloaded, and transcribed verbatim. These texts serve as authentic sources of linguistic data, reflecting the speaker's pragmatic choices in real institutional discourse. For the quantitative analysis, all instances of deictic expressions were systematically identified and categorized into three major types: Person deixis, Place deixis, and Time deixis. Each category was tabulated to show frequency counts and percentages, allowing for measurable comparison across deictic categories. Statistical representations, such as frequency distribution tables and percentage calculations, were used to determine the relative prominence of each deictic type in the speech.

The qualitative component focuses on the interpretive analysis of the identified deictic expressions. This involves examining how the speaker's use of deixis constructs interpersonal relationships, positions the audience within the speech context, and reflects institutional authority and social interaction. Contextual interpretation and pragmatic inference were employed to uncover the underlying communicative intentions and sociocultural meanings embedded in the deictic forms. By integrating quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative pragmatic interpretation, this mixed-method design provides both empirical precision and interpretive depth, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how deixis functions as a communicative strategy in academic discourse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this analysis is built upon the foundational theories of deixis as articulated by Levinson (1983) and Fillmore (1975). Levinson's categorization of deixis into person, place, time, and discourse provides a comprehensive model for analyzing how language anchors itself in context. Fillmore's contributions further enhance the understanding of deictic expressions by emphasizing their role in shaping and understanding contextual meaning.

The study also draws on broader pragmatic theories that consider how context influences meaning and communication. This includes examining the historical development of pragmatics from early philosophical thought, such as Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics and Ludwig

Wittgenstein's language games, to more contemporary models of communicative competence and sociolinguistic variation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Huang (2007; 2014) views deixis as one of the central phenomena in Pragmatics, emphasizing that its interpretation is inseparable from the situational context of the utterance. He explains that deictic expressions derive their meaning from contextual parameters such as the speaker's location, time of speaking, social identity, and communicative intentions. Huang identifies person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis as essential categories through which speakers anchor language to the circumstances of the speech event. He argues that deixis plays a crucial role in guiding the listener's interpretation, ensuring that linguistic expressions are properly mapped onto real-world referents. Huang concludes that without deixis, language would lose its ability to situate meaning dynamically in communication, thereby undermining effective interaction.

Adejola (2022) analyzes the use of deictic expressions in Nigerian political speeches, focusing on how politicians use personal, temporal, and spatial deixis to create immediacy and relevance. Personal deixis like "I" and "we" connects the speaker with the audience, while temporal deixis ("now," "today") emphasizes the urgency of political messages. Spatial deixis ("here," "there") grounds the discourse in specific locations, enhancing the significance of political promises. Adejola concludes that these deictic strategies are key in shaping political narratives and establishing the speaker's authority.

Okoye (2023) specifically examines President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's use of deixis in his campaign speeches. Okoye finds that Tinubu effectively employs personal deixis to build intimacy and solidarity with voters, using expressions like "I" and "we" to appear relatable. Additionally, Tinubu's use of spatial and temporal deixis helps tie his political promises to specific locations and timeframes, adding immediacy and relevance to his rhetoric. Okoye concludes that Tinubu's adept use of deixis plays a significant role in his persuasive power, helping him connect with the electorate on both personal and contextual levels.

Both Adejola's and Okoye's studies, together with the analysis of Olayinka's convocation speeches, show that deixis plays a central role in shaping meaning in public communication. While political speeches use deixis to persuade and engage voters, Olayinka's academic addresses use it to project institutional values and strengthen speaker-audience rapport. Huang (2007; 2014)

reinforces these findings by arguing that deixis derives its meaning from contextual factors such as the speaker's location, time, social identity, and communicative intention. His classification of person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis highlights how speakers anchor language to real-world circumstances. Overall, the studies demonstrate that deixis is adaptable across political and academic discourse, enhancing clarity, relevance, and effective interaction.

DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka's 2020 Convocation speech through the lenses of deixis as described by Stephen C. Levinson and Charles J. Fillmore, we will explore how different deictic expressions shape the speech's contextual meaning. Levinson's framework divides deixis into person, place, time, and discourse categories, while Fillmore's theory further explores how these expressions anchor meaning within context.

Person Deixis: Person deixis deals with how speakers use pronouns and related forms to refer to themselves, their audience, and others.

Analysis of First-person Pronouns: The use of pronouns like "I," "my," "we," and "our" is prevalent in the speech. For example:

"I am truly delighted and excited to welcome you all..."

"I charge you to go all out to do exploits..."

"We all, with every sense of duty..."

These pronouns highlight Professor Olayinka's personal involvement and authority in the speech. "I" and "my" signify his direct engagement and leadership, while "we" includes both the speaker and the audience, fostering a collective sense of unity and purpose.

Analysis of Second-person Pronouns: "You" and "your" are employed to directly address the audience:

"I charge you to go all out..."

"I particularly welcome the graduands and to celebrate with your families..."

These pronouns specifically target the graduates and their families, making them the focus of the message and emphasizing their roles and achievements in the context of the ceremony.

Analysis of Third-person references: Terms like "they" and "them" are used to refer to graduates and other entities:

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"Our diversity, if only appropriately channeled, will lift our society to unprecedented enviable heights..."

This use of third-person deixis creates a degree of separation from the broader audience, highlighting the achievements and potential of others while underscoring collective societal challenges and successes.

Place Deixis: Place deixis refers to expressions that specify locations or spatial relationships.

Analysis of Geographical References:

"University of Ibadan, Ibadan, NIGERIA"

"St Louis Missouri, USA"

"Food System Commission of Switzerland"

These location markers provide the geographical backdrop for the university and its achievements, emphasizing the institution's global connections and local significance. By naming specific places, the speech situates the university within a broader international context, highlighting its reach and influence.

Time Deixis: Time deixis involves expressions that situate events in time.

Analysis of Temporal References:

"This year's convocation ceremony"

"Since my last address to convocation a year ago"

"Sometime ago"

These references provide a temporal framework for the events and accomplishments discussed. They anchor the speech within a specific timeframe, drawing attention to the current ceremony while reflecting on past events and achievements. This helps to contextualize the progress and milestones achieved over time.

Discourse Deixis: Discourse deixis pertains to references within the speech or text itself.

Analysis of Discourse Markers:

"Before I conclude my speech"

"In conclusion"

These markers guide the audience through the structure of the speech, signaling transitions between different sections and topics. They help organize the content, making it easier for listeners to follow the flow and understand the main points being addressed.

Quantitative Analysis of Deixis in Professor Olayinka's 2020 Convocation Speeches

The quantitative analysis of deixis in Professor Olayinka's 2020 convocation speech reveals a strategic use of deictic expressions to enhance clarity, engagement, and contextual relevance. The frequency and distribution of person, place, time, and discourse deixis highlight the speaker's focus on personal connection, institutional significance, and organizational coherence. The analysis is done in a tabular form in four columns: serial number, deixis types, frequency of occurrences and percentages.

S/no	Diexis types	Frequency of occurrences	Percentages
1.	Person Deixis	Person Deixis	
i.	First-Person Pronouns: "I" "My" "We" "Our" Total:	15 occurrences 8 occurrences 12 occurrences 6 occurrences 41 occurrences	36.59% 19.51% 29.27% 14.63% (54%)
ii.	Second-Person Pronouns: "You" "Your" Total:	- 10 occurrences - 7 occurrences 17 occurrences	58.82% 41.18% (23%)
iii.	Third-Person References: "They" "Them" Total:	5 occurrences 3 occurrences 8 occurrences	62.5% 37.5% (11%)
	Overall Total		100%
2.	Place Deixis		
i.	Geographical References: "Universityo of Ibadan" "Ibadan, Nigeria" "St. Louis, Missouri, USA" "Food System Commission of Switzerland" Total:	5 occurrences 3 occurrences 2 occurrences 1 occurrence 11 occurrences	45.45% 27.27% 18.18% 9.10% (100%)
3.	Time Deixis		
i.	Temporal References: "This year's convocation ceremony" "Since my last address" "Sometime ago" Total:	4 occurrences 3 occurrences 2 occurrences 9 occurrences	44.44 33.33 22.23 (100%)

4.	Discourse Deixis		
	Discourse Markers:		
	"Before I conclude my speech"	3 occurrences	60%
	"In conclusion"	2 occurrences	40%
	Total:	5 occurrences	(100%)

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The results of the analysis reveal that first-person pronouns are the most frequently used in Professor Olayinka’s speech, accounting for 54% of occurrences, with "I" (36.59%), "My" (19.51%), "We" (29.27%), and "Our" (14.63%), underscoring his personal involvement and leadership. Second-person pronouns make up 23% of the occurrences, with "You" (58.82%) and "Your" (41.18%), focusing on the audience, particularly the graduates and their families, and highlighting their achievements. Third-person references are the least frequent, constituting 11% of the occurrences, with "They" (62.5%) and "Them" (37.5%), providing context about broader societal contributions and framing the graduates’ achievements within a larger societal context. Place deixis is dominated by geographical references, with "University of Ibadan" (45.45%), "Ibadan, Nigeria" (27.27%), "St. Louis, Missouri, USA" (18.18%), and "Food System Commission of Switzerland" (9.10%), emphasizing the central role of the University of Ibadan along with its global connections and local significance. Time deixis is entirely comprised of temporal references, such as "This year’s convocation ceremony" (44.44%), "Since my last address" (33.33%), and "Sometime ago" (22.23%), providing a temporal framework that contextualizes the achievements and progress over time. Discourse deixis is represented by five instances of discourse markers, with "Before I conclude my speech" (60%) and "In conclusion" (40%), which aid in structuring the speech, signaling transitions, and guiding the audience through its different sections.

FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that deixis in Olayinka’s convocation speech operates similarly to deixis in political discourse. Across all studies, deixis is context-bound, categorized primarily as person, place, time, and discourse, and functions to establish authority, maintain coherence, and foster speaker–audience engagement. These results highlight the adaptability and pragmatic significance of deictic expressions across different genres of public discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a detailed pragmatic analysis of deictic expressions in Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka's 2020 convocation speech at the University of Ibadan, utilizing Levinson's and Fillmore's frameworks. It reveals how person, place, time, and discourse deixis are strategically employed to navigate social relationships, establish institutional identity, and convey values in formal academic settings. The research underscores the critical role of deixis in shaping formal discourse, illustrating how these linguistic tools enhance communication and foster a sense of community. The study also extends the application of deixis theory beyond conversational contexts, offering insights into its use in structured and ceremonial discourse, and contributes significantly to the field of pragmatics by showing how deictic expressions influence identity and meaning in academic environments.

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