

IDENTITY AND SOLIDARITY IN THE INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The paper investigates the use of person deixis in the institutional discourse of the World Health Organization (WHO) in order to establish the collective reference function of first person plural pronominals and the individual reference function of first person singular pronominals and second person plural pronominals. The data, selected from media briefings on Covid-19, show that both the individual function, as well as the collective function of deictic pronominals are valuable in the institutional discourse and that deictic pronominals express identity and solidarity.

Keywords: person deixis, institutional discourse, identity, solidarity.

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1. Introduction

Our analysis focuses on exploring the distribution and the functions of first person singular deictic pronominals, first person plural deictic pronominals and second person deictic pronominals in the discourse of the World Health Organization related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The article shall refer to the fields of discourse analysis, in order to elaborate on the discourse of WHO as part of the institutional discourse, and pragmatics, in order to expand on the domains of deixis, person deixis and the categories of deictic pronominals it includes.

With regard to the functions of the deictic pronominals, we shall consider the dispensation of first person singular pronouns, first person plural pronouns and second person pronouns throughout a corpus made up of 20 texts representing the institutional discourse of WHO in the context of Covid-19. The texts contain the opening remarks at media briefings on Covid-19 pertaining to WHO Director-General, in a timeframe of one hundred thirty days (from 1st of June 2021 to 13th of October 2021).

The investigation indicates that first person singular deictic pronominals, exclusive-of-addressee first person plural deictic pronominals and second person deictic pronominals express identity, whilst inclusive-of-addressee first person plural deictic pronominals express solidarity. The level of distribution of deictic pronominals establishes the prominence of both individual function, as well as collective function of deictic pronominals.

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2. Deictic pronominals in the institutional discourse of WHO

2.1. Discourse Analysis and the Institutional Discourse

Brown and Yule (1983: 1) describe discourse analysis as “an investigation of what and how the language is used for”. We could thus say that discourse analysis is concerned with the language one uses in communication and the interpretation of the linguistic message communicated by the interlocutors in the speech event.

Discourse is defined as “language beyond the sentences” (Brown and Yule, 2006: 124) and discourse analysis is typically concerned with “the study of language in text and in conversation”. Discourse analysis consists of either spoken language (dialogues, monologues, etc.), or written language (novels, newspapers, etc.), used in social communication. Regardless of the different types of spoken or written texts, language users utilise them to convey their message to each other. In doing so, they use specific codes, which have to be interpreted by the participants in the conversation in order for the intended message to be decoded. The influence of the relationship that the participants in the speech act have on the use of language is also a main concern of discourse analysis. We can thus conclude that discourse analysis focuses on interpreting and analysing language and how it is used in society, whether it is in written or spoken communication.

With reference to the institutional discourse, Freed (2015: 809), notes that it refers to “verbal exchanges between two or more people where at least one speaker is a representative of a work-related institution and where the interaction and the speakers’ goals are partially determined by the institution in play.”

We shall further on focus on the analysis of deictic pronominals in the discourse of WHO as part of the institutional discourse. WHO became operational on 7th of April 1948 and has since helped solve health-related issues globally, according to the official website.

Good health is a precious thing. When we are healthy we can learn, work, and support ourselves and our families. When we are sick, we struggle, and our families and communities fall behind. That’s why the World Health Organization is needed. Working with 194 Member States, across six regions, and from more than 150 offices, WHO staff are united in a shared commitment to achieve better health for everyone, everywhere².

2.2. Deixis

The word *deixis* comes from the Greek word “*deiknynai*”, which means “to show, to display” (Online Etymology Dictionary). It means “pointing via” language. Any linguistic form used to accomplish this “pointing” is called a deictic expression.

There are different definitions that scholars give for *deixis*. According to Cruse (2000: 319), “*Deixis* means different things to different people.” It was the Austrian psychologist, Karl Bühler that invented the term “*deixis*”, in 1934. He presented a new form of reference for the analysis of demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative adverbs by inventing the terms “*deixis*” and “*deictic*”. His studies, which have been expanded and refined by a lot of scholars, such as Fillmore (1975: 219-306), Lyons (1977: 636-724), Levinson (1983: 54-96) and others, are regarded as fundamental to the field of *deixis*.

For Bühler (1934, cited in Cruse 2000: 319), a deictic expression is “any expression which locates a referent in space or time”. Thus, the sentence in (1) contains the locative expression “on the mat” and

² <https://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/who-brochure>

a tense marker, which is usually considered to be deictic. However, in (2), “the cat” is located not only in respect to “the mat”, but also with respect to the speaker, *that* indicating that the cat is probably distant from the speaker.

- (1) *The cat sat on the mat.*
- (2) *That cat sat on the mat.*

Scholars tend to agree that deixis is a linguistic phenomenon dependent on the relationship between language and context. Lyons says:

The term deixis... is now used in linguistics to refer to the function of personal and demonstrative pronouns, of tense and of a variety of other grammatical and lexical features which relate utterances to the spatio-temporal coordinates of the act of utterance. (Lyons, 1977: 636)

It is unclear from this definition what proportion of the locational meaning of spatial terms must depend on the extralinguistic context.

Levinson explains that:

Deixis concerns the ways in which languages encode or grammaticalize features of the context of utterance or speech event, and thus also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of that context of utterance. Thus the pronoun 'this' does not name or refer to any particular entity on all occasions of use; rather it is a variable or place-holder for some particular entity given by the context (e.g. by a gesture). (Levinson, 1983: 54)

Cruse notes that:

usage of the term “deixis” is variable, but most typically it designated referring expressions which indicate the location of the referents along certain dimensions, using the speaker (and time and place of speaking) as a reference point or “deictic centre”. (Cruse, 2006: 44-45)

Libert (2016: 490) states that “it is not helpful to use *deixis* in this way; one could simply call such items *locational terms* or *locative terms*.” According to Hanks, there are no linguistic items which contain only deictic information (Hanks, 2011: 317). In other words, there is no sharp boundary between what is deictic and what is not deictic, as even phrases with apparently precise reference still depend on context.

Given the above stated definitions, we can conclude that there is no simple definition of deixis. We can, however, deduce that, if we talk about a spectrum of deicticity, there are no items that are completely deictic, on the other hand, all linguistic items may be at least slightly dependent on context for their interpretation.

2.3. Person Deixis

According to Levinson (1983: 62), Person Deixis concerns:

- the participants directly engaged in the utterance (*I, we*), representing the grammatical encoding of the reference to the speaker(s);
- the participants indirectly engaged in the utterance (*you*), representing the grammatical encoding of the reference to the addressee(s);
- the participants that are made known in the utterance (*he, she, they*), representing the grammatical encoding of the reference to bystanders.

The category first person pronoun has the semantic feature of speaker inclusion (+S). We distinguish between the inclusive-of-addressee *we* and the exclusive-of-addressee *we*. This category does not

include the addressee for the singular (*I*), but it can include the addressee for the plural (*we*), as shown in Figure 1 and in the examples (3) – (6):

Figure 1

Division	Kind of expression	Type of pronoun	Values
First	Singular	I	(+S, -A)
	Plural	we	(+S, +A)
we		(+S, -A)	
we		(+S, +/- A)	

(3) *I want to clarify the meaning of that sentence.* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

(4) *We are all in this together.* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

(5) *We disagree with your solution to the problem.* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

(6) *We should listen to our parents.* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

In (3) *I* includes the speaker, but not the addressee. In (4) *we* includes the speaker and the addressee. In (5) *we* includes the speaker, but not the addressee. While in (6) *we* includes the speaker, but it is unclear whether it includes the addressee or not.

The category second person pronoun includes the addressee, but it does not include the speaker (+A, -S). As shown in Figure 2 and in the examples (7) and (8), the addressees can be “ratified participants, directly addressed”, or they can be “ratified participants that are not directly addressed” (distinction made by Bell, 1984: 158-161):

Figure 2

Division	Kind of expression	Type of pronoun	Values
Second		you	(-S, +A) (addressees - ratified participants, directly addressed)
		you	(-S, +A) (auditors - ratified participants, not directly addressed)

(7) *I salute you all.* (on a TV show, the host addresses the auditors)

(8) *I salute you all.* (on a TV show, the host addresses the participants in the room, not the auditors) (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

The third person pronoun is a residual category that does not include the speaker or the addressee (-S, -A), as shown in Figure 3 and in the examples (9) - (11):

Figure 3

Division	Kind of expression	Type of pronoun	Values
Third	Singular	he	(-S, -A)
	Singular	she	(-S, -A)
	Plural	they	(-S, -A)

(9) *He stayed at home yesterday.* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

(10) *She watched tv last night.* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

(11) *They listened to music two days ago.* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.)

In (9) *he* does not include the speaker or the addressee, in (10) *she* does not include the speaker or the addressee, while in (11) *they* does not include either the speaker, or the addressee.

The descriptive content of the third person pronoun category “does not suffice to identify a referent”, this category is thus ranked as deficient to the highest degree in this respect: “she – the woman – the beautiful woman – Anne” (Vilceanu, 2011: 56).

2.4. Functions and distribution of deictic pronominals

As previously stated, the analysis focuses on identifying the functions and the level of distribution of the first person singular pronoun *I*, the first person plural pronoun *we* and the second person pronoun *you*.

We have examined twenty texts pertaining to the institutional discourse of WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, at media briefings regarding the Covid-19 pandemic over a period of one hundred thirty days (from 1st of June 2021 to 13th of October 2021) in order to establish the functions that the deictic pronominals have and to determine which deictic pronominals become prevalent.

The results of the investigation reveal that the first person singular pronoun *I*, the exclusive-of-addressee first person plural pronoun *we* and the second person pronoun *you* have the function of expressing identity. The inclusive-of-addressee first person plural pronoun *we* has the function of expressing solidarity.

The distribution of deictic pronominals indicates that there is a prevalence of first person singular pronouns (24.13%), exclusive-of-addressee first person plural pronouns (25.05%), inclusive-of-addressee first person plural pronouns (26.45%) and individual reference second person pronouns (22.04%). The results establish the fact that both the individual, as well as the collective function of the deictic pronominals are valuable in the institutional discourse of WHO.

The low distribution of collective reference second person pronouns (2.32%) indicates that the participants directly engaged in the utterance (*I*, *we* - speakers) and the participants indirectly engaged in the utterance (*you* – auditors) are mostly regarded as a collectivity. The auditors are mostly referred to by using the inclusive-of-addressee *we*, expressing solidarity (25.05%).

2.4.1. Category first person singular pronoun

The analysis shows that the category of the first person singular pronoun *I* indicates an individual reference – *I* refers to WHO Director-General, in all occurrences (104), as shown in Figure 4 and in the quotation below it:

Figure 4

Type of pronoun	Number of utterances	Percentages	Function
<i>I</i>	104	24.13%	expression of identity

Finally, I want to talk about the escalating crisis in northern Ethiopia. As an Ethiopian from Tigray, this crisis affects me personally. But today I am speaking as the Director-General of the World Health Organization. (Who Director-General, 13 October 2021)³

³ <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---13-october-2021>

The high distribution of the first person singular pronoun *I*, expressing identity (24.13%), indicates that WHO Director-General intends to make his identity known to the auditors and that he wishes to make his personal contribution for people all over the world to enjoy better health and well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.4.2. Category first person plural pronoun

With regard to the first person plural pronoun category, we distinguish between the inclusive-of-addressee pronoun *we*, expressing solidarity, and the exclusive-of-addressee pronoun *we*, expressing identity.

We have identified 108 occurrences of the inclusive-of-addressee pronoun *we*, expressing solidarity, as shown in Figure 5:

Figure 5

Type of pronoun	Number of utterances	Percentages	Function
<i>we</i>	108	25.05%	expression of solidarity

The inclusive-of-addressee first person plural pronoun *we* refers to everyone who is affected by the pandemic in the quotation:

Finally, what does the world need to do to prevent a tragedy on this scale occurring again? We need better governance, better financing, better systems and tools, and we need a stronger, sustainably financed and empowered WHO at the centre of the global health architecture - all underpinned by equity. We owe it to those who have lost their lives to this virus to make the lasting change the world needs for a safer, fairer and healthier future - together. (Who Director-General 22 September 2021)⁴.

The high distribution of the inclusive-of-addressee pronoun *we*, expressing solidarity (25.05%), denotes the fact that, alongside identity (24.13%), solidarity is also a main focus in the discourse of WHO.

The study shows that there are 114 occurrences of the exclusive-of-addressee pronoun *we*, expressing identity, as illustrated in Figure 6:

Figure 6

Type of pronoun	Number of utterances	Percentages	Function
<i>we</i>	114	26.45%	expression of identity

In the quotation below, the exclusive-of-addressee first person plural pronoun *we* refers to those who have the power of decision making:

The development and approval of vaccines in record time took us to the summit of scientific achievement; now we stand on the precipice of failure, if we don't make the benefits of science available to all people in all countries, right now. (Who Director-General 7 October 2021)

The fact that the exclusive-of-addressee pronoun *we*, expressing identity, is also extensively distributed throughout the texts, suggests that WHO also intends to make its identity known to the

⁴ <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-remarks-at-the-global-covid-19-summit-ending-the-pandemic-and-building-back-better-to-prepare-for-the-next>

auditors and to make its personal contribution in achieving measurable impacts on people’s health during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.4.3. Category second person pronoun

Regarding the category of the second person pronoun *you*, the analysis shows that there is an individual reference pronoun *you*, expressing identity, and a collective reference pronoun *you*, expressing identity.

We have identified 95 occurrences of the individual reference pronoun *you*, expressing identity, as indicated in Figure 7:

Figure 7

Type of pronoun	Value	Number of utterances	Percentages	Function
<i>you</i>	addressees	95	22.04%	expression of identity

The individual reference pronoun *you* refers to an addressee in the quotation:

Secretary-General, thank you for your support and advocacy throughout the pandemic, and your special focus on vaccine equity. Welcome, and you have the floor. (Who Director-General 7 October 2021)⁵.

The broad allocation of the individual reference pronoun *you*, expressing identity (22.04%), indicates that there is a high number of addressees. WHO Director-General asks representatives of institutions, states representatives and public figures to take the floor and address issues regarding the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are 10 occurrences of the collective reference pronoun *you*, expressing identity, as can be seen in Figure 8:

Figure 8

Type of pronoun	Value	Number of utterances	Percentages	Function
<i>you</i>	auditors	10	2.32%	expression of identity

The collective reference pronoun *you* refers to everyone who is listening to WHO Director-General in the quotation:

As you know, WHO’s global targets are to support every country to vaccinate at least 40% of its population by the end of this year, and 70% of the world’s population by the middle of next year. (Who Director-General 14 September 2021)⁶.

The low distribution of the collective reference pronoun *you*, shows that the auditors are mostly referred to by using the inclusive-of-addressee *we*, expressing solidarity (25.05%), rather than by using the collective reference pronoun *you*, expressing identity (2.32%).

⁵ <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---7-october-2021>

⁶ <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---14-september-2021>

3. Conclusions

We conclude that deictic pronominals have the function of expressing identity and the function of expressing solidarity in the texts selected from the institutional discourse of WHO on Covid-19 pandemic.

The function of the individual reference first person singular deictic pronouns *I*, the exclusive-of-addressee first person plural deictic pronouns *we*, the individual reference pronouns *you*, and the collective reference pronouns *you* is that of expressing identity.

The function of the inclusive-of-addressee first person plural deictic pronouns *we* is that of expressing solidarity.

The results of the analysis indicate the fact that both functions are prominent in the institutional discourse of WHO on Covid-19 pandemic.

The data collected from the texts show a high distribution of both individual deictic pronominals, as well as collective deictic pronominals. We have detected a high distribution of individual reference first person singular deictic pronouns *I* (104 occurrences representing 24.13% of the total amount of deictic pronominals), exclusive-of-addressee first person plural deictic pronouns *we* (114 occurrences representing 26.45% of the total amount of deictic pronominals), inclusive-of-addressee first person plural deictic pronouns *we* (108 occurrences representing 25.05% of the total amount of deictic pronominals) and individual reference pronouns *you* (95 occurrences representing 22.04% of the total amount of deictic pronominals).

The texts we have selected contain a low distribution of the collective reference pronouns *you* (10 occurrences representing 2.32% of the total amount of deictic pronominals).

The findings denote the fact that the auditors and the speakers are regarded as a collectivity (only 2.32% collective reference pronouns *you*, but 25.05% inclusive-of-addressee first person plural deictic pronouns *we*).

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