



## Deixis Analysis in Mark Zuckerberg's Testimony in the United States Congress

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the use of deixis in Mark Zuckerberg's testimony in the United States Congress, focusing on how deictic expressions contribute to meaning, positioning, and speaker-hearer relations in political discourse. Deixis, a central concept in pragmatics, refers to words and phrases such as pronouns, temporal expressions, and spatial indicators that require contextual information for interpretation. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method with a pragmatic approach. The primary data for this research consists of video recordings of Mark Zuckerberg's congressional hearings in Youtube channel. The utterances of Mark Zuckerberg and Senators became the object of the research to be investigated. The findings show that the deictic markers employed during testimony in Congress categorized into three types; they are personal, temporal, and spatial deixis. Zuckerberg and Senators skillfully employs deixis to construct an image of accountability, collaboration, and respect, while subtly shifting responsibility through strategic pronoun use. By examining how deixis functions in Zuckerberg's testimony, the research contributes to broader insights in political linguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics.

**Keywords:** Deixis; Pragmatics; Congress; Mark Zuckerberg

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is the main human communication tool that allows the exchange of information, expression of emotions, and negotiation of meaning between speakers and interlocutors. Language is a communication tool that is essential to the creation of communication (Herman & Pardede, 2020). Since language plays a crucial role in communication, there is precise research to discuss language. Communities communicate with one another using a language that represents their values and customs (Khalili, 2017). In the communication process, the context aspect plays an important role in understanding the true meaning of an utterance. One form of linguistic expression that is highly dependent on context is deixis. According to Levinson (2018), deixis is one of the main ways in language to "connect" utterances with the real world and with communication participants. Without the use of deictic elements, language becomes too rigid or too explicit because it must state all the information in every utterance in full. Speakers can save words and convey messages efficiently with deixis, because the meaning is mostly taken from the context that is already known by the speaker and listener. Deixis is a linguistic phenomenon that refers to words or phrases whose meaning cannot be understood without knowing the context of the utterance, such as time, place, and identity of the speaker.

In the study of pragmatics, deixis occupies a central position because it shows a direct relationship between language and the reality of its use. Yule (1996) emphasizes that deictic expressions reflect how speakers position themselves relative to their audience, emphasizing the role of pragmatics in interpretation. The words such as I, you, here, yesterday, and that are typical examples of deictic forms that appear in almost every daily conversation (Sari, 2015). The meaning of these words is not fixed so that it changes depending on who is speaking, when speaking, and in what situation the conversation occurs. The study of deixis is important not only because of its contextual nature, but also because it is able to provide a deeper understanding of how language is used in real life in certain social situations. Understanding the deixis system in a language can help speakers understand social identity, interpersonal relations, and even the ideology contained in an utterance.

In a multilingual and multicultural context like Indonesia, the study of deixis also opens up space for understanding how society uses language to negotiate identity, power, and social closeness. One prominent study by Cap (2006) explored political discourse through a pragma-rhetorical lens and argued that deictic expressions are tools for ideological positioning. Adetunji (2006) examined deixis in political discourse and found that deictic expressions were strategically used by politicians to align themselves with their audiences and create a sense of solidarity or distance. Through an analysis of political speeches, Adetunji demonstrated that the use of personal deixis *we*, *you*, *they* can signal inclusion or exclusion, serving persuasive or manipulative purposes depending on the communicative goals.

Ramadhani and Fitriati (2021) explores how deixis, as a central concept in pragmatics, is used in political discourse, specifically in Imran Khan's speech at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2019. The study aims to identify the dominant types of deixis used and analyze their communicative purposes. Beyond identifying types, the study also explores the functions of deixis in the speech. The authors argue that deixis was used by Khan to express emotions, persuade his audience, and convey or challenge ideological positions. These findings demonstrate that deixis operates not only as a grammatical reference but also as a rhetorical tool. Another relevant study is conducted by Minkhatunnakhriyah et al. (2021) that presents a focused study on the use of deixis in a formal political speech delivered by Silwany Pasaribu, an Indonesian diplomat, in response to Vanuatu's claims regarding Papua. The study applies Levinson's pragmatic theory of deixis, which includes person, spatial, and temporal deixis, to analyze the speech both structurally and contextually. The study offers insightful contextual analysis, emphasizing that deixis in political discourse not only serves referential purposes but also functions to establish power relations, national identity, and ideological stance. By examining deixis within its communicative and political context, the research reveals the strategic role of language in diplomacy and international debate. Although the study limits itself to three types of deixis and one speech event, it succeeds in demonstrating the importance of pragmatic elements in formal international communication.

The study of deixis has important theoretical value in linguistic studies. Deixis not only helps in understanding the contextual aspects of meaning, but also opens up an understanding of how language operates in real life (Febriza, 2020; Hidayah, 2019). This is where the strength of pragmatics as a science lies. Since deixis are widely used in everyday language, they cannot be disregarded in linguistic studies (Miftah, 2016; Saerudin, 2024). It does not only study the language system in the abstract, but examines how language is used by humans in concrete terms. In the context of globalization and increasingly intensive intercultural interaction, understanding deixis becomes important to avoid misunderstandings. In cross-cultural communication, the use of deixis can be a source of communication disruption if the interlocutor does not understand the referential system used by the speaker. Yahya (2020) states that deixis reflects historical and ideological positioning, and how these linguistic strategies are used to mobilize public sentiment. One of the article's strengths is its use of deictic mapping, a methodological technique adapted from Santon Wortham, which visualizes the relationship between speaker, audience, time, and space. This approach offers a deeper understanding of how deictic expressions operate ideologically.

Deixis is crucial in social interaction because it involves the relationship between the speaker and the listener. In fact, the choice of deixis form often reflects social status, emotional closeness, or power relations. A study by Al-Ali (2007) analyzed political speeches in Arabic and English and found that deixis plays a crucial role in building solidarity, authority, and exclusion. The strategic use of *we* and *they* helps politicians include or exclude groups to achieve rhetorical goals. A study by Kurniawan (2020) on presidential speeches found that person deixis was the most dominant category. Stockwell (2002) introduced the concept of "deictic shift theory" (DST), which explains how readers shift their deictic center to align with characters in narratives. This process allows readers to experience events from the character's point of view. Handayani & Wahyuni (2022) examined deixis in Instagram captions and found a prevalence of person deixis, especially first-person references. Users employed *I*, *me*, and *my* to express personal identity, while second-person deixis (*you*) was used to directly engage followers. The study concluded that deixis serves not only a referential function but also a social one in digital interactions. In a comparative study of English and Javanese, Suryanto (2018) revealed differences in how social deixis reflects politeness strategies. English tends to use neutral person deixis, while Javanese differentiates between honorific and humble forms depending on the social status of the interlocutor. This shows that deixis is not merely a linguistic tool but also a reflection of cultural values. Such cultural

reflections embedded in deixis become particularly important when language is used to navigate complex social dynamics and institutional power structures.

Analyzing deixis in Mark Zuckerberg's testimony to Congress is crucial for understanding how language is strategically used in high-stakes political and legal communication. Deixis, which includes person, time, and place references functions to anchor statements to specific contexts. In a setting like a congressional hearing, where every word is scrutinized, these linguistic elements carry significant weight in shaping public perception, assigning responsibility, and navigating institutional authority. Studying deixis in this context also contributes to broader pragmatic analysis by showing how language is used to maintain power dynamics, construct corporate identity, and appeal to multiple audiences such as lawmakers, media, and the public. It highlights the performative nature of testimony, where every linguistic choice is part of a broader rhetorical strategy. Moreover, it helps listeners critically evaluate how powerful figures use language to manage accountability. Therefore, the analysis of deixis in Mark Zuckerberg's congressional testimony is not only valuable for linguistic and pragmatic research but also for understanding the intersection of language, power, and responsibility in public institutional discourse.

## METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method with a pragmatic approach to analyze the use of deixis in Mark Zuckerberg's testimony before the United States Congress. The objective was to explore how deictic expressions specifically personal, temporal, and spatial deixis used to manage meaning, position responsibility, and construct narrative in a formal political context. A qualitative method is appropriate for this study because it allows for a detailed interpretation of language use within its social and situational context (Creswell, 2014). The primary data for this research consists of video recordings of Mark Zuckerberg's congressional hearings in Youtube channel entitled "These are the most confusing questions Congress asked Zuckerberg". This video was selected due to their public availability, relevance to issues of corporate accountability, and rich use of strategic language. Data collection was conducted by transcribing selected portions of the testimony where Senator and Mark Zuckerberg do question and answer so they are directly responded to questions each other. The utterances of Mark Zuckerberg and Senators became the object of the research to be investigated. The researcher then segmented the utterances into analyzable units typically individual sentences or speaker turns. Deictic expressions were identified and categorized into three main types following the pragmatic framework outlined by Yule (1996).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Deixis refers to linguistic expressions whose interpretation relies on the context of the utterance, such as the identity of the speaker, the time and place of the speech act, or other situational factors. These expressions are inherently context-dependent and derive their meaning from the deictic center, often the speaker's perspective. Deixis is crucial for understanding how language functions in context. It helps speakers anchor their utterances to their environment or situation, facilitating clear interaction. Different languages encode deixis in unique ways, reflecting cultural and grammatical diversity. In Mark Zuckerberg's interview, it is found that there are three types of deixis, they are personal, temporal, and spatial deixis as described in the table below.

Table 1. List of Deixis

No.	Types of Deixis	Form of Deixis
1	Personal Deixis	You I My We
2	Temporal Deixis	Anytime Previously 10 Years Past Early

No.	Types of Deixis	Form of Deixis
3	Spatial Deixis	There

### Personal Deixis

Personal deixis refers to the linguistic expressions used to indicate persons involved in a communicative event (Yule, 1996). It is a subcategory of deixis in pragmatics, where language points to or refers to the participants in the context of a conversation. Personal deixis is the use of linguistic expressions (primarily pronouns) that indicate the roles of participants in a conversation or communicative event. It is a type of deixis that focuses on the identity of the speaker, the addressee, and sometimes others who are neither the speaker nor the addressee. Personal deixis appears in subject, object, and possessive forms, affecting sentence structure and meaning. The meaning of personal deixis depends entirely on who is speaking and who is being addressed

*Sen. Deb Fischer: "Do **you** store any?" (00:37)*

In this context, the word "you" is used by the speaker to refer to the person being addressed, which is Mark Zuckerberg. This word is deictic because its meaning depends on who the listener is in the communication situation. Therefore, "you" is considered person deixis because it directly refers to the identity of the listener in the conversation. When Sen. deb fischer uses "you" to refer to the interviewer, it is a specific deixis, pointing to the person asking the question. When Sen. deb fischer addresses Mark Zukerberg directly using "you," it can make his response feel more personal and engaging. It creates a one-on-one conversational dynamic.

*Sen. John Kennedy: "You have the right to **put my** data" (00:58)*

The word "my" is categorized as person deixis because it refers to the first-person singular, indicating possession or direct association with the speaker. In this context, the word "my" is used by the Senator to refer to data that is owned or controlled by him. This word is deictic because its meaning depends on who is saying it, which in this case is the Senator in the conversation. Therefore, "my" is considered person deixis because it refers to the identity of the Senator as the speaker who is talking about data that he owns. "My" is a first-person possessive pronoun and a form of personal deixis. It indicates possession or association by the Senator John Kennedy, making it highly context-dependent. It signals ownership or a close connection between the speaker and the noun it modifies. The meaning of "my" is clarified by the noun it modifies and the context of the conversation.

*Mark Zuckerberg: "Congresswoman **we** have made and are continuing to make changes" (1:26)*

The word "we" is categorized as person deixis because it refers to the first-person plural, indicating a group or party included in the speaker's statement. Person deixis is used to refer to participants in the conversation, whether the speaker, the listener, or a related group. In this case, "we" is used by Mark Zuckerberg to refer to himself and his team or the group he represents, such as the company or organization he works for. The word "we" is deictic because its meaning depends on who the speaker is in the communication situation, and in this context, "we" refers to the group represented by Zuckerberg. Therefore, "we" is considered person deixis because it shows the identity of the group or collective involved in the conversation.

*Sen. Dan Sullivan: "**You** couldn't do this in china right" (2:44)*

The word "you" is categorized as person deixis because it refers to the second-person pronoun, indicating the listener or the person being addressed. Person deixis is used to refer to participants in the conversation, specifically to identify who is being spoken to. In this case, "you" is directed at the person Senator is speaking to, which is the listener (Mark Zuckerberg). The word "you" is deictic because its meaning depends on the identity of the listener in the conversation. Therefore, "you" is considered person deixis because it directly refers to the individual being addressed in the context of the dialogue.

*Sen. Deb Fischer: "How many do **you** store Facebook?" (00:34)*

The word "you" is categorized as person deixis because it refers to the second-person pronoun, indicating the person being addressed. Person deixis is used to point to the participants in a conversation, specifically to the speaker, listener, or other referenced individuals. In this case, "you" is directed at the person being questioned (Mark Zuckerberg). The word "you" is deictic because its meaning depends on the identity of the

listener in the conversation. Therefore, "you" is considered person deixis because it refers directly to the individual being addressed, shaping the interpretation of the question based on who is being spoken to

Mark Zuckerberg: *"I'm not actually sure what that is"* (00:40)

The word "I'm" is categorized as person deixis because it refers to the first-person singular pronoun. Person deixis is used to indicate the identity of the speaker or the participant in the conversation. Here, "I'm" refers to Mark Zuckerberg, the person speaking. It is deictic because its meaning depends on who the speaker is in the context of the conversation. In this case, "I'm" helps to identify Mark Zuckerberg as the speaker and provides clarity that he is the one expressing uncertainty about something. Therefore, "I'm" is considered person deixis because it directly refers to the identity of the speaker in the conversation.

Mark Zuckerberg: *"I do not believe we have the right to do that"* (1:06)

The word "we" is categorized as person deixis because it refers to the first-person plural pronoun. Person deixis is used to indicate the participants in the conversation, specifically the speaker, the listener, or others involved. In this case, "we" refers to Mark Zuckerberg and his team or the organization he represents. The word "we" is deictic because its meaning depends on who the speaker is in the context of the conversation. In this case, "we" is used to indicate the collective group that Zuckerberg is a part of, such as Facebook or his team. Therefore, "we" is considered person deixis because it refers to the identity of the group represented by the speaker in the conversation.

Mark Zuckerberg: *"So we would never do that"* (1:17)

The word "we" is categorized as person deixis because it refers to the first-person plural pronoun. Person deixis is used to identify the participants in the conversation, specifically referring to the speaker, the listener, or the group being discussed. In this case, "we" refers to Mark Zuckerberg and the group he represents, likely Facebook or his team. The word "we" is deictic because its meaning depends on the identity of the speaker in the conversation. "We" indicates the collective entity (Zuckerberg and his team) taking responsibility for actions, and the meaning changes based on who the speaker is. Therefore, "we" is considered person deixis because it refers to the identity of the speaker's group or collective in the context of the conversation.

### Temporal Deixis

Temporal deixis refers to the use of expressions in language that locate an event or state in time relative to the moment of speaking (Yule, 1996). It helps speakers situate actions, events, or states with respect to the time of utterance.

Sen. Deb Fischer: *"I think at any time "* (00:30)

In this context, "at any time" does not indicate a specific time but provides a flexible temporal reference, which can refer to any moment in the past, present, or future. The phrase refers to time in a general sense, without specific boundaries, and can only be understood through the context of the conversation or the situation at hand. Therefore, "at any time" is considered temporal deixis because it directs the listener to understand the dimension of time being referred to in the utterance.

Sen. John Cornyn: *"Can I bar Facebook or any third parties from using the data that had previously supplied"* (1:47)

In this case, "previously" provides a specific time marker, referring to data that was supplied at some point before the conversation took place. The word directs the listener to understand the time relative to the prior action, which can only be understood through the context of the conversation. Therefore, "previously" is considered temporal deixis because it indicates the dimension of time in the utterance.

Sen. Dan Sullivan: *"What you did all 10 years"* (2:47)

"10 years" is categorized as temporal deixis because it refers to a specific period of time. Temporal deixis is used to indicate when an event or action occurred relative to the moment of speaking or within the context of the conversation. Here, "10 years" is used to specify the duration of time over which something occurred, thus referring to a period in the past. The word "all" emphasizes that the entire span of those 10 years is being referenced, helping to frame the action or events that happened during that time. As such, "10 years" provides

a temporal reference that depends on the context of the conversation, making it a clear example of temporal deixis.

*Sen. Deb Fischer: "there are some **past** reports that have been out there" (00:13)*

The term "past" refers to a specific time frame that has already occurred, thus indicating a point in time relative to the current conversation. Temporal deixis is used to reference specific times, whether they are in the past, present, or future, and in this case, "past" clearly refers to something that has already happened. Therefore, "past" is a temporal deixis because it frames the reports in a time that has already transpired, relative to the present moment of speaking.

*Sen. Deb Fischer: "well you don't sell too **early** rented" (02:30)*

Temporal deixis is used to point to a specific time or period relative to the moment of speaking, and in this case, "early" indicates a point in time, suggesting that the action of selling is happening too soon, before the right time has come. While "early" suggests a concept of time, it doesn't point to a physical location or space, which would make it spatial deixis. Instead, it refers to a temporal concept, meaning it is related to temporal deixis. Therefore, the word "early" should be classified as temporal deixis because it indicates a time reference rather than a spatial one.

### Spatial Deixis

Spatial deixis refers to words and phrases in language that indicate location or direction relative to the position of the speaker or sometimes the listener. These expressions depend on the physical context of the utterance to be understood correctly (Nasarudin et al., 2024).

*Mark Zuckerberg : "Senator, can you clarify what you mean by **there**?" (00:10)*

*Sen. Deb Fischer : "There are some past reports that have been out **there** that indicate that it that Facebook collects about 96 data" (00:12)*

In this case, "there" is used to refer to something previously mentioned by the Senator. Although it does not explicitly indicate a physical location, "there" points to a "discursive location" or a reference point within the conversation, which still falls under the realm of "place" in a conceptual sense. Zuckerberg is asking for clarification about what the Senator means by "there," indicating that the location or reference being pointed to is not yet clear to him. Therefore, the word "there" is considered a spatial deixis because it refers to the concept of space, whether tangible or abstract, that needs to be understood within the context of the conversation. The word "there" functions to refer to the existence of something (in this case, past reports) in an abstract or discursive location, such as "out there" in the realm of information or reports that have already been known or discussed. The use of "there" provides a clue about the place or existence of these reports within the discourse or context of the conversation. Thus, "there" is still considered spatial deixis because it provides a reference to the location of an entity, whether tangible or abstract, which requires contextual understanding to identify the "location" being referred to.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis of deixis in Mark Zuckerberg's testimony to Congress reveals how language functions as a powerful tool in shaping meaning, constructing identity, and managing accountability in high-stakes public discourse. Through the use of personal deixis such as "I," "we," and "you," Zuckerberg strategically positions himself in relation to his company, the government, and third parties, either assuming responsibility or distancing himself from blame. Temporal deixis like "past" and "10 years" allows him to frame Meta's actions within a narrative of progress and reform, often emphasizing solutions rather than dwelling on past mistakes. Spatial deixis helps reinforce the global and national dimensions of Meta's operations, appealing to both domestic and international audiences. Overall, deictic expressions in his testimony are not random but carefully chosen rhetorical devices used to influence perception, mitigate criticism, and establish trust. This analysis underscores the importance of deixis in understanding how language operates in political and corporate communication, highlighting its role in shaping public narratives and power relations in institutional settings.

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