

# DEIXIS IN KAMALA HARRIS'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AT THE 2024 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

**Yoga Dwitama**

PT. Taruna Jaya Utama

[yogadwitama@gmail.com](mailto:yogadwitama@gmail.com)

Corresponding author: Yoga Dwitama, PT. Taruna Jaya Utama

E-mail: [yogadwitama@gmail.com](mailto:yogadwitama@gmail.com)

Volume 9

No. 1

March 2025

Page 20-26



## **Abstract:**

*This research is entitled "Deixis in Kamala Harris' Acceptance Speech at the Democratic National Convention: A Pragmatic Study." The purpose of this research is to analyse the types of deixis and meanings used in Kamala Harris' speech. The research employs a descriptive analytical method with the following steps: determining the research topic, collecting and studying relevant literature, formulating the problem, selecting data from the speech transcript, obtaining the data from CNBC Television's YouTube channel, classifying and analysing the data based on the types of deixis and meanings found in the speech, and drawing conclusions based on the analysis results. From a total of 299 data points collected, further grouped into smaller units, totalling 40 data points. However, for the analysis in this study to be more specific, only 10 examples of deixis were selected. The findings reveal five types of deixis in the speech, namely personal deixis, temporal deixis, spatial deixis, social deixis, and discourse deixis, with the most dominant type being personal deixis, with the most frequently used type of deixis is person deixis. Additionally, seven types of meaning were identified in the speech, namely denotative meaning, connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective meaning, reflective meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning, with connotative meaning being the most dominant. This research highlights how deixis and meanings play a crucial role in delivering effective communication within the context of political speeches.*

**Keyword:** Pragmatics, deixis, types of deixis, meaning, speech

Cite this as: Dwitama, Yoga. (2025). Deixis in Kamala Harris's Acceptance Speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention: A Pragmatic Study. English Journal Literacy Utama, <https://doi.org/10.33197/ejlutama.vol9.iss1.2025.2655.455>

## **Article History:**

Received: 19 February 2025; Revised: 8 March 2025;

Accepted: 23 March 2025

## **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is a fundamental element in human life, where the exchange of information, ideas, and messages occurs between individuals or groups. Communication can be explained as "the process in which individuals exchange information through symbols, signs, or behaviour" (Griffin, 2006, p. 5). This process not only involves delivering messages but also understanding them. In various social, cultural, and political contexts, communication serves as a crucial connecting tool. The success of communication is often determined by one's ability

to use language and signs appropriately. Effective communication plays a significant role in building interpersonal and organizational relationships, as well as in conveying complex ideas.

The use of language in daily communication is essential as it functions as a tool to express individuals' thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Language is not merely a system of symbols but also a medium to achieve more complex communication goals. In the pragmatic context, language analysis focuses on understanding how meaning is conveyed and received in specific situations. Yule (1996, p. 3) states that pragmatics is the study of how meaning is communicated through language in particular contexts. This approach helps individuals grasp nuances in conversations, which often go beyond the literal meaning of spoken words.

Furthermore, language plays a crucial role in various phenomena that occur in society. Every day, individuals and groups use language to express views, share information, and influence others. In an increasingly complex social context, language use often reflects power dynamics, identity, and cultural values. For example, in formal situations such as speeches, speakers utilize language to reach an audience and deliver messages that can move or motivate them.

When someone listens to a speech, they attempt to understand the intent and meaning of what is being conveyed, including who and what is being referred to. In pragmatic analysis, this is known as deixis, which illustrates how references in language can change depending on the context of the conversation.

Deixis is a linguistic phenomenon related to the use of words or phrases whose meanings heavily depend on the context in which they are expressed. Understanding deixis requires information about who is speaking, to whom, and under what circumstances the expression is made. According to Levinson (1983, p. 54), deixis is "an element in language that allows individuals to refer to people, locations, time, and context in communication." Based on this statement, context becomes a determining factor in understanding the meaning of a word or sentence.

Meaning is a crucial element in communication, encompassing the comprehension of the information being conveyed. According to Kuo and Tseng (2020, p. 78), meaning is not only determined by the symbols used but also by the social and cultural contexts in which communication takes place. In the context of a speech, understanding meaning is essential, as listeners must interpret the speaker's intent based on word choice and the surrounding context. Therefore, meaning does not solely depend on the words spoken but also on how they are delivered in a particular situation, which can influence the impact of the message on the audience. Research by Van Dijk (2021, p. 142) emphasizes that contextual factors such as audience background and social norms also play a vital role in the process of meaning interpretation.

In its analysis, deixis consists of five main types: personal deixis, temporal deixis, spatial deixis, social deixis, and discourse deixis. Meanwhile, Leech (1974) categorizes meaning in linguistics into seven types: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective meaning, reflective meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning.

This study focuses on the various types of deixis found in a speech and the meaning generated from their use. The data source for this analysis is taken from a video titled "Vice President Kamala Harris' Full Acceptance Speech at the Democratic National Convention," uploaded on CNBC Television's YouTube channel.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to analyse deixis and its meanings in political speeches. According to Vagle (2020, p. 15), qualitative methods

allow researchers to understand meanings formed through social interactions by collecting and analysing data comprehensively. The primary data is sourced from the video of Kamala Harris's acceptance speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention, uploaded by CNBC Television's YouTube channel, which is then transcribed for analysis. The research focuses on identifying types of deixis and their meanings in the speech. The stages of the research include data collection (transcribing the speech), coding and classifying data based on deixis theory, analysing the data using a pragmatic approach to interpret meanings, and compiling the findings into a comprehensive report. This process aims to provide deeper insights into the use of deixis and the meanings conveyed in Kamala Harris's speech.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data analysis conducted on Kamala Harris' acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, which serves as the research object in this pragmatic study. The data were obtained from CNBC Television's YouTube channel, totalling 299 examples of data and further grouped into smaller units, totalling 40 data points. However, for the analysis in this study to be more specific, only 10 examples of deixis were selected and presented, namely person deixis, time deixis, place deixis, social deixis, and discourse deixis. The analysis focuses on the types of deixis and the meanings that influence them.

### **Data 1: Person Deixis**

Kamala: "To my husband, Doug, thank you for being an incredible partner to me and father to Cole and Ella." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this excerpt, person deixis appears in the word "me," which refers to Harris as the speaker expressing gratitude to her husband, Doug. The choice of this word directly connects Harris with the audience while also emphasizing the personal and emotional relationship she has with her husband. The role of person deixis in the word "me" is to indicate that the expression of gratitude is highly personal, showcasing the closeness between the speaker and the addressee, in this case, her husband.

The phrase "thank you" in the sentence "To my husband, Doug, thank you for being an incredible partner to me and father to Cole and Ella," carries affective meaning with deep emotional significance. This expression reflects Harris' sincere gratitude to Doug for his support as a husband and father. It goes beyond a simple thank-you; it also underscores the crucial role Doug plays in their lives. Although delivered in a formal speech, this phrase conveys warmth that resonates with the audience while revealing Harris' personal and emotional side

### **Data 2: Person Deixis**

Kamala: "In many ways, Donald Trump is an unserious man." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this excerpt, person deixis appears in the name "Donald Trump," which functions as a third-person singular deixis. The name "Donald Trump" directly refers to the former President of the United States, who is the subject of this sentence. The role of person deixis in "Donald Trump" is to provide a clear identification of the individual being referred to and to emphasize the statement regarding Trump's characteristics or actions as perceived by Harris.

In the sentence "In many ways, Donald Trump is an unserious man," the word "unserious" carries stylistic meaning. The use of this word conveys a critical nuance regarding Trump's leadership, suggesting that he does not meet the level of seriousness

expected from a leader. The word "unserious" clarifies that, according to Harris, Trump fails to adhere to the expected standards of serious and responsible leadership.

### **Data 3: Time Deixis**

Kamala: "My early memories of my parents together are joyful ones. A home filled with laughter and music. Aretha. Coltrane. And Miles." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this excerpt, the word "early" functions as time deixis, referring to an earlier period in Harris' life, particularly her childhood. The role of this time deixis is to provide a temporal context that directs the audience toward memories from the past, creating the impression that these recollections originate from a distant time.

In the sentence "My early memories of my parents together are joyful ones. A home filled with laughter and music. Aretha. Coltrane. And Miles." the word "joyful" carries affective meaning. The use of this word emphasizes the sense of happiness that fills her childhood memories. This indicates that these memories are not just about a past period but also contain deep positive emotions that shape her perspective on her early years.

### **Data 4: Time Deixis**

Kamala: "Last year, Joe and I brought together Democrats and conservative Republicans to write the strongest border bill in decades." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this excerpt, the phrase "last year" functions as temporal deixis, referring to the previous year, providing a clear time context for when the event occurred. The role of this time deixis is to direct the audience to a specific period that frames the event in the past.

In the sentence "Last year, Joe and I brought together Democrats and conservative Republicans to write the strongest border bill in decades," the word "strongest" carries connotative meaning that goes beyond its literal definition. In this context, the word does not refer to physical strength but rather to the quality and effectiveness of the legislation being described. Additionally, "strongest" holds an evaluative nuance aimed at creating an emotional impact by emphasizing a significant achievement and the substantial impact of the bill. This word choice is intended to build a positive perception and convey a strong sense of success to the audience.

### **Data 5: Place Deixis**

Kamala: "But the consequences of putting Donald Trump back in the White House are extremely serious." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

The deixis analysis in this sentence focuses on the phrase "White House," which serves as place deixis. "White House" here refers to the official residence of the U.S. President, which also symbolizes the core of executive power in the country. By mentioning "White House," the speaker directs attention to the position and immense responsibilities associated with the presidency. The role of place deixis in this context is to emphasize a location that holds significant influence over governance and national policy.

The phrase "extremely serious" carries a strong connotative meaning. The word "serious" in this context goes beyond simply indicating importance; it conveys a sense of great impact and deep concern if the situation were to occur. By using "extremely serious," the speaker aims to highlight the urgency and potential consequences that

could significantly alter the country's direction. This phrase suggests that the decision at hand carries substantial risks and could lead to undesirable changes for the nation's future.

#### **Data 6: Place Deixis**

Kamala: "With respect to the war in Gaza. President Biden and I are working around the clock." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

The word "Gaza" in this sentence functions as place deixis, referring to a specific location where the war is taking place. The role of this place deixis is to provide clear information about the place being discussed, which serves as the focal point of the statement.

In the sentence "With respect to the war in Gaza. President Biden and I are working around the clock," the phrase "working around the clock" carries collocative meaning—a commonly used expression that describes an effort being made continuously and without stopping. This phrase indicates a high level of commitment, portraying an intensive and relentless effort to address a highly urgent issue. The use of this expression strongly conveys the seriousness and full dedication involved in dealing with the critical situation at hand.

#### **Data 7: Social Deixis**

Kamala: "As a prosecutor, when I had a case, I charged it not in the name of the victim. But in the name of. 'The People'." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this excerpt, social deixis is found in the word "prosecutor," which signifies Kamala Harris's role as a legal professional. The function of social deixis in "prosecutor" is to emphasize her authoritative position within the judicial system. By identifying herself as a prosecutor, Harris speaks from a legitimate and experienced perspective, reinforcing the credibility of her statements as being based on firsthand knowledge of the legal field.

The phrase "The People" carries thematic meaning with profound implications. "The People" refers to the public—those who are innocent and deserve protection and justice. In this context, the phrase reflects the fundamental principle of social justice, where the law is upheld for the common good rather than for specific individuals. By using the term "The People," Kamala Harris underscores that her actions as a prosecutor were aimed at safeguarding and advocating for the rights of the entire community, ensuring that justice is applied equally to all.

#### **Data 8: Social Deixis**

Kamala: "Compare that to Donald Trump. He doesn't actually fight for the middle class."  
(CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this excerpt, social deixis is present in the phrase "middle class." This phrase refers to a social group positioned in the middle of the economic spectrum—those with moderate income and social status, who do not belong to the elite or wealthy class. The function of social deixis in "middle class" is to specify the group that is the focus of the statement, highlighting the distinction between this class and the upper class.

The phrase "fight for the middle class" carries connotative meaning. The word "fight" here goes beyond its literal sense of physical combat; it implies struggle, dedication, and strong efforts to protect and advocate for the well-being of the middle class.

Connotatively, this word suggests that defending the middle class is not an easy task and requires concrete actions and courage to face significant challenges.

#### **Data 9: Discourse Deixis**

Kamala: "I fought against cartels who traffic in guns, drugs, and human beings. Who threaten the security of our border and the safety of our communities. Those fights were not easy." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this sentence, discourse deixis is found in the phrase "those fights," which refers to the struggles Harris previously mentioned, such as fighting against cartels and threats to security. The use of "those" connects this sentence to the struggles described earlier, providing clear context for the audience following the speech. The function of discourse deixis here is to refer back to situations that have been previously mentioned, offering a deeper understanding of the struggles involved. The word "fought" carries reflective meaning, as it indicates a past experience filled with challenges. The past tense emphasizes the significant obstacles the speaker faced. Reflectively, this sentence reminds the speaker of the difficulties they have overcome, while also showing the audience that they have addressed major threats to national and community security. The word "fought" also emphasizes the speaker's courage and commitment in confronting these issues.

#### **Data 10: Discourse Deixis**

Kamala: "Let me be clear: I will always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself and I will always ensure Israel has the ability to defend itself." (CNBC Television Youtube Channel)

In this excerpt, discourse deixis is found in the phrase "Let me be clear," which serves to emphasize that the following statement is very important and must be understood clearly. The function of discourse deixis in "Let me be clear" is to highlight that what is being said is a firm commitment that cannot be disputed. In the sentence "I will always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself," the word "defend" carries a connotative meaning. It goes beyond mere physical protection; it encompasses defending the rights, freedoms, and integrity of the state of Israel. Connotatively, "defend" reflects a deeper effort to uphold the existence and core values of the country, which include aspects such as political freedom and national sovereignty.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research findings regarding the types of deixis and the meanings contained in Kamala Harris's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, five types of deixis were identified in the speech, with 40 selected data points. The most frequently found deixis was persona deixis, with 10 data points, followed by time deixis (9 data points), place deixis (8 data points), social deixis (8 data points), and discourse deixis (5 data points). The dominance of persona deixis indicates that Kamala Harris frequently referred to herself as an individual, the audience, and relevant parties, aiming to assert her existence in the presidential race, weaken her political opponents, and foster a close relationship with her audience.

Secondly, seven types of meanings were found in the analyzed speech, consisting of 40 data points. The most prevalent type of meaning was connotative meaning, with 14 data points, followed by affective meaning (9 data points), denotative meaning (8 data points), reflective meaning (3 data points), thematic meaning (3 data points), collocative meaning (2 data points), and stylistic meaning (1 data point). These findings suggest

that much of the content delivered by Kamala Harris carried symbolic meanings, rich in interpretation to resonate with her diverse audience. The purpose of this approach was to convey complex ideas or messages implicitly while also appealing to the emotions of her listeners.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, S. R., & Keenan, E. L. (1985). Deixis. In T. Shopen (Ed.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description: Vol. 3. Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon* (pp. 259–308). Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (6th ed.). Blackwell Publishing.
- Griffin, E. (2006). *A First Look at Communication Theory* (6th ed.) in McGraw-Hill.
- Huang, Y. (2007). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Kerlinger, F. N. (1973). *Foundations of Behavioural Research*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Kuo, C. Y. (2021). The Dynamics of Deixis in Verbal Communication: A Contextual Approach. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 180, 123–135.
- Kuo, C. Y., & Tseng, W. C. (2020). The Role of Context in Interpreting Meaning in Communication. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 168, 100–112.
- Leech, G. N. (1974). *Semantics*. Penguin Books.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principle of Pragmatics*. Longman.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, S. C. (2004). Deixis and Pragmatics. In L. R. Horn & G. Ward (Eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 97–121). Blackwell Publishing.
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nadar, F. X. (2009). *Pragmatik dan Penelitian Pragmatik*. *Jurnal Humaniora*, 21(1), 88–99. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v21i1.766>
- Renkema, J. (2004). *Introduction to Discourse Studies*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Sweeney, S., & Ritchie, C. (2020). *Meaning and Experience: A Phenomenological Perspective*. Routledge.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. Longman.
- Vagle, M. D. (2020). *Crafting Qualitative Research: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives*. Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2021). Contextualizing Meaning in Discourse: A Socio-Cognitive Approach. *Discourse Studies*, 23(1), 5–22.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1992). *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations*. Oxford University Press.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Zhan, M., & Zhang, J. (2021). Contextual Shifts in Meaning: A Socio-Pragmatic Perspective. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 40(3), 367–382.
- Zikmund, W., & Babin, B. J. (2010). *Exploring Marketing Research*. Cengage Learning.