


Social Deixis in *The Godfather* Movie

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A B S T R A C T

This research examined the types and functions of social deixis in *The Godfather* movie using Levinson's (1983) theory, focusing on how language reflects power, hierarchy, and social relationships within the mafia world. This research used a qualitative descriptive method. The result of the research identifies 62 occurrences of relational social deixis, consisting of 21 referent honorifics, 33 addressee honorifics, and 8 bystander honorifics, as well as 21 occurrences of absolute social deixis, including 9 authorized speaker instances and 12 authorized recipient instances. The findings reveal that social deixis in *The Godfather* serves as a linguistic tool to establish authority, reinforce hierarchical structures, and convey respect and familiarity among characters. Through its use of formal address terms, honorifics, and social markers, the movie effectively illustrates how language shapes interpersonal dynamics and power relations, contributing to a deeper understanding of social deixis in cinematic dialogue and its implications in pragmatics.

Keywords: *Levinson's Theory, Pragmatics, Social Deixis, The Godfather.*

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INTRODUCTION

Language functions as a medium for communication and mutual understanding among individuals. Additionally, it signifies social status and acts as a means to reflect social relationships within a community. Without language, people would be unable to communicate or convey messages to others. Analyzing the structural, contextual, and social dimensions of language is essential to understanding its role in communication. Such knowledge aids in overcoming linguistic barriers across various fields, enhances communication strategies, and fosters intercultural comprehension.

Levinson (1983) defined pragmatics as the study of communication meaning and interpretation in a certain situation. It focuses on how context affects the interpretation of meaning in communication. Levinson (1983) underlined that pragmatics is concerned with how the meaning of an utterance is perceived in relation to its context and background. Levinson (1983) also claimed that pragmatics is an inferential process in which speakers and listeners make a conclusion based on what is said and what has been agreed upon previously. Levinson (1983) explained that there are several concepts that help understand how language is used in daily interactions to achieve the speakers intended meaning such as implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and deixis.

Deixis is a key issue in linguistics that investigates how certain words or phrases, known as deictics, receive their meaning from the situational context in which they are used rather than having a fixed, independent reference (Levinson, 1983). These linguistic features require contextual interpretation since their meaning varies based on the speaker, listener, time and location of utterance, and social relationships among conversation participants. Deixis takes various forms, such as person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, and social deixis.

Social deixis is a communication tool commonly used by speakers and addressees in daily life. It functions as a linguistic marker that conveys honor based on social differentiation within a society. Levinson (1983, p. 63) defines social deixis as the encoding of social distinctions relative to the roles of participants, particularly in terms of status, social distance, or other interpersonal relationships. The reason for this frequently determined by titles, honorifics, and numerous phrases that represent societal context or interlocutors' hierarchical standing. Additionally, social deixis serves as a form of respect influenced by status and cultural norms within a community. Its usage is often shaped by local culture, as seen in movies that portray dialogues between speakers and listeners.

Movie is a form of artistic expression that works as cultural representations that go beyond mere fictional storytelling, offering a reflection of societal norms, including cultural, social, and political structures. *The Godfather* stands as one of the most iconic movie that delve into the interplay of social deixis and power, serving as a cinematic masterpiece that intricately depicts the complexities of interpersonal relationships within a mafia family. The movie's character engage in complex and diverse social interactions, in which status, authority, and hierarchy play a crucial role in shaping their relationships. The dialogue in this movie do more than advance the plot; they subtly reveal underlying social relationships between the characters, embedding deeper meanings within their interactions.

The Godfather (1972) is a legendary American gangster movie adapted from Mario Puzo's acclaimed 1969 novel, which has earned widespread recognition as a masterpiece of cinema. The movie is celebrated as a cornerstone of American moviemaking, renowned for its detailed and authentic depiction of Italian-American mafia life. Within the Corleone crime family, authority is defined by intricate hierarchies, unwavering familial devotion, and multifaceted personal relationships, all of which are masterfully conveyed through the movie's dialogue and character interactions.

In *The Godfather*, social deixis plays a vital role in shaping character interactions, as language is strategically employed to signify social hierarchy within the mafia, establish dominance, and demonstrate respect toward figures of authority. For example, the distinction between formal and informal salutations can reveal the degree of familiarity or hierarchical superiority between individuals. Likewise, particular words and expressions serve as indicators of a character's position, whether dominant or subordinate, within the power dynamics of the mafia. Vito Corleone, as the head of the family, is frequently referred to with honorifics such as "Godfather" or "Don", underscoring his influence and esteemed rank. On the other hand, characters occupying lower ranks typically employ respectful or subservient language when addressing those of higher status. Analyzing social deixis in *The Godfather* provides researchers with a deeper understanding of the film's linguistic and cultural aspects, while also revealing the broader societal hierarchies and power dynamics embedded within its narrative.

Several consideration of the researcher selected this movie as the focus of the study. *The Godfather* showcases intricate social interactions both within the family and in professional environments. Its dialogues are rich with distinct uses of pronouns, greetings, and references, reflecting how characters employ social deixis to convey respect, intimacy, or hierarchical status, making it a compelling subject in the field of pragmatics. Furthermore, the movie presents a diverse array of characters, ranging from close family members to business associates, whose relationships significantly impact their linguistic choices in expressing authority, familiarity, or formality. These factors make *The Godfather* an excellent case study for analyzing the role of social deixis in cinematic discourse.

Deixis In Pragmatics

Levinson (1983) defined pragmatics as the study of meaning and interpretation in specific contexts, emphasizing how context shapes the understanding of communication. Levinson described pragmatics as an inferential process, where speakers and listeners draw

conclusions based on what is said and shared prior knowledge. Key concepts in pragmatics, according to Levinson, include implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and deixis.

Levinson (1983, p. 62) identified five distinct types of deixis, each serving a specific function in communication. Person deixis refers to linguistic expressions used to indicate particular individuals or groups within a conversation. Spatial deixis pertains to references that specify the location or setting of an utterance. Temporal deixis involves expressions that denote a specific point in time relative to the moment of speaking. Discourse deixis consists of words or phrases that establish connections between different segments of discourse. Finally, social deixis encodes social relationships between speakers and listeners, often signifying levels of respect, hierarchy, or familiarity. Each category of deixis plays a fundamental role in shaping meaning within communication, ensuring contextual clarity and facilitating precise interpretation in interactions.

Levinson (1983) identified two types of social deixis: relational social deixis and absolute social deixis. Relational social deixis pertains to aspects of social identity, such as the relative status between individuals or the relationship between a speaker and a listener. Levinson (1983, p. 90-91) also defined relational social deixis as four types of honorifics for speakers: referent (referent honorific), addressee (addressee honorific), bystander (bystander honorific), and setting (formality levels). Levinson (1983) defined absolute social deixis as a greeting that does not compare the speaker and addressee's rank. Absolute social deixis is categorized into two distinct types: Authorized speaker, referring to individuals with the authority to use specific language or titles, and authorized recipient, denoting those who hold a recognized status as the intended audience in formal interactions.

Moreover, according to the concept mentioned above, the types of relational social deixis are as follows:

Referent Honorific

Levinson (1983, p. 120) stated that a referent honorific is a linguistic expression used to show deference or respect toward the person being referred to. This form of honorific is conveyed by recognizing the referent's social status or position. Referent honorifics are used to address or refer to someone who holds a higher social position than the speaker or listener.

Addressee Honorific

Addressee honorifics are utilized by the speaker to convey deference and acknowledgment of the listener's status. These forms are often associated with speech levels, as they indicate varying degrees of politeness and formality. This type of honorific expresses respect or deference without the need for an explicit mention. In addressee honorifics, the manner a phrase ends have a considerable impact on the entire honorific meaning of the utterance.

Bystander Honorific

According to Levinson (1983) bystander honorific is a form of speaker's respect addressed to the audience. Bystander honorifics are usually conveyed in the form of naming, nicknames, or spoken according to the context.

Moreover, according to the concept mentioned above, the types of absolute social deixis are as follows:

Authorized Speaker

According to Levinson (1983), the authorized speaker is a sort of honor reserved for only authorized speakers. An authorized speaker is an individual who has the societal authority to use specific kinds of language or titles that indicate their social status or ranking.

Authorized Recipient

Levinson (1983) defined authorized recipient as a form of honor that refers to the recipient. Authorized recipient is a term or honorific given to the appropriate recipient to denote rank, employment, and profession. It usually refers to the recipient by title or distinction.

To explore the second research question, the researcher applies the theoretical frameworks of Levinson (1983, pp. 91-92) and Cruse (2006, p. 166), which propose that social

deixis fulfills specific communicative functions. These functions are categorized into four key dimensions includes social status, politeness, social identity, and closeness within interactions.

Moreover, according to the concept mentioned above, the function of relational social deixis are as follows:

Social Status

Social deixis plays a crucial role in reflecting an individual's social standing or hierarchical position within a conversation. This is accomplished through linguistic markers such as honorifics, titles, pronouns, and specific forms of address, which help establish the power dynamics between the speaker and the listener. Furthermore, kinship terms often function as indicators of social hierarchy. In various cultural contexts, terms like "brother" or "sister" can signify equality or familiarity, whereas designations such as "uncle" or "aunt" are frequently used to express deference and acknowledge a superior social rank.

Politeness

Politeness in social deixis pertains to how language is utilized to demonstrate courtesy, show deference, and maintain appropriate social distance in communication. It plays an essential role in linguistics by fostering harmonious social relationships. For example, addressing someone as "Mr. Andrew" instead of just "Andrew" is considered more polite, as it reflects a higher level of formality and respect.

Social Identity

Social identity plays a crucial role of language in communication that essential for individuals to define and reinforce their roles within different social groups. Social deixis serves as a key linguistic tool in conveying and solidifying these identities. The inclusion of titles like "Doctor," "Professor," "Captain," or "Judge" not only signifies acknowledgment and respect but also highlights a person's professional standing and societal position.

Closeness

The degree of connection, mutual familiarity, or emotional bond between speakers is often reflected in their choice of language. This can be observed through the use of pronouns, modes of address, and other linguistic elements that signal either intimacy or social distance. Affectionate terms like "honey," "dear," and "buddy" are commonly employed to express warmth and closeness in relationships

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to analyze the uses of social deixis in *The Godfather* movie. The qualitative descriptive method is chosen because it allows for an in-depth and naturalistic exploration of language use in its social context. This method provides a comprehensive summary of the phenomenon without extensive interpretation, ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in the data collected.

The primary data source in this study is based on the script and scene of *The Godfather* movie. The movie script and scene serve as the main materials for analysis. The selection of this movie is based on its rich and hierarchical social interactions, which make it a suitable subject for examining social deixis. As a critically acclaimed American gangster movie, *The Godfather* was first released in 1972 and was adapted from Mario Puzo's best-selling 1969 novel. Recognized as one of the greatest cinematic achievements, the movie has been praised for its authentic depiction of Italian-American mafia culture. The screenplay itself spans 129 pages, capturing the movie's intricate narrative and complex character dynamics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After observing and examining *The Godfather* movie and script, the researcher found the results of the overall data based on the following types of social deixis:

Table 1. Findings of Social Deixis in The Godfather Movie

Category	Type of Social Deixis	Occurrences
Relational Social Deixis	Referent Honorific	21
	Addressee Honorific	33
	Bystander Honorific	8
Total		62
Absolute Social Deixis	Authorized Recipient	9
	Authorized Speaker	12
Total		21
Overall		83

Afterwards, the researcher explained the context of the collected data and analyzed the sample of data based on types and functions as follows:

Relational Social Deixis

According to Levinson (1983), relational social deixis is the process to encoding of social relationships between participants in a communicative event. It is particularly explaining how language expresses social qualities and divisions between the speaker, addressee, and referents. These distinctions are divided into four categories: referent (referent honorific), addressee (addressee honorific), bystander (bystander honorific), and setting (formality levels).

Referent Honorific (Speaker and Referent)

As defined by Levinson (1983:120), referent honorific is a phrase used to express respect toward the referent. Respect or honor can only be conveyed by explicitly acknowledging the status of the intended individual. A referent honorific is used to address someone of superior rank or elevated position in relation to the speaker or listener.

Data 1:

Bonasera: *Be my friend... (after bowing and the Don shrugs) Godfather...*
 Vito Corleone: *Good....*
(The Godfather, 1971, p.1)

Context and analysis:

The context of the utterance occurs when Bonasera seeks help from Vito Corleone after his daughter was severely beaten by her boyfriend. Desperate for justice, Bonasera is willing to pay any price to have his revenge carried out. However, Corleone does not demand payment but instead expects Bonasera to show him proper respect by acknowledging their bond as friends. As a sign of deference, Bonasera is required to bow and address Corleone as **"The Godfather."**

The phrase *"The Godfather"* belongs to the type of relational social deixis, namely referent honorific because the phrase *The Godfather* is uttered by the speaker as a form of respect for the referent.

The function of the phrase *"The Godfather"* is to showing respect and honor to Don Corleone as a differentiation of social status between the speaker and the referent.

Addressee Honorific (Speaker and Addressee)

Addressee honorifics are linguistic forms used to show respect toward the addressee. Often associated with speech levels, they indicate varying degrees of politeness and formality. These honorifics express deference without the need for explicit mention. In addressee honorifics, the manner a phrase ends is important in creating the entire honorific meaning of the discourse.

Data 2:

Bonasera: *I believe in America. America has made my fortune. And I raised my daughter in the American fashion. I gave her freedom, but I taught her never to dishonor her family.*
(*The Godfather*, 1971, p.1)

Context and analysis

The utterance takes place in a situation where Bonasera initially trusts his daughter and allows her the freedom to be with her boyfriend. However, he later learns that her boyfriend has mistreated her. Seeking justice, Bonasera turns to Don Corleone, requesting his help in taking revenge on the man who harmed his daughter.

The phrase “**my daughter**” represents addressee honorific in social deixis, as Bonasera refers to his daughter without mentioning her actual name. This usage conveys a sense of closeness and familiarity while maintaining a respectful and affectionate tone.

The phrase “**my daughter**” functions as an expression of closeness or intimacy between a father and his child. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “daughter” refers to a biological child, emphasizing the father-daughter relationship. This demonstrates the function of closeness in addressee honorifics within relational social deixis.

Bystander Honorific

According to Levinson (1983) bystander honorific is a form of speaker's respect addressed to the audience. Bystander honorifics are usually conveyed in the form of naming, nicknames, or spoken according to the context.

Data 3:

Nurse: *(entering the room) What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be here now!*
Michael: *I'm Michael Corleone...this is my father. (then)*
There's nobody here. What happened to the guards?
(*The Godfather*, 1971, p.52)

Context and analysis

The context of this dialogue takes place in a hospital, when Michael Corleone visits his father, Don Vito Corleone, who is being treated after an assassination attempt by the Tattaglia family. The moment Michael enters the room, a nurse is surprised to see him there and says that he shouldn't be there. However, Michael stays and introduces himself as Don Corleone's son. He then realizes that the guards who were supposed to guard his father have disappeared, which makes him suspect that there is a new threat to his father's safety.

The type of social deixis in the dialog above is belong to the bystander honorific because Michael explicitly introduces Vito Corleone as “father” rather than using his real name or other nicknames. Vito Corleone himself is not part of the conversation between Michael and the nurse which makes him an audience. The use of “father” in this context shows respect and recognition of Vito's status as Michael's biological father.

The function of social deixis in the phrase “**This is my father**” is closeness or intimacy because Michael directly explains to the nurse that Vito Corleone is his father and not just the leader of the Corleone mafia family, but also has a close relationship with Michael as his biological father.

Absolute Social Deixis

According to Levinson (1983), absolute social deixis is only applicable to particular speakers and recipients. Absolute social deixis refers to a linguistic marker used to designate a particular individual through specific forms of address, without indicating any hierarchical distinction between the speaker and the recipient.

Authorized Speaker

According to Levinson (1983), the authorized speaker is a sort of honor reserved for only authorized speakers. An authorized speaker is an individual who has the societal authority to use specific kinds of language or titles that indicate their social status or ranking.

Tom: *I'll do my best*

Sollozzo: *Good. Now, you can go.*

(while walking out)

*I don't like violence, Tom. I'm a **business man**. Blood is a big expense.*

(The Godfather, 1971, p.38)

Context and analysis

The context of this dialogue begins with a scene of Tom Hagen, an advisor to the Corleone family talking to Virgil "The Turk" Sollozzo, a gangster and drug smuggler who is trying to form a partnership with the Corleone family. Sollozzo had just kidnapped Tom to negotiate after Don Vito Corleone was shot by his people. He wanted to ensure that the Corleone family would not pursue retaliation and tried to convince Tom to persuade Sonny Corleone to cooperate with him in the drugs business.

The type of social deixis in the dialogue above belongs to the authorized recipient. Sollozzo referred to himself as a "**businessman**" which indirectly places him as someone who has authority in the world of illegal business (especially drugs). Sollozzo wants to make certain that Tom sees him not only just as a brutal gangster, but also as someone who runs a business with rational calculations.

The function of the conversation above belongs to social identity which Sollozzo uses language to emphasize his position as a businessman rather than a criminal. This phrase also reflects his attempt to maintain an image as a rational and measured person in front of Tom Hagen.

Authorized Recipient

Levinson (1983) defined authorized recipient as a form of respect that refer into the recipient. Authorized recipient is a term or honorific given to the appropriate recipient to denote rank, employment, and profession. It usually refers to the recipient by title or distinction.

McCluskey: *Phil, take him in!*

Officer Phil: *The kid's clean, **Captain**. He's a war hero.*

He's never been busted for the rackets...

(The Godfather, 1971, p.50)

Context and analysis

The context of the above conversation is when Michael Corleone is facing a threat from Sollozzo, a drug businessman who is a rival of the Corleone family. Captain McCluskey, who has been bribed by Sollozzo, helps ensure Sollozzo's safety and tries to block the actions of the Corleone family.

The type of conversation above is authorized recipient which Officer Phil conveys a form of respect or honor to McCluskey who is the superior of Officer Phil by calling "**Captain**" as McCluskey's profession.

The function of the authorized recipient in the conversation above is as a form of social identity which shows that Officer Phil is a junior subordinate of Captain McCluskey.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of social deixis in *The Godfather* is crucial in illustrating power structures, reinforcing authority, and shaping the dynamics of relationships within the mafia world. The study's findings support the hypothesis by identifying 62 occurrences of

relational social deixis (21 referent honorifics, 33 addressee honorifics, and 8 bystander honorifics) and 21 occurrences of absolute social deixis (9 authorized speakers and 12 authorized recipients). The findings reveal that the use of social deixis in *The Godfather* movie is not only employed as a communication tool, but also as a means of establishing social status and power dynamics among the characters. High-ranking characters, such as Don Vito Corleone, are routinely addressed with honorifics like "Godfather" or "Don", reinforcing authority and respect in social interactions. Other types of social deixis, such as addressee and bystander honorifics, are employed to convey politeness, intimacy, or social distance between characters. Absolute social deixis has also been found to be a significant variable in emphasizing the authority of the speaker and recipient in formal and hierarchical communication.

This study has broader implications for pragmatics, particularly in understanding how language reflects and constructs social relationships by legitimizing authority and maintaining structured power relations in various contexts, including politics, business, and family dynamics. It also highlights the value of cinematic dialogue as a linguistic and sociological resource, influencing audience perceptions of power, hierarchy, and cultural norms. Furthermore, this research enhances our understanding of social deixis in cross-cultural communication, translation, and discourse analysis, paving the way for future studies comparing its use across different film genres, cultures, and historical contexts. Thus, the findings of this research verify the initial theory that social deixis in *The Godfather* is not only portray social interactions inside the mafia world, but also supports existing power hierarchies. This study examines deeper into how language is used to generate and maintain social dynamics, highlighting the importance of social deixis in pragmatics.

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