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A pragmatic analysis of deictic expressions in economic news articles of the Jakarta Post

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Abstract. Deixis is a pragmatic device that anchors linguistic expressions to the context in which they are produced, including the participants, time, and place of an utterance. This study investigates deictic expressions in economic news articles published by The Jakarta Post, an English-language digital newspaper widely read in Indonesia. The study aims to identify the context in which deictic expressions occur and to determine the dominant type of deixis used. Employing a descriptive qualitative design with documentation as the data collection technique, seven economic articles published in 2026 were analysed using George Yule's (1996) framework of person, temporal, and spatial deixis. Following Yule's (1996) criterion, an expression was counted as deictic only when its meaning depended on the context of utterance; proper nouns, institutional noun phrases, and grammatically empty pronouns were treated as fixed naming and excluded from the count. The analysis identified 114 deictic instances in total. Temporal deixis was the most dominant type, with 75 instances (65.8%), followed by person deixis with 36 instances (31.6%), while spatial deixis was marginal, with only 3 instances (2.6%). The dominance of temporal deixis reflects the inherently time-bound nature of economic reporting, in which figures, forecasts, and policy statements are only meaningful once anchored to a specific moment or period. These findings diverge from earlier studies on deixis in The Jakarta Post, which generally reported person deixis as dominant, suggesting that deictic distribution is sensitive to genre and to how strictly deixis is operationalised.

Keywords: Deixis, Pragmatics, Economic News, The Jakarta Post, Temporal Deixis

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental part of human life, involving the exchange of information, ideas, and emotions to establish shared understanding (Crystal, 1992). Meaning in communication does not come from words alone; it also depends on context,

including who is speaking, when and where the speech occurs, and what is being discussed (Yule, 1996). This contextual nature of meaning becomes especially significant in written discourse such as newspaper articles, where writers must guide readers through the who, when, where, and what of a story using language alone, without the shared physical context available in face-to-face interaction (Van Dijk, 1988).

Among Indonesia's digital newspapers, The Jakarta Post stands out as one of the most widely accessed English-language outlets, established in 1983 and serving as a significant source of English exposure for Indonesian readers, academics, and professionals (Yamamoto & Lee, 2012). Because its language blends standard English conventions with local Indonesian influences, it offers a valuable and freely accessible source of authentic data for pragmatic research. Digital newspapers, in particular, rely heavily on deictic expressions to establish context, since writers address readers they will never meet and cannot assume any shared physical or temporal ground with them.

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with how context shapes the interpretation of meaning in language use (Yule, 1996). Within pragmatics, deixis is one of the most central concepts, referring to linguistic forms whose interpretation depends on specific knowledge of the context in which they are used. The term originates from the Greek word for "pointing" or "indicating", and deictic expressions are among the mechanisms through which language points to the who, when, and where of a communicative situation (Yule, 1996). Yule's (1996) framework identifies three principal categories of deixis: person deixis, which points to participants in the speech event; spatial deixis, which points to locations relative to the speaker; and temporal deixis, which points to time relative to the moment of utterance.

Several previous studies have examined deictic expressions in The Jakarta Post, though most have focused on categories other than economic news. Samosir et al. (2013) examined political articles using Levinson's (1983) framework and found person deixis dominant at 42.85%. Zulkarnaen (2014) analysed the Editor's Choice section and found time deixis most frequent. Miftah (2016) identified three types of deixis person, spatial, and temporal in selected articles. Heryanto (2016–2017) analysed opinion columns using Yule's (1996) framework and found personal deixis dominant at 29.6%. Herman and Pardede (2020) examined business articles using Levinson's (1983) theory and found person deixis dominant at approximately 60%. Febriza (2020), analysing a general online article using Alan Cruse's (2000) framework, found person deixis constituting approximately 70% of all deictic expressions identified. In contrast, Pranata and Rahmat (2020) found temporal deixis most frequent, with 59 occurrences, while Herawati et al. (2020) found all three of Yule's (1996) categories present in the City Column.

These studies show that previous research has focused mainly on political, business, opinion, editor's choice, and city-column articles, while economic articles characterised by a strong reliance on time-bound statistics and institutional actors remain comparatively underexplored. In addition, findings across these studies vary considerably regarding which type of deixis is dominant, suggesting that the distribution of deictic types may be sensitive to genre. Many of these studies also did not clearly distinguish genuine context-dependent deixis from ordinary naming, such as proper nouns and institutional noun

phrases, which risks inflating the count of person and spatial deixis. This study addresses these gaps by analysing deictic expressions in economic news articles of The Jakarta Post using Yule's (1996) framework, applying a stricter operational criterion that separates canonical deictic markers from fixed naming and grammatically empty forms. Specifically, this study aims to (1) identify the context in which deictic expressions are used in economic articles of The Jakarta Post, and (2) determine the dominant type of deictic expression used.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design (Creswell, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007), which is suitable for identifying, classifying, and interpreting linguistic features as they naturally occur in written texts without manipulating the data. Although the study reports frequency counts and percentages for each type of deixis, these figures are used solely as a descriptive tool to determine the dominant type; they are not intended for statistical hypothesis testing or generalisation beyond the dataset.

The data consisted of seven economic news articles collected from The Jakarta Post's online edition (thejakartapost.com), selected according to three criteria: the articles had to be published on the official website, published in 2026 to ensure the data reflected current language use, and drawn specifically from the economic category rather than politics, sports, or entertainment.

Data were collected through a documentation method (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003), which involved accessing the website and selecting seven free articles meeting the criteria, reading each article thoroughly to understand its content and context, and identifying and marking all candidate deictic expressions based on Yule's (1996) classification. The identified expressions were then classified into person, temporal, and spatial deixis; recorded with their context in structured data sheets; counted for frequency per type; and converted into percentages using the formula (frequency of one type ÷ total deictic expressions) × 100%. The dominant type was determined by the highest frequency and percentage.

A key methodological feature of this study is its strict operationalisation of deixis. Following Yule's (1996) definition, an expression was counted as deictic only if its meaning depended on the context of utterance that is, on who was speaking, when, or where rather than being interpretable on its own. This criterion excluded proper nouns (e.g. “Indonesia”), institutional or collective noun phrases (e.g. “the government”, “the central bank”), and absolute place names (e.g. “Jakarta”, “Southeast Asia”), since these retain the same meaning regardless of who utters them or when. A further refinement excluded grammatically empty, non-referential uses of “it” (e.g. “it is possible for countries…”), comparable to “it” in “it is raining”, since such forms do not identify any participant in the discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the seven economic articles from The Jakarta Post identified a total of 114 deictic instances, distributed across the three categories in Yule's (1996) framework. Table 1 presents the overall distribution.

Table 1. Type of Deixis Found in the Economic Articles of The Jakarta Post

Type of Deixis	Frequency	Percentage
Temporal Deixis	75	65.8%
Person Deixis	36	31.6%
Spatial Deixis	3	2.6%
Total	**114**	**100%**

Temporal deixis was the most frequently occurring type, accounting for 75 instances (65.8%). This category included calendar-relative expressions such as “last year” and “currently”, day and month pointing expressions such as “Thursday” and “on May 29–30”, and benchmark expressions such as “since October 2023” and “a 32-month low”. Every one of the seven articles contained multiple temporal expressions of this kind.

For example, in Article 1, the sentence “Indonesia's economy picked up pace last year to grow more than five percent, data showed Thursday…” uses “last year” to anchor the reported growth figure to a specific calendar year relative to the article's publication date; the expression would point to an entirely different year had the article been published at another time. Similarly, in Article 7, “late last month” anchors the European Central Bank's past rate decision to a point just prior to the current reporting period, allowing the writer to sequence the past decision against the article's present-tense discussion.

Person deixis was the second most frequent category, with 36 instances (31.6%). Once the analysis was restricted to genuine third-person pronouns whose interpretation depends on the surrounding co-text rather than institutional names or proper nouns this category consisted of forms such as “it”, “its”, “he”, “his”, “she”, “they”, “their”, and “we”. Virtually no first- or second-person deixis was identified outside direct quotations, consistent with the objective, source-attributing style of economic journalism. For instance, in Article 2, “The central bank said Tuesday it would ‘continue to be present in the market… to maintain the stability of the rupiah's exchange rate’” uses “it” to refer back to “the central bank” mentioned earlier in the sentence, sustaining institutional distance and formality while avoiding repetition of the full noun phrase.

Spatial deixis was the least frequent category, with only 3 instances (2.6%), found in just two of the seven articles. Once absolute place names and regional descriptors such as “Southeast Asia” and “the euro zone” were reclassified as fixed naming, only three genuine deictic-centre-dependent expressions remained: the locative pro-form “elsewhere” and the deictic motion verb “come” (as in “pressure has also come externally”), both in Article 4, and the relational term “domestic” in Article 5. In “The

Chinese companies that helped build Indonesia's nickel industry… are already looking elsewhere for alternatives", "elsewhere" can only be interpreted relative to Indonesia as the implicit deictic centre established across the article, signalling a shift of investment activity away from that centre without naming a specific destination.

Discussion

The findings answer the two research questions posed in this study. Regarding the context of deictic expressions, all three categories in Yule's (1996) framework were found to serve distinct anchoring functions within economic discourse: temporal deixis provides the when of nearly every reported figure, person deixis provides the who behind institutional statements and policy actions, and spatial deixis plays only a marginal, largely incidental role once separated from ordinary place naming. Regarding the dominant type, temporal deixis clearly predominates, accounting for nearly two-thirds of all deictic instances more than twice as frequent as person deixis.

The dominance of temporal deixis can be explained by the inherently time-bound nature of economic reporting. Economic claims are only meaningful once anchored to a specific moment or period: a growth rate means little without knowing which quarter it refers to, and a policy decision carries different weight depending on how recently it was made. Because nearly every statistic, forecast, and policy statement in the dataset is compared against a prior benchmark, temporal anchoring functions as the connective tissue of the entire genre, appearing more densely and consistently than person or spatial pointing. Person deixis remains the second most frequent category because economic reporting still requires third-person pronouns to track institutional actors' governments, central banks, and officials across multiple clauses once they have been named, though its frequency is considerably lower than that of temporal anchoring. Spatial deixis's near-absence reflects the fact that economic journalism is concerned with quantifiable relationships between actors and time-bound events rather than physical space; geographic entities are mentioned extensively throughout the corpus, but function as topic identification rather than deictic pointing.

This finding diverges from previous studies on deixis in The Jakarta Post, including Samosir et al. (2013), Heryanto (2017), Herman and Pardede (2020), and Febriza (2020), all of which identified person deixis as the dominant type across political, opinion, business, and general online news respectively. This divergence may be attributable to two factors. First, genre: economic articles are more heavily oriented toward quantitative, time-bound claims than political or opinion pieces, which are more centrally organised around named actors and their statements. Second, methodology: earlier studies may have applied a broader operationalisation of person deixis that included institutional and proper-noun naming alongside genuine pronouns, which would inflate the person deixis count. This suggests that the dominance of person deixis reported in prior research on The Jakarta Post may not be a fixed structural feature of the newspaper generally, but rather sensitive to both genre and the strictness of the coding criteria applied.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated deictic expressions in seven economic news articles published by The Jakarta Post, drawing on George Yule's (1996) framework of person, temporal, and spatial deixis. The analysis identified 114 deictic instances in total, confirming that all three types identified by Yule (1996) are present in economic news discourse, though very unevenly distributed. Temporal deixis emerged as the dominant type, accounting for 75 instances (65.8%), followed by person deixis with 36 instances (31.6%), while spatial deixis was marginal, with only 3 instances (2.6%). The dominance of temporal deixis reflects the structural reliance of economic journalism on time-anchored comparison, since every statistic is meaningful only relative to a prior point in time; person deixis remains necessary to track institutional actors across quoted statements, while spatial deixis is largely incidental in a genre organised around figures and timeframes rather than physical location. These findings diverge from earlier Jakarta Post deixis research that generally reported person deixis as dominant, suggesting that deictic distribution is sensitive to genre and to how strictly deixis is operationalised. Future research could expand the corpus, compare deictic usage across article categories, or examine discourse and social deixis to provide a more comprehensive account of pragmatic anchoring in Indonesian English economic media.

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