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## Deixis in English Islamic Friday Sermons: A Pragma-Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

*Although deixis has received increasingly academic attention in linguistic research, its use in sermons, particularly in the Islamic context, has been largely underexplored. Therefore, this paper examined deixis in Islamic Friday sermons from the perspective of pragmatics and discourse analysis. Drawing on Levinson's Framework, it aimed at analyzing three main types of deixis (personal, temporal, and spatial), focusing on their forms, features, functions, and frequency. The data were a corpus of 70 sermons compiled by the researcher from various online websites. The study employed qualitative and quantitative methods to meet the purpose of the study. The findings revealed that these three deictic types were relatively common in the language of the respective corpus with the personal type being predominant, deictically pointing to different referents whose interpretation was sensitive to the context in which they occurred. As an affectively powerful tool in the corpus, the preachers utilized deixis to serve a wide variety of functions on the discourse and pragmatic levels. In the corpus, deictic expressions worked as a discourse strategy to persuade the listeners by drawing their attention and engaging them in the message of the sermon and to signal and organize the flow of information in the ongoing discourse. They also served to enhance togetherness, intimacy, and politeness between the preachers and their audience. This study is hoped to present a good basis for further linguistic investigation of deixis in other languages and religions to illuminate how deictics work in sermonic discourse.*

**Keywords:** Friday sermon, personal deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a universal linguistic phenomenon, deixis is held to be ubiquitous and a pervasive feature of daily talk and writing in all-natural languages that every human language employs to point to objects in context (Levinson, 2006). It concerns the ways in which language encodes the features of context of an utterance and the ways in which the interpretation of deictics depends on the analysis of the context in which they are used, thus, reflecting the relationship between the language and context (Levinson, 1983). It includes any linguistic form employed to accomplish the function of ‘indicating’ or ‘pointing’, for instance, linguistic forms that indicate people (e.g., you, and they) called ‘person deixis’, time (e.g., yesterday, and tomorrow) called ‘temporal deixis’, or place (e.g., there, and here) called ‘spatial deixis’. The study of deixis is of paramount importance to linguistic research, particularly pragmatics and discourse studies because it reflects the aspects of inevitable intersection and interaction between the linguistic form and the context in which speech or talk takes place, particularly, how participants encode and decode this phenomenon (O’Keeffe et al., 2011).

There is a variety of expressions varying in forms and functions in different languages that carry a deictic usage, where the role of context is pivotal in figuring out their reference (Mey, 2001). Put it differently, context as a constantly changing setting enables interlocutors in the process of communication to interact and make their use of deictics intelligible, thus, giving them the intended pragmatic meaning. This calls to draw a distinction between what is deictic and non-deictic because expressions that can serve as deictic are not always so (Kreidler, 2014). There is a subtle dividing line between deictic and non-deictic expressions whereby some expressions can serve both deictic and non-deictic functions according to context.

To label an expression as deictic or non-deictic depends on whether this expression derives some of its meaning or interpretation and is sensitive to the current social setting (Hanks, 2011; Kreidler, 2014; Levinson 1983; Levinson, 2006; Mey, 2001; Rühlemann & O’Donnell, 2015). If the expression is context-sensitive, it is deictic but if it is not so, it is non-deictic. For example, ‘yesterday’ and ‘today’ are deictic in ‘I couldn’t help you yesterday, but today is fine’, referring to a specific time according to the speaker’s intention. Yet, they are non-deictics in ‘yesterday’s dreams are today’s facts’ as they do not refer to a specific time but to past and general present time, respectively. The same can be applied to the use of pronouns. For example, ‘Ahmed thinks he is right’, where the choice of the pronoun ‘he’ refers back to the noun phrase ‘Ahmed’ mentioned recently in the sentence. Therefore, there is no need to identify the speech event to recognize the reference of ‘he’ because its interpretation rests on the preceding noun phrase to which it stands in an anaphoric relation. Hence, this is a non-deictic usage of the pronoun. Consequently, the distinction between deictic and non-deictic (anaphoric) expressions is fairly plain, even if some expressions can be used to serve both functions. Generally speaking, non-deictic expressions are context-independent while deictic ones are context-dependent.

The importance of deixis in English and language, in general, can be seen from two facts. First, deixis is pervasive and ubiquitous in the sense that it is commonly frequent in all languages based on large corpora studies (Wu, 2004). Second, deixis has been largely examined in various genres and text types in different languages from different perspectives. However, little attention has been paid to deixis in religious

settings. More particularly, the study of deixis in Islamic Friday sermons has been understudied as we have not found any study that addresses the issue of deixis in such a genre, despite the meticulous survey of the existing literature. Accordingly, the overriding goal of the paper is to fill this gap by examining the use of deixis in Friday sermons from the perspective of pragmatics and discourse analysis. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing literature by turning academic attention to this area of research and offering a better understanding and more insights into the use of deixis in sermons. Thus, it lays the groundwork for future research. What makes this study distinct is that it is set in an eclectic approach that combines pragmatics and discourse analysis based on a corpus compiled by the researcher, unlike earlier studies that focus on the pragmatic or semantic use of deixis. The paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of deixis are commonly used in Friday sermons?
2. What are the deictic expressions used in each type?
3. What are the functions and features of these deictic types?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Taxonomy of Deixis

In the literature, a number of various deictics have been distinguished and classified. According to [Levinson \(1983\)](#), the classical triad classification of deixis is person, time, and place, which can be represented as ‘I-now-here’. In this section, an overview of those deictic types is discussed.

#### 2.1.1 Personal deixis

Person deixis (e.g., ‘I’ and ‘we’) concerns itself with “the identity of the interlocutors in a communication situation” ([Fillmore, 1997, p. 61](#)). It serves to encode the participants’ role in the context in which an utterance is produced ([Levinson, 1983](#)). That is, it is a mirror of the speaker’s point of view on the participants’ role (speakers and hearers) as well as non-participants other than the speaker and the addressee in a speech situation ([Rühlemann & O’Donnell, 2015](#)).

Some pronouns can be distinguished in terms of clusivity: inclusive and exclusive ([Wieczorek, 2013](#)). Inclusivity is explained as to whether the pronoun ‘we’ is intended by the speaker’s utterance to include or exclude the addressee. When it is used to include both the speaker as well as the addressee is called inclusive ‘we’ whereas, it is exclusive when including the speaker and excluding the addressee.

#### 2.1.2 Temporal deixis

Time deixis is the expressions (e.g., now, and today) used to encode and point to the interlocutors’ relation to the time at which the utterance is spoken ([Levinson, 1983](#)). In English, time deixis is, to a large extent, grammaticalized in time adverbs (e.g., now and then) and in tenses (e.g., present and past). [Levinson \(1983\)](#) contends that tense is one of the focal factors operating mainly to ensure that nearly all utterances are deictically anchored to their context.

The time of speaking (the moment of an utterance) is termed as coding time (abbreviated as CT) and the time of receiving (the moment of reception of an utterance) is termed receiving time (abbreviated RT). The former is mostly pinpointed around the speaker, meanwhile, the latter is identified around the addressee. The majority of communicative acts are naturally face-to-face, and thus, CT and RT are deemed identical in that case (O’Keeffe et al., 2011). More specifically, CT is represented in the present tense as it is the time at which the utterance is said. Whereas what occurred prior to the coding time is represented in the past tense, what succeeds the coding time is represented in the future tense. Two types of temporal deictic forms can be distinguished in terms of distality: proximal and distal. Proximal time refers to a time close to the speaker such as ‘now’ while distal time refers to a time far away from the speaker such as ‘then’. According to Kermer (2016), the past tense is the distal form and the present tense is the proximal one.

### 2.1.3 Spatial deixis

Spatial deixis serves to mark the interlocutors’ relationship with the referents in terms of location or space in context, including demonstratives (e.g., this and that), place adverbs (e.g., here and there), prepositions of place (e.g., below and behind) and motion verbs (e.g., go and come).

In essence, spatial deictics are often relative in distance to the deictic center, for instance, the speaker’s position. The notion of distance from the center is commonly based on proximal/distal opposition. For example, while ‘here’ refers to a location close (proximal) to the speaker, ‘there’ refers to a place more remote or distal from the speaker. Spatial deixis may be metaphorically extended to communicate and stress the speaker’s emotional or personal attitude rather than actual distance (Grenoble, 1998). Yule (2008) illustrates that the speaker may mark a perfume he has just sniffed as metaphorically distant ‘I don’t like that’ though it is physically close.

## 2.2 Previous Studies

The phenomenon of deixis has been dealt with by a number of scholars and linguists from various approaches and perspectives in different languages and genres. In this section, we sketch out an array of the previous studies relevant to the purpose of the present study.

Many of the existing studies on deixis have focused on its use in political discourse. The analysis of deixis in such a discourse, Zupnik (1994) points out, has manifested the power of deictics in realizing social goals. Hutagalung (2017) and Khalifa (2018) examine the use of deictic expressions in US President Donald Trump’s speeches. While the former shows that the pronoun ‘we’ is often used to involve the citizens to work together to protect America, the latter Khalifa (2018) indicates that the frequent use of ‘we’ can be attributed to the desire of showing power and dominance. In Nigerian presidential speeches, Adetunji (2006) emphasizes that ‘we’ serve different functions, for example, to indicate that a speaker speaks confidently on the behalf of his people to the international community and to persuade them to share the load of responsibility.

From a pragmatic perspective, a number of studies have examined deixis. According to Hanks (2011), the study of deictic expressions is central to pragmatics

because it defines the intersection between linguistic form and social settings. As Marmaridou (2000) puts it, deixis is the most obvious linguistic manifestation of the relationship between language and context. Therefore, it has been often described as the borderline between pragmatics and semantics. Haverkate (1992) investigates the employment of time and person deixis as mitigating strategies in social interaction. In a study on news discourse, Chovanec (2014) highlights the significant contribution of deixis towards the interpersonal dimension of discourse it defines, reinforces, and modifies the participants' personal relation in a speech event.

From a discourse analysis perspective, deixis has been investigated by a variety of studies (Eragbe & Yakubu, 2015; Garner, 2007; Grenoble, 1998; Maziad, 2018). These studies exhibit the role of deixis as a discourse device for achieving and enhancing text cohesion and coherence, particularly, signaling and organizing the flow of text. They also explore their role as a discursive strategy for representing and marking ideological positions and power relations in interaction.

Some studies have been concerned with one category of deixis such as demonstratives and pronouns. In a contrastive study of personal deixis in English and Japanese, Irgens (2017) observes that they are used to point to objects, entities, proximity/distality, honorifics, and saliency. Likewise, Wu (2004) explores spatial demonstratives in English and Chinese, focusing on their basic meanings and uses and their extended and metaphorical meanings. In Harwood's (2005) study, the inclusive pronoun 'we' serves as a positive politeness device by describing, elaborating, critiquing arguments on behalf of the community.

Deixis has been examined in various genres and text types, for example, newspaper (Ewata, 2017), academic writing (Harwood, 2005), literary works (Green, 1992), advertisements (Sušinskienė, 2013). More particularly, relatively few studies address deixis in religious settings (Abdulameer, 2019; Inčuraitė, 2012; Yadin-Israel, 2015). The language of Islamic Friday sermons has attracted the attention of some scholars from different perspectives (Alenzi, 2019; Alsaawi, 2017; Mahmood & Kasim, 2019; Rumman, 2019). However, the study of deixis in Friday sermons has been underexplored as we have not found any study that addresses the issue of deixis in Friday sermons, despite the meticulous survey of the existing literature.

### 2.3 Islamic Friday Sermons

Friday sermon is a religious congregational practice in Islam that includes an oral address (called in Arabic *khutba*) on a weekly basis delivered by a preacher in mosques. Sermons aim at influencing listeners to adopt, reinforce, and modify certain attitudes and beliefs, and particularly to establish a good relationship between the audience and Allah 'Islamic God'. Characterized as a discourse valuable to be worth pursuing, the Friday sermon represents an important facet of public discourse directed to Muslims and an influential and educational means (Mahmood & Kasim, 2019).

The language of religious discourse has received scholars' attention in different domains (mainly discourse analysis and pragmatics) since religion is seen as a crucial and influential factor in society and culture (Akhimien & Farotimi, 2018; Downes, 2011). More particularly, the genre of sermons is a key form of religious discourse and it is widely used over history and across communities, exhibiting certain distinct structures, content, functions, and features which are interesting to be linguistically explored (Akhimien & Farotimi, 2018).



Although many studies have been undertaken to explore language use within institutional settings (e.g., schools, universities, courtrooms, and workplace), less attention has been given to language use within mosques as Islamic institutions in which Muslims can pray, worship, receive religious lessons (especially Friday sermons) and meet their fellows (Alsaawi, 2017).

The interest in Islamic sermons can be justified that, on one hand, Islam has produced a noticeable influence on culture and society. On the other hand, they have been increasingly spreading thanks to the popularity of social media platforms and the growing number of Muslim converts worldwide, especially, in English-speaking countries. The rationale for the present investigation of deixis derives from the belief that the study of the deictic phenomenon offers valuable insights into language (Wu, 2004) and particularly enriches our understanding of its behavior in the discourse in question as it has been characterized as an integral part of discourse (Green, 1992). Therefore, the present study intends to offer an adequate corpus-based investigation of the deictic usage in English Islamic sermons. What marks the present study distinct from preceding studies on deixis is that its focus is centered on the use of deixis in sermons based on a specialized corpus, drawing on an eclectic approach to discourse and pragmatic analysis.

### 3. METHODS

To the end of the present study, a corpus of 70 sermons had been established, which is mainly selected from an initially larger corpus containing 120 sermons compiled from various online sources. All the sermons were delivered only in English as the focus of the present study is English Friday sermons. They were conducted by different preachers in different mosques on different Fridays. This indeed helped ensure the diversity of themes for representativeness and validity of the data under scrutiny. The duration of the compiled sermons ranged from approximately between 30 and 40 minutes. They were downloaded from several online websites, which are specialized in Islamic affairs and run by prominent Islamic centers and institutions.

To analyze the present corpus, the process started with locating all instances of the deictic expressions in the corpus according to Levinson's (1983) framework. This step was accompanied by classifying them into their types (person, time, and place) and counting the frequency of each expression and its deictic type to identify the most common. Then, the instances of each type were analyzed and interpreted separately to account for their functions and features. Moreover, the analysis of the pragmatic aspect drew mainly on Levinson (1983) in addition to the studies reviewed here, while the analysis of the discourse role of deixis drew generally on Brown and Yule (2012) as there is no already-established framework on this aspect of deixis. Following Wu (2004), as context is an essential notion in discourse analysis and pragmatics, they are necessary for analyzing deictics since they appeal to the context that embeds them to access their references, functions, and features successfully.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Personal Deixis

The first deictic category to be examined in this study is person deixis concerned with speech participants involved in the act of utterance. In the sermons, the analysis showed that the preachers assigned themselves at the center point of deixis, and thus, the interpretation of pronouns should be understood in relation to that reference point. The findings showed that three forms of personal deictics were found in the corpus: ‘we’, ‘you’, and ‘I’. This is in line with many studies (e.g., [Adegoju, 2014](#); [Ivanova, 2016](#); [Maziad, 2018](#)) that describe those pronouns as the most common in the personal deixis. Statistically speaking, personal deictics rank second in the corpus, with a frequency of 141 times out of 324 times of the deictics in the entire corpus. ‘We’ occurs 86 times more than ‘you’ (26 times) and ‘I’ (29 times).

#### 4.1.1 ‘We’

It has been asserted that ‘we’ is referentially complex, whose meaning is not categorical, and cannot be successfully interpreted without reference to a speech context and speaker’s intentions ([Levinson, 1983](#)). As the most frequent pronoun in the corpus (86 times), the examination showed that ‘we’ was used to point to different referents: the preacher, the preacher and attendees, all Muslims, and all humankind (generic ‘we’ that includes the whole humankind). This proves that it is not always clear who is meant by ‘we’ ([Duguid, 2007](#)).

Based on the pragmatic notion of clusivity, a close reading of the entire occurrences of ‘we’ revealed its exclusive and inclusive character. This feature of ‘we’ has been asserted in the literature on deixis (e.g., [Marmaridou, 2000](#); [Mey, 2001](#); [Wieczorek, 2013](#)). While the inclusive ‘we’ included the preacher and the congregation, who are jointly anchored to the deictic center, the exclusive ‘we’ excluded the congregation from the deictic center. However, the statistical findings revealed that the deictic ‘we’ is much more frequently used to serve an inclusive function (74 times) than its counterpart (12 times), which highlighted the preachers’ preference of the inclusive ‘we’ to the exclusive one. The inclusive ‘we’ was used to convey three different referents in context: to refer variously to the preacher and the attendees, all Muslims including the preacher and attendees, and all human beings. As exclusive, it was used only to refer to the preacher himself and Muslim scholars as well as Islamic institutions. Consequently, it is evident that ‘we’ serves different deictic references in the corpus depending on whether it excludes addressee(s) and its inclusion is total or partial. Hence, it can be stated that the preachers’ usage of ‘we’ oscillated evidently between an all-inclusive ‘we’ (referring to the entire humankind) and a more restricted, partially inclusive ‘we’ referring to him and the congregation, and exclusive ‘we’ referring alone to the preacher.

- (1) We should continue in the development of our relationship with our maker.
- (2) We called for more genuine efforts to face terrorism.

Consider examples (1) and (2), where the former was used inclusively to include the speaker and the attendees and the latter (uttered by the preacher in the context of referring to the role of his institution in warning against terrorism) was used

exclusively to exclude the addressee and behave as egocentric referring only to the speaker's institution.

- (3) We should follow Allah's commandments and keep away from what He forbade.
- (4) We should condemn what extremists act in the name of Islam.
- (5) We ask Allah to make easy for us the path in this world and grant us salvation on the day of judgment.

The high frequency of the deictic 'we' as it appeared in the data reflected that the sermons relied heavily on it to serve various ends as is argued below. Sermon preachers are supposed to utilize various linguistic devices for persuasive and pragmatic purposes. Among these devices is person deixis, especially 'we', characterized in spoken discourse as an important rhetorical tool that plays a powerful role in the process of persuasion (Ivanova, 2016; Zupnik, 1994). This can be illustrated in example (3) in which the preacher utilized the inclusive-we to influence and persuade the listeners that complying with Islamic teachings is every Muslim's responsibility. That is, it downplayed the individual responsibility and enhances the collective responsibility toward the teachings of Islam and the message of the sermon. Another justification of the extensive use of the inclusive 'we' is what Brown and Levinson (1994) point out that in contrast to 'you' and 'I', 'we' can serve pragmatic functions of positive politeness where its use, as seen in example (4), mitigates the assertive force of what the preacher asks the listeners to do that he is not issuing commands. This function is pointed out by Haverkate (1992) that the inclusive use of 'we' produces certain mitigating effects to avoid an impression of imposing the speaker's point of view upon his addressees.

The inclusive 'we' was noticed in the corpus to co-occur with exhortative statements to get listeners to do something preached by the speaker, especially, with the deontic modal 'should' and 'must' as seen in examples (3) and (4). Moreover, it was also used in all instances of directive speech acts of making prayers of supplication, as seen in example (5).

- (6) We need to remind ourselves of our duties towards this city.

In example (6), the preacher used the inclusive-we to minimize the distance between him and his audience, indicating that they all belonged to the same group, and hence, the audience felt close to the preacher and motivated to heed the lessons. It also helped the preacher to appear as one of the Muslims not superior to the congregation as indicated by using 'ourselves' in example (6). The extensive use of 'we' can be characterized as a proximization strategy that draws the listeners closer to the preacher. Instead of 'I' that lends the discourse a marker of self-centeredness, the use of 'we' helps avoid self-centeredness, especially, when it co-occurs with 'together' that intensifies the meaning of plurality or inclusiveness.

- (7) We spoke in the last *khutbah* about the status of the companions of the prophet.
- (8) We mentioned what he highlighted before his death.

Another use of the inclusive-we is what I call 'preaching we', whose function is similar to what is called 'authorial we' (Wales, 2003). In examples (7) and (8), the preacher employed 'we' rather than 'I' to engage his listeners into the sermon and to involve them in joint work, blurring the speaker-addressee divide. The use of such



strategies to engage the addressee explicitly or implicitly is seen as a rhetorical tool for persuasive ends, used by speakers to recognize the presence of their audience, include them as discourse participants, draw and focus their attention, and guide them to the intended interpretation (Hyland, 2005). It is worthy to mention that this use of ‘we’ commonly co-occurs in the sermons with the verbs of ‘saying’ such as ‘spoke’ in example (7) and ‘mentioned’ in example (8).

- (9) Since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, we and other religious Islamic institutions that includes many *ulama* (scholars) have issued Fatwa asking all Muslims to comply with the government measures.

As an exclusive deictic, ‘we’ as seen in example (9) is used by the preacher to present himself as a representative of an institution. This institutional ‘we’ avoided the preacher taking the responsibility alone and thereby invoked a larger authority to legitimate the *fatawa* ‘verdict’ concerning safety measures to stop the virus. This use of ‘we’ can work as a persuasive device for the listeners to align themselves with the proposed course of action as “the speaker speaks on behalf of the authoritative source” (Arminen, 2005, p. 106). As a discourse strategy of legitimization, van Leeuwen (1995, 2007, 2008) argues that reference to authoritative sources (Islamic institutions in our case represented by the use of ‘we’ standing as authoritative sources entitled to issue fatwa) in the immediate context of the current speech helps legitimize and strengthen the speaker’s position, thus, winning addressees’ support or acceptance.

#### 4.1.2 ‘You’

The deictic ‘you’ was the least frequent one among the personal deictics (26 times out of 141), unlike Abdulameer’s (2019) study that reports ‘you’ as the most frequent in its religious data. The low frequency of ‘you’ can be justified that the preachers tended to prefer ‘we’ to ‘you’ when addressing the congregation since the reliance on ‘you’ may represent the preacher as a superior addressing his subordinates, and therefore, most of the preachers in the corpus appeared to avoid it. It also created a sense of togetherness and intimacy and enhances the involvement of the congregation in the communicative event.

- (10) I will be talking to you about a group of *ayat*.  
 (11) You should have an example in Khadejah who supported her husband.

However, the analysis showed that some preachers resorted to ‘you’ as a discursive way to draw the attention of the congregation and get them to feel that the message was specially directed to them. In some cases, as shown in examples (10) and (11), ‘you’ can be used to indicate intimacy, shortens the distance between the speaker and the audience when being addressed directly (Wang, 2017), and lowers relatively the formality of the speech (Reyes, 2011).

While ‘you’ semantically refers to the addressee(s), in the corpus it pragmatically refers to the congregation attending the Friday sermon. However, the question of whether ‘you’ refers to plural or singular can be answered depending on our knowledge of the context that it is unconventional to address one person in Islamic sermons. Expectedly, no instance of singular ‘you’ is detected since our contextual knowledge informs us those Islamic sermons are by nature directed to the whole

congregation rather than one individual (Alenzi, 2019). It referred deictically to the whole congregation attending the Friday sermon as seen in example (10). As an exception, one instance of the deictic ‘you’ was detected to point to a particular group of the audience. As seen in example (11), ‘you’ was used to refer to female congregants where the preacher attempts to urge them to take Khadejah, the prophet Muhammad’s wife, as a role model on how to treat their husbands.

(12) What is your relationship with your fellow Muslims? Do you visit the sick and help the needy?

The use of ‘you’ is observed to be generally used in its positive semantic prosody to urge and entice the listeners into accepting what is being preached. According to the findings, ‘you’ was commonly used when giving advice to draw the listeners’ attention, and reinforce their involvement in the message in question as seen in example (12).

(13) In Islam, you know, to accuse somebody of *zina* (adultery), you have to have four witnesses.

Another interesting use of ‘you’ in the corpus is in the pragmatic marker ‘you know’. As a discourse device, ‘you know’, as in example (13), suggested that what is given by the preacher was a mutual understanding between him and his hearers and to involve everyone in this understanding, not just his own viewpoint (Vanda & Péter, 2011).

#### 4.1.3 ‘I’

In comparison with other deictic pronouns in the corpus, the case of ‘I’ was the most unambiguous one since it did not indicate other than the preacher himself, speaking to the overhearing audience.

(14) I want to highlight some of the wisdom that can be learned from coronavirus.

The results showed that though its sporadic presence (16 times), ‘I’ served different functions in the corpus. It was used when the preacher wanted to impart the purpose of the sermon, attempting to make the audience interested in it. In the corpus, many instances of ‘I’ were used by the preacher to state the purpose of the sermons, all of which occur at the outset of the sermons as shown in Example (14).

(15) I was deeply saddened by his loss.

(16) I don’t think it is a good idea to tell your mother about your personal problems with your wife.

‘I’ was also used in the corpus when the preacher wanted to signal to the congregation that he was speaking from an individual/personal perspective, expressing his own opinions or feelings as seen in examples (15) and (16). This use of ‘I’ is congruent with the findings of Bramley (2001) and Yadin-Israel (2015). It helped listeners distinguish what was given as Islamic truths from personal opinions or subjective remarks of the speaker. Thus, ‘I’ encodes what Wilson (1990) calls a ‘personal voice’. Furthermore, as ‘I’ occurs in the context of sharing subjective information with the listeners, it rendered the preacher’s message more intimate and impressive, bringing the preacher closer to his attendees. The use of verbs like ‘think’

and ‘mean’ reinforces that the preacher is giving an individual opinion not religious rules, leaving an impression that he is speaking intimately.

(17) I pray to Allah to strengthen our bonds of brotherhood.

The last use of ‘I’ in the corpus was when the speaker wanted to make *duaa* ‘prayer’ at the end of the sermon as seen in example (17), which can be seen as a marker of closing the sermon.

## 4.2 Temporal Deixis

The notion of the deictic center is essential to the discussion of temporal deixis since it provides the focal point to which time indicators (tenses and time adverbials) are related. According to the findings, temporal deictics were the most frequent (155 occurrences), compared to the other two types. In the corpus, they were realized in two different forms: lexically (time expressions such as adverbs) and grammatically (tense such as present and past). This finding concurs with what is given in the surveyed studies by Chovanec (2014), Levinson (2006), and Rühlemann and O’Donnell (2015).

In the sermons as spoken face-to-face communication, the preachers and the addressees shared fully the same temporal and spatial context. The investigation revealed that no switch in the deictic center between interlocutors as speakers (no change in turns) was discerned as a result of the monologue nature of Friday sermon discourse in Islam, where no talking, interruption, or commotion by the attendees was permissible during the sermon. In this sense, the CT and RT coincide, and thus, they are simultaneous, technically known as ‘deictic simultaneity’.

In the corpus, ‘today’ (61 times) and ‘now’ (20 times) were observed to be frequent, constituting around 50 % of the total occurrences of lexical temporal deictics (155 times). They both belonged to the present time span, which indicates that Friday sermons tended highly to use deictics referring to present tense rather than past or future tense.

(18) Today we’ll talk about one of the amazing stories in the Quran.

In example (18), ‘today’ was used deictically in the corpus to refer to the day of the production of the sermon, which was Friday, due to the fact that it was the only day for conducting Friday sermons as an obligatory act in Islam. The findings demonstrated that ‘today’ was used in all sermons especially at the beginning of the sermon as a discourse technique to introduce the topic of the sermon as seen in Example (18). In terms of speech acts, this use of ‘today’ and ‘now’ often co-occurs with the speech act of both representative and commissive. The preacher informed the attendees of what the sermon would be about and he committed to focusing on the topic at issue.

(19) What I mean by ‘disbelief’ I’ll explain to you now.

Concerning ‘now’, it is used deictically to refer to the moment of the utterance in the sermon from the preacher’s perspective. In example (19), the speaker employed ‘now’ to indicate the temporal proximity of explaining what he intended by ‘disbelief’. This use of ‘now’ helped the speaker assure his listeners that this ‘disbelief’ would be

interpreted shortly. It also carried temporal information that maintained discourse connectivity between the text unit that hosts 'now' and the following textual unit/s that carried the expected explanation.

- (20) We spoke last week about the status of the companions of the prophet. Today I want to talk about Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq.

The use of the past deictic 'last week' in the corpus had two functions. It provided the time frame of the previous sermon as a past event located temporally in the time occurring before the coding time. The other function was to maintain discourse connectivity between the sermon whose time was specified by the distal deictic 'last Friday' and the present sermon whose time was denoted by the proximal deictic 'today'. In Example (20), the preacher pointed out to the listeners that the topic of the last sermon and the present sermon were closely related, where the former talked about companions in general and the latter focused in particular on one of these companions of the prophet. Furthermore, the preacher intended to remind the congregation of the preceding topic by the use of 'last week' and linked it with the topic of the sermon at hand and introduced it to them through the use of the deictic 'today'.

The other way to encode temporal deixis in the sermons was tense (68 times), which implied the idea of reference by locating events and states in time by means of the grammar. Tense is seen as time deixis that requires a fixed time point, from which we can capture a temporal relation, particularly, in terms of simultaneity, anteriority, and posterity with respect to the deictic center (Wei & Ruizhi, 2017). The concept of tense was dealt with here from the deixis perspective to provide a more explicit temporal interpretation. For example, present tense when referring to general time frame is not considered deictic because time deixis must refer to a specified time related to the context of the situation (Chovanec, 2014).

The findings revealed that three tenses were used in the corpus: present, future, and past. Present tense represents events as temporally proximal to the time of speech meanwhile future and past tense represent events as temporally distant from the time of speech (Levinson, 2006). More elaborately, three time zones of deictic tense usage in the sermons could be identified: the past (before the time of an utterance), the present (at the time of an utterance), and the future (after the time of an utterance).

- (21) In one of my lectures three years ago, I explained how the Bible led me to Islam.

As a noticeable feature, the tense was found to occur with time adverbs such as 'now' and 'ago' as seen in example (21). This helped emphasize and specify for the listeners the time frame and reference point to which the tense belonged and made them aware of the time span being referred to. For example, the use of time adverbs with past tense as in example (21) stressed for the hearers that the event in question referred to a past time frame not present.

In terms of proximity, the use of temporal deictics can be divided into proximal and distal (Chovanec, 2014). The former indicates a time frame close to the time of sermon production while the latter indicates a time frame away from the time of the sermon. The choice of tense generally affected the temporal distance between the events and the preacher as well as his listeners.

- (22) Her husband, Abu Salamah, left for Medina and her relatives had snatched her son away to force her to stay with them.

In Example (22), the use of simple past encoded a distant time and in turn past perfect indicated a more remote time reference in the past. The preacher used past perfect to refer to a time point more distal than the time of the event in the narrative to dichotomize two distinct periods.

- (23) We've mentioned that Allah wants us...

The use of present perfect though being highly infrequent in the corpus was found to indicate a time at not a big distance from the moment of speech. It also, as [Chovanec \(2014\)](#) pointed out, enhanced the current relevance of the event for the listener's benefit at the time of speaking. In example (23), the present perfect occurs at the end or within the time of the ongoing sermon to refer to a time point at some time past in the sermon.

- (24) Next week, we'll talk about another amazing story.

- (25) Allah will reward us with paradise.

The future deictics showed a very low presence since the sermons were mainly concerned with present-day issues rather than the future. A closer look into the occurrences of the future tense in the corpus revealed that it referred, to a large extent, to the near or immediate future being very close to the moment of utterance. As shown in example (24), future time was used at the end of the sermon to reveal and announce the topic of the next sermon. It was also found to be used to refer to the afterlife, especially to address the rewards in paradise as seen in example (25). Thus, the future was used to give a two-time frame: one is the near future to the time of the sermon as seen in example (24) and the maximally distant time frame as seen in example (25).

It appears that the present deictics frequently opted by the preacher to locate events in the present time frame of reference were pragmatically motivated. It established a shared temporal anchorage between the preacher and the congregation, where the preacher attempted to focus his sermon and the attendees' attention on what currently concerns contemporary Muslims' lives. This is in agreement with what [Chovanec \(2014\)](#) finds that the present tense has a strong interpersonal orientation. It established interpersonal contact with the congregation by indicating temporal co-presence. It also underscored the worthiness of sermon content as referring to issues closely related and relevant to the present-day Muslim community. More particularly, the deictic use of 'now' and 'today' enhanced the temporally proximal relation of the sermon to the reality and conditions of Muslims, stressing the immediacy of responding to the messages of the sermon. Moreover, it implied that the topics of sermons were not abstracted or hypothetical but realistic and actual and it was even applicable to the present life, thus, influencing the attitudes of the listeners. This leaves an impression that Friday sermons were more concerned with present-day events and affairs than the past ones.



### 4.3 Spatial Deixis

This section addresses deictic expressions used to refer to certain localities (e.g., rooms, streets, cities, etc.). It has been pointed out that they denote how a speaker perceives his position or relationship to entities in space (Marmaridou, 2000).

The quantitative analysis yielded that the spatial type was the least frequent in the corpus (28 occurrences), where only three spatial deictics occurred in the corpus: 'here' (14 times), 'this' (12 times), and 'that' (twice). While all of them were locational, no instance of directional deictics (such as 'this way' and 'next street') was used. No shift in the deictic center was detected due to the fact that the preachers and the listeners remained at the same place and did not change their location, thus, the speaker's position was static, not dynamic. The motion verbs (e.g., go and come) taken in the literature as deictics (Levinson, 1983) were not used at all in the corpus, which may be due to the static nature of the spatial center of sermons as the preacher discursively situated himself and the audience at the same deictic center (Inčuraite, 2012).

Unlike Wu (2004), the quantitative prevalence of the proximal deictics 'here' (14 times) and 'this' (12 times) over the distal 'that' (twice) may be due, on one hand, to the shared space by the preacher and the listeners. On the other hand, the cognitive dimension of spatial deictic references rests on linguistic representation of an act performed by one person in the presence of another one, which tends to favor positive associations with action close to the speaker and happening here than with something distal to the speaker and happening there (Cramer, 2010).

#### 4.3.1 'Here'

The analysis demonstrated that 'here' tended to refer deictically to different referents e.g., the mosque and America. Most of its instances referred to the mosques where the sermons were delivered.

(26) We're here to talk about parents' rights.

It seems that the preachers selected 'here' whose referent was identifiable in context as the addressees or listeners were led by the pragmatics of the context to interpret 'here' as referring to a particular place. In example (26), the deictic reference of 'here' was the mosque, which was pragmatically identifiable. The preacher assumed that the listeners were aware of the point of reference 'here' that deictically referred to the mosque, where they were situated. In the corpus, all instances of 'here' included deictically the location of the speaker at CT (coding time), unlike 'there', which was distal from the speaker and addressee's location at CT. That is, due to the simultaneous CT and RC (receiving time) in sermons, what was proximal to the preacher's location was so to the addressee's and vice versa

(27) We have been living here for decades.

The understanding of 'here' in example (27) crucially involved the preacher's location CT, where it referred to a specific point by the speaker's location that was equally proximal to the speaker and the attendees. The space was pragmatically specified that it included the speaker and attendees at CT. Therefore, the deictic

reference of ‘here’ was ambiguous (e.g., the mosque, the city, or the country) unless interpreted in terms of linguistic context as well as pragmatic setting (Wu, 2004). In example (27), ‘here’ could not be interpreted as referring to the mosque since we know that mosques were not a place to live in but to worship. The linguistic context of the whole sermon helped us identify that the referent of ‘here’ is the United States of America as the whole sermon from which the example was extracted is concerned with the duties of Muslims in American society.

(28) We’re here to talk about one of the great companions of the prophet.

As a proximity-signaling deictic, ‘here’ was pragmatically employed to indicate that it did not only signal a close physical distance but also signaled an emotional distance (Ariel, 2014). In example (28), by using ‘here’ the preacher indicated that this close distance encoded by the semantic content of ‘here’ was not only physical but it was also emotional as one Muslim group shared the same place of worship. In this sense, ‘here’ stressed the atmosphere of closeness and intimacy between the preacher and the attendees, expressing the preacher’s emotional attitude towards the place to which ‘here’ deictically referred to, namely the mosque. This was because the mosque has a great status in Muslims’ hearts. It is worth mentioning that ‘here’ mostly referred deictically to the mosque, which was often used by the preacher at the beginning of the sermon associated with introducing his topic and to draw the listeners’ attention to what he was going to say.

(29) This virus is attacking all humanity. Here, we need to think of the wisdom of this virus.

However, ‘here’ could be sometimes used to serve a discourse function: to indicate or mark a point in discourse. In the corpus, the discourse usage of ‘here’ is in the sense of ‘at this point’ to indicate an abstract location in discourse. In example (29), the preacher used ‘here’ not in its literal sense to denote a physical space but in its metaphorical sense to denote an abstract place in discourse, more clearly, in his train of thoughts. ‘Here’ was employed to index the wisdom encoded in the previous utterance, turning the attention of the listeners to associate what was given in the preceding utterance to what was given in the following one. This usage was apparently deictic in nature, creating an attention-catching effect on the listeners. According to Wu (2004), demonstrative expressions, including ‘here’, index textual entities and contribute to discourse coherence and cohesion by anchoring one proposition to another.

#### 4.3.2 *‘This’ and ‘that’*

Demonstratives were infrequently used in the sermons in comparison with other deictics in the corpus. Only singular forms of demonstratives were found in the corpus, namely, ‘this’ and ‘that’, which can be delineated in terms of distal-proximal opposition. The analysis displays that the deictic usage of ‘this’ and ‘that’ was from the speaker and his attendees’ perspective as they shared the same physical space (deictic center), namely, the mosque. ‘This’ was used to indicate physical proximity to the preacher while ‘that’ indicated directionality away from the preacher’s location. It should be reiterated that the spatial perspective in the sermons was static and stationary. Most of the occurrences of the deictic demonstratives were related to the

proximal ‘this’, while the distal ‘that’ occurred rarely in the corpus. By contrast, in Wu (2004), ‘that’ is found to occur with a much more frequency than its proximal counterpart for the former occurs in a variety of structural contexts, which the latter does not share.

(30) It’s not the first time in this mosque we warn against religious extremism.

(31) The Muslim population in this country is growing.

In example (30), the proximal ‘this’ helped the listeners identify the referent, which was physically proximal to them. The preacher sought to draw the attention of the congregation to the issue of religious extremism that had been warned against many times in the same mosque referred to by the proximal ‘this’. In example (31), the preacher employed ‘this’ to help the listeners understand that the Muslim population in question was the one existing in the United States of America (rather than other countries).

(32) We should choose this path or that path.

(33) This religion is the source of mercy and justice.

In the corpus, some instances of ‘this’ and ‘that’ are used in the sense of what Lyons (1977) calls ‘emphatic deixis’ and Fillmore (1997) calls ‘acknowledging functions’. In Example (32), the preacher used ‘this’ as a proximal deictic with the path that Muslims should follow, the path of believers, while he used the distal ‘that’ with the path of disbelievers. While ‘this’ reinforced that Muslims should follow and be close to the path of believers, ‘that’ was used to exhort that Muslims should avoid and be away from the path of disbelievers. Thus, it can be stated that ‘this’ was associated with what was liked and ‘that’ with what was hated.

This selection of the proximal ‘this’ and distal ‘that’ is the preacher’s metaphorical preference to send and implant a message in the hearers’ minds, rather than indicating an actual distance. This is in line with what Levinson (1983) points out that the shift from ‘this’ to ‘that’ expresses emotional distance, whereas the shift from ‘that’ to ‘this’ shows empathy to the referent.

In example (33), the context informed that ‘this religion’ referred to Islam as the religion of the congregants. This deictic use of ‘this’ in ‘this religion’ was to encode close proximity to the speaker and listeners. It was not intended to facilitate reference to the religion, namely, Islam, but rather to express a positive attitude to it – to show the emotional proximity of Islam to the hearts and minds of Muslims.

(34) We will speak about the last days in his life... That’s for several reasons.

The findings also reported that deictic demonstratives were employed as a discourse procedure for coordinating and organizing the flow of information in the ongoing discourse. They served to direct the addressees’ attention towards a new discourse unit or a new aspect of a previously-mentioned referent. Like Wu (2004), ‘this’ and ‘that’ were used to point to text chunks, calling the audience’s attention as if saying ‘listen to what comes next’ or ‘I’m alluding to what has been just said’. This is illustrated in Example (34), where ‘that’ referred back to the entire sense of the previous utterance. This use contributed also to the cohesion of the text and served as a pointing device to direct the listeners to a certain part of the text. This discourse

function sprang from the assumption that a text can be represented as a space in the sense that every utterance in the text is spatially unique (Yang, 2011).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The investigation addressed how the preachers used deixis in the Islamic Friday sermons, drawing on a general perspective of pragmatics and discourse analysis. Three deictic classes were examined, based on a manageable corpus derived from different online sources. The findings displayed that the three types (personal, temporal, and spatial) were relatively common in the corpus, displaying an array of features and functions on the discourse and pragmatic level. They all were observed to point to different referents in the context in which they occurred. As an effectively powerful tool in the sermonic discourse, they were used to serve a wide variety of functions on the discourse and pragmatic levels. They worked as a discourse strategy to persuade the listeners by focusing their attention and engaging them in the message of the sermon and organizing and maintaining the cohesion and coherence of the text. Pragmatically, they were employed as a politeness marker and to indicate closeness and intimacy between the preacher and the congregation.

Only three pronouns of person deictics were used: ‘we’, ‘I’, ‘you’. As the most frequent, ‘we’ revealed its inclusive and exclusive character though its inclusive function is by far the prevalent. It displayed versatility, serving a range of discourse and pragmatic functions such as toning down the assertive force and creating a sense of togetherness and closeness. ‘I’ was employed to express that the preacher was speaking from a personal perspective not religious. As the least frequent one, ‘you’ was used to refer generally to the attendees, serving to draw their attention and lowering the formality of the speech.

Temporal deictics were the most prevalent type in the entire corpus. They were realized in two different forms: lexically (e.g., ‘today’ and ‘now’) and grammatically (tense such as present and past). ‘Today’ for example, was used at the beginning of the sermon as a discourse technique to introduce the topic of the present sermon while ‘now’ carried temporal information that maintained discourse connectivity between the text unit that hosts ‘now’ and the following textual unit/s that carried the expected explanation. Three time zones of deictic tense usage in sermons were identified: the past (before the time of an utterance), the present (at the time of an utterance), and the future (after the time of an utterance).

The last type examined was spatial deixis, where only three spatial deictics occurred in the corpus: ‘here’, ‘this’, and ‘that’. ‘Here’ was used to serve a discourse function to indicate or mark a point in discourse. As for the proximal ‘this’ and distal ‘that’, they were observed to be used in terms of metaphorical proximity to express certain emotions or attitudes. They served for coordinating and organizing the flow of information in the ongoing discourse. This discourse function sprang from the assumption that a text can be portrayed as a space in the sense that every utterance in the text is spatially unique.

The present study is limited to a small corpus, and therefore, its findings cannot be claimed to be exhaustive or definitive. A larger corpus is expected to offer immense potential for a better understanding of the deixis in Islamic sermons. This study is

hoped to present a good basis for further linguistic investigation of deixis in other languages and religions to illuminate how deictics work in sermonic discourse.

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