

Interpreting Deixis and Referential Meaning in Harris J's 'Promise'

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v10i4.1107>

Muhammad Burhanudin Al Bisri, Siti Aisyah*, Umi Nur Hastuti^{abc} 

¹²³English Education Department, Universitas PGRI Delta, Sidoarjo, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: siti.aisyah.yes@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the use of deixis in the lyrics of Harris J's song "Promise", focusing on deixis categories, their frequency, and their referential meanings. The objectives are to identify the types of deixis present in the lyrics, determine the most dominant type, and interpret the referential meanings of each deictic expression. Grounded in George Yule's (2006) theory of deixis and employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected by listening to the song and closely examining the lyrics. The findings reveal three types of deixis: person deixis, temporal deixis, and spatial deixis. Person deixis was the most frequently used, with 60 instances (68.97%), followed by spatial deixis (13 instances, 14.94%) and temporal deixis (11 instances, 12.64%). The referents of person deixis typically include the singer and the listener, underscoring the emotional and personal tone of the lyrics. Temporal deixis points to moments of memory and promise, while spatial deixis reflects emotional proximity and movement. Overall, deixis in the song enriches its expressive quality, strengthening the listener's emotional connection with the narrative.

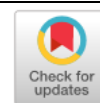
Keywords: *Deixis, Lyric of Harris J's Song, Promise*

Article History:

Received 19th June 2025

Accepted 14th July 2025

Published 3s1th July 2025



INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital medium for communication. It consists of words that are structured and used in various forms such as speaking, writing, and gesturing. According to Sinaga et al. (2020), language is not only a tool for conveying ideas but also a means of interaction between individuals and groups, enabling them to live and work together within a society. In this way, language becomes a basic modality for human connection across diverse contexts.

One linguistic concept that plays a fundamental role in interpreting meaning within different contexts is deixis. Deixis refers to words or phrases – such as *I*, *you*, *here*, *there*, *now*, and *then* – whose referents rely entirely on the situational context of the speaker and listener. These expressions do not have fixed meanings unless tied to who is speaking, to whom, when, and where. According to Yule (2006), deixis is categorized into several types, including person deixis, temporal deixis, and spatial deixis, each pointing to participants, time, and place in a communicative act.

In pragmatics, deixis is studied as a key to understanding how utterances gain meaning through context. The word *deixis* itself originates from the Greek word *deiktikos*, meaning "to point," and functions as a linguistic marker that anchors communication to physical or emotional experience. It is also considered a form of indexicality that reflects context-dependent language use (Lyons, 1977). Personal pronouns, demonstratives, temporal indicators, and spatial markers are all examples of deictic expressions that reflect the interrelation between speaker, listener, and setting.

In the age of modern media, the relevance of deixis extends beyond spoken discourse into expressive textual forms, notably song lyrics. Music shares many parallels with language; it is a medium through which people express emotion, beliefs, and identity. Lyrics can act as

narratives or emotional monologues, where deixis plays a central role in creating perspective and intimacy. According to Arnoi & Ashadi (2021), understanding the meaning of song lyrics requires the listener to be aware of the context, the background of the writer, and how deixis operates to refer beyond the literal text.

Deixis in lyrics serves more than a grammatical function—it builds emotional engagement. By using person deixis like *I* and *you*, artists invite listeners into an emotional dialogue. Spatial deixis such as *here* or *there* and temporal deixis such as *now*, *forever*, or *one day* help construct a narrative landscape where time and place resonate with the audience's own experience. This pragmatic dimension enriches the listener's comprehension and emotional involvement in the song.

This study focuses on Harris J's song "*Promise*", a heartfelt composition that expresses a child's devotion to their parents. The song was chosen for its rich use of deictic expressions, particularly person deixis, which helps construct a powerful and emotional narrative. Through lines such as "*I'll always be there*," and "*You taught me*," the song uses deixis to illustrate closeness, gratitude, and an enduring emotional bond.

Previous research has explored deixis in songs and speeches, such as in Damayanti (2023) on *Here's Your Perfect*, or Rizqi (2022) on political statements by Joko Widodo. These studies have consistently found that person deixis is the most dominant form due to its ability to express personal emotions and relationships. However, most of these studies focused only on identifying deixis types without analyzing their referential meaning—that is, what or whom the deixis specifically refers to in the given context.

This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing not only the kinds of deixis found in "*Promise*" but also the referential meanings behind those expressions. It emphasizes how deixis enhances both linguistic clarity and emotional storytelling within the song.

Based on the issues identified, the objectives of this study are: (1) To identify the types of deixis used in the lyrics of "*Promise*" by Harris J. (2) To determine which type of deixis is most frequently used in the song. (3) To analyze the referential meanings of each deictic expression in the song lyrics.

This research is expected to contribute to the field of pragmatics by demonstrating how deixis is used as a tool for emotional expression in song lyrics. It can also serve as a reference for educators and linguists who wish to teach contextual meaning through creative texts such as music. Additionally, this analysis may enhance listeners' appreciation of how language functions not only to convey literal meaning but also to foster emotional resonance and narrative depth.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the types of deixis and their referential meanings in the lyrics of "*Promise*" by Harris J. As descriptive research, the aim was not to quantify but to describe language phenomena systematically and contextually, focusing on how deixis functions within the song. The data consisted of the lyrics themselves, specifically words and phrases that serve as person, spatial, or temporal deixis. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, conducting data collection and analysis manually. The process began with repeated listening to the song to gain an overall understanding, followed by a close reading of the lyrics to identify deictic expressions. Each occurrence of deixis was then recorded and categorized based on its type and contextual usage. To interpret the referents of these deictic expressions, the study used analytical criteria grounded in George Yule's (2006) theory of deixis, with a focus on context-sensitive interpretation. This involved asking critical questions such as: Who is the speaker and the addressee in this context? What is the time frame being referenced—past, present, or future? What spatial setting is being implied or explicitly mentioned? And how do the surrounding lyrics and the overall theme of the song clarify the intended referents? These guiding questions served as tools to determine what each deictic expression specifically referred to in the context of the song. The data were then analyzed using a three-step process based on Miles and

Huberman's qualitative model: data reduction (selecting relevant deictic expressions), data display (grouping and organizing into tables by type), and conclusion drawing and verification (interpreting which type of deixis was dominant and how referents contributed to the narrative and emotional expression of the lyrics). This approach allowed the researcher to move beyond mere classification of deixis types and explore how deictic language functioned to strengthen the communicative and emotional intent of the song.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Analysis deixis of the song lyrics entitle "Promise" are classified as a person deixis, a spatial deixis, and a temporal deixis also serves as a function of a song lyrics. The results are in the table below:

Table 1. Analysis kind of Deixis in song lyrics "Promise"

| Lyrics | Person | Type of Deixis Spatial | Temporal |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Every time that I need you by my side | I, you, my | by my side | every time |
| Every time I lose my way in life | I, my | my way | every time |
| You're my circle of life, compass and guide | you're, my | - | - |
| There behind me | me | there | - |
| And one day when the tables finally turn | - | - | one day, when |
| And it's me you're depending on | you're, me | - | - |
| I'll put you first, hold you close | you | - | - |
| Like you taught me | you, me | - | - |
| I promise anytime you call me | you, me | - | - |
| It don't matter where I am | I | where I am | - |
| I'll always be there, like you've been there | I'll, you've | there | - |
| If you need me closer, I'll be right over | I'll, you, me | Closer, right over | - |
| I swear | I | - | - |
| There are days when I just don't want to talk | I | - | there are days |
| The love you've raised inside this family | you've | - | - |
| Everything that I do is to make you proud | I, you | - | - |
| You're my heat when I'm cold | you're, my, I'm | - | - |
| The place I call home and always will be | I | place I call home | - |
| That was sent from above | - | above | - |
| Oh I know that wherever I'll go | I | wherever I'll go | wherever I'll go |
| You'll be forever in my heart | you'll, my | - | forever |

From the table above, a song lyric "Promise" mention three different types of deixis. This is in accordance with Fauziah (2024) said that deixis is used to explain and illustrate references to and functions of personal pronouns, time, demonstratives, lexical features, and other words that connect and express room and time relationships. The table above, helps the readers to learn about deixis inside the song lyrics. Grouping the types of deixis inside the song lyrics is accordance with the characteristics of every type of deixis in the following table.

Table 2. Analysis of Person Deixis in song lyrics "Promise"

| Lyrics | Person | Reference Meaning |
|---|------------|---|
| Every time that I need you by my side | I, you, my | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| Every time I lose my way in life | I, my | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| You're my circle of life, compass and guide | you're, my | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |

Interpreting Deixis and Referential Meaning in Harris J's 'Promise'

| | | |
|---|-----------------|---|
| There behind me | me | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| And one day when the tables finally turn | - | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| And it's me you're depending on | you're, me | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| I'll put you first, hold you close | you | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| Like you taught me | you, me | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| I promise anytime you call me | you, me | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| It don't matter where I am | I | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| I'll always be there, like you've been there | I'll, you've | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun and Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient. |
| If you need me closer, I'll be right over | I'll, me, you | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun and Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient. |
| I swear | I | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| There are days when I just don't want to talk | I | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| The love you've raised inside this family | you've | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient. |
| Everything that I do is to make you proud | I, you | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun and Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient. |
| You're my heat when I'm cold | you're, my, I'm | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |

Interpreting Deixis and Referential Meaning in Harris J's 'Promise'

| | | |
|--|------------|---|
| The place I call home and always will be | I | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| That was sent from above | - | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| Oh I know that wherever I'll go | I | Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |
| You'll be forever in my heart | you'll, my | Indicates the person in communication, which is used the 2nd person that is person identified as recipient and Indicates the person in communication, in this context used 1st person which is expressed in singular pronoun. |

According to the table, the researchers believe the most prevalent type of deixis is used the song's lyrics "Promise" is person deixis. It turns out that the previous study basically refers to Satyadewi et al., (2023) person deixis canused to point people has three categories such as speaker (I). It is a strong statement, the used of deixis in the song's lyrics is most frequently personal because of the song's inherent meaning.

Table 3. Analysis of Spatial Deixis in song lyrics "Promise"

| Lyrics | Type of Deixis Spartial | Reference Meaning |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| Every time that I need you by my side | by my side | Indicates a spatial relationship, suggesting closeness and physical proximity between the speaker and the person being addressed |
| Every time I lose my way in life | my way | Indicate location and direction in relation to the speaker's position. It helps establish where things are in relation to the speaker, using words like "here," "there," "this," and "that". It's about how the speaker's perspective shapes the way they describe space and movement. |
| There behind me | there | Indicate location or direction relative to the speaker's position in a conversation |
| It don't matter where I am | where I am | Indicate location or direction relative to the speaker's position in a conversation |
| I'll always be there, like you've been there | there | Indicate location or direction relative to the speaker's position in a conversation |
| If you need me closer, I'll be right over | Closer, right over | Indicate location or position relative to the speaker's or addressee's location. It essentially encodes the spatial relationships within a conversation. |
| The place I call home and always will be | place I call home | Indicate location relative to the speaker's position in a conversation or utterance |
| That was sent from above | above | Indicate locations relative to the speaker's position during a conversation. |
| Oh I know that wherever I'll go | wherever I'll go | indicate location relative to the speaker's position, which is implied by the phrase itself. The phrase points to a general location without specifying a particular place, demonstrating a form of spatial deixis that is |

relative to the speaker's perspective.

You'll be forever in my heart

Next kind of deixis that employed in the song lyrics "Promise" is spatial deixis. According to the table above, it showed that spatial deixis identifying the location in the room connected to the utterance. These also deals with Harahap et al., (2024) that spatial deixis is knowing a location expressions of the space relative to speaker. In this lyric, the song writer used the word of deixis more specifically. By my side, my way, there, where I am, Closer, right over, place I call home, above and wherever I'll go were the referenced to spatial deixis based on the song lyrics Shape of You.

Table 4. Analysis of Temporal Deixis in song lyrics "Promise"

| Lyrics | Temporal | Reference Meaning |
|---|------------------|---|
| Every time that I need you by my side | every time | Indicates the temporal by the timing of the discourse but relative to the speaker |
| Every time I lose my way in life | every time | Indicates the temporal by the timing of the discourse but relative to the speaker |
| And one day when the tables finally turn | one day, when | Indicates the temporal by the timing of the discourse but relative to the speaker |
| There are days when I just don't want to talk | there are days | Indicates the temporal by the timing of the discourse but relative to the speaker |
| Oh I know that wherever I'll go | wherever I'll go | Indicates the temporal by the timing of the discourse but relative to the speaker |
| You'll be forever in my heart | forever | Indicates the temporal by the timing of the discourse but relative to the speaker |

Table 5. Number of Deixis within the song lyrics "Promise"

| Deixis Types | Quantity | Percentages |
|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| Person deixis | 60 | 68.97% |
| Spatial deixis | 13 | 14.94% |
| Temporal deixis | 11 | 12.64% |
| Total | 84 | 100% |

Based on the table above, it appears that the researcher observe that the number of kinds deixis found in the song "Promise": there are at least 60 or 68.97% of person deixis, at least 13 or 14.94% of spatial deixis, and at least 11 or 12.64% of temporal deixis. Therefore, the dominant type of deixis in the song lyrics "Promise" is person deixis.

Discussion

Person deixis is the first type of deixis used in song lyrics. The emergence of the word "aku" in this song shows the initial person deixis, it can also be called a persona that functions as the main subject of the song. The term "aku" indicates the author himself because the song describes the author's impression. Stated by Harahap (2024) that the use of personal deixis that is followed by the three types of personal deixis occurs. The function of personal deixis is to indicate the use of personal pronoun in the song lyrics. In the song "Promise" by Harris J, the dominant person deixis (pronouns) are "I", "you", and "we". These pronouns are used to refer to oneself, the person being spoken to, and the group involving oneself and the person being spoken to. Harris J uses "I" to state his promise or commitment to the listener. This is a form of person deixis that shows his identity as the actor in the song. "You" is used to refer to the person addressed by the promise, most likely the listener or someone close to Harris J. This is a form of person deixis that shows the person being spoken to or the party receiving the promise. By using this person deixis, Harris J creates a closer and more personal relationship with his listeners, making the message in the song feel more intimate and connected.

According to Agustina (2022), place deixis is an expression used to indicate a location relative to the location of the participants in the speech. In the song "Promise" by Harris J, spatial deixis refers to the location or place mentioned in the lyrics that serves to indicate direction or position relative to the speaker. Spatial deixis helps the listener understand where the events in the song are taking place. Spatial deixis is the use of words (such as "there," [specific location]) to refer to a place or location in a specific context. In songs, spatial deixis helps to create a visual image and feeling of place for the listener. By mentioning a location,

the song can transport the listener to a specific place or create a mood associated with that place.

According to Ilma (2023), the term temporal deixis refers to the time of a particular event. This term is used to identify the flow of time by utilizing the moment capture point. In the song "Promise" by Harris J, temporal deixis is shown through words such as "every time," "one day," "when," "forever," and "there are days," which refer to the present time. By using these words, Harris J conveys that the promises made in the song are promises that apply to the present and also to the future. The importance of temporal deixis in this song is to emphasize that the promise is something serious and must be kept at various times.

CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed the use of deixis in the lyrics of "Promise" by Harris J, focusing on identifying the types of deixis present, determining which type was most dominant, and interpreting the referential meanings of each expression. The findings revealed that three types of deixis were used in the song: person deixis, spatial deixis, and temporal deixis. Among these, person deixis was the most dominant, appearing in 60 instances (68.97%), followed by spatial deixis with 13 instances (14.94%), and temporal deixis with 11 instances (12.64%). The frequent use of pronouns such as *I*, *me*, *my*, and *you* emphasized the emotional and personal nature of the song, portraying a strong relational bond between the speaker (the child) and the addressee (the parent). Spatial deixis, such as *by my side* and *there*, added depth to the narrative by indicating emotional or physical closeness, while temporal deixis, such as *every time* and *forever*, underscored the enduring nature of the promises made in the lyrics. These findings demonstrate that deixis in song lyrics is not only a linguistic feature but also a powerful narrative tool that enhances listener engagement and emotional resonance. Overall, deixis functions as a key element in shaping the perspective, intimacy, and expressiveness of the song's message.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise be to Allah SWT and thanks to my lecturers who have guided me, shared comments, and promoted this research. I also want to thank my family who have supported me with love. Additionally, I'd want to extend my gratitude to my family for supporting me with love. The author would like to thank profusely to the supervisors who always provide support to the author during this research. After that, the author would like to extend the gratitude to the reviewers who read this article as well for the editor so that this article may be published completely.

REFERENCES

- Agustina, D., & Hendar, H. (2022). Deixis Analysis on The Song Lyric of Driver's License by Olivia Rodrigo. *Ethical Lingua*, 9(2), 523-528. <https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.461>
- Anjani, M. W., & Yon, A. E. (2024). A Deixis Analysis of Jung Kook's Song Lyrics in "Golden" Album. *Education, Research, Formation, and Action in General Education Journal*, 1(1), 93-99.
- Aulina, Z. D., Amelia, E. R., Umar, I. A. A., Hasanah, D. U., & Rumandhani, A. E. (2023). A Deixis Analysis of Song Lyrics in Drivers License By Olivia Rodrigo. *Modality Journal: International Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 3(2), 99-106.
- Damayanti, N. K. L. P. (2023). A deixis analysis of song lyrics in "Here's Your Perfect" by Jammie Miller. *Jurnal Penelitian Mahasiswa Indonesia*, 3(1), 148-152.
- Dayana, S., & Syatroh, I. L. (2025). The Use of Deixis in Taylor Swift's Cowboy Like Me. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 8(3), 568-573.
- Fauziah, I., Faizah, H., & Charlina, C. (2024). Persona Deicis in The Novel Merindu Baginda Nabi Works of Habiburrahman El Shirazy A Review of Pragmatics. *Blantika: Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2(6), 689-697.

- Harahap, F. S. (2024). An Analysis of Deixis in "Who I Am" Song Lyrics by Alan Walker, Putri Ariani and Peder Elias. *EDUJ: English Education Journal*, 2(1), 86-92.
- Ilma, F., & Sabat, Y. (2023). Deixis analysis of the song lyrics Shape of You by Ed Sheeran. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 6(4), 123-134.
- Krismonita A, A. (2022). The Effect of Students' Vocabulary by Using Audio Visual Media at the University of Esa Unggul. *Pendidikan Bahasa*, 33(1), 462.
- Mahdzurah, G. I., & Argawati, N. O. (2025). An Analysis of Deixis in Lewis Capaldi "Someone You Loved" Song Lyrics. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 8(1), 21-26.
- Ningtyas, D. N. A. F., & Arifin, A. (2025). Deixis in Elemental Movie. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 12(1).
- Rizqi, M., & Sabat, Y. (2022). A Deixis Analysis in Joko Widodo's Statement on Indonesia's G20 Presidency. *Journal of English Language and Culture*, 13(1).
- Safarudin, R., Zulfamanna, Z., Kustati, M., & Sepriyanti, N. (2023). Qualitative research. *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 3(2), 9680-9694.
- Sandoval, I. A., Parthama, I. G. N., & Adni, N. P. (2024). Analysis of Deixis in The Short Story Beauty and The Beast. *JLER (Journal of Language Education Research)*, 7(3), 109-119.
- Satyadewi, N. P. M., Ayomi, P. N., & Sulatra, I. K. (2023). An Analysis of Deixis in Avicii's Song Lyric. *Journal of Language and Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 122-134.
- Sinaga, D., Herman, H., & Marpaung, T. I. (2020). Deixis in the Song Lyrics of Lewis Capaldi's "Breach" Album. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 8(4), 450. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v8i4.2843>
- Susanto, D., & Jailani, M. S. (2023). Data validity checking techniques in scientific research. *QOSIM: Journal of Social Education & Humanities*, 1(1), 53-61.
- Yule, G. (2006). *The Study of Pragmatics* (3rded.). New York: Cambridge University Press.