

## Reflecting social status and relationships: Social deixis in *Muhammad: The Last Prophet* (2002)

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of social deixis in the film *Muhammad: The Last Prophet* (2002). The film remains relevant to contemporary contexts as it offers important lessons on how effective communication is constructed in society, particularly among individuals of diverse social statuses. Social deixis refers to the linguistic means by which social relationships and communicative contexts are reflected in language. The aim of this study is to identify the types of social deixis used in the film and to describe their functions. Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, the data were collected from dialogues in the film and analyzed based on Fillmore's (1975) theory of social deixis. The analysis focuses on five types of social deixis: person marking, speech level, honorifics (including names, titles, and kinship terms), social acts, and linguistic performance. The findings indicate that social deixis in the film is realized through various linguistic forms and is shaped by factors such as participants, social relationships, and the communicative context. Furthermore, the use of social deixis reflects differences in social status and relationships among the characters. In conclusion, social deixis plays an essential role in conveying social meaning and shaping interpersonal interactions within the film.

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### INTRODUCTION

In everyday human life, film plays a significant role as a medium of communication. Film can be interpreted as a form of art to convey information and a message creatively and uniquely. Furthermore, as an audiovisual medium, films highlight the important thing of the story's movement, which serves as a key element in meaning-making (Atsil, 2025). Therefore, films have played a crucial role in shaping our society and influencing our values and beliefs.

The study of this film tells the story of Muhammad's journey as the last prophet. This film portrayed Mecca society, under the control of leaders who adhered to idol worship; slavery was widespread, women were subjected to torture, and property was frequently confiscated. At that time, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was just an ordinary person in Mecca. Then, he got a revelation (*wahyu*) at the cave of Hira, and it became a new journey of Muhammad's life to spread Islam to all people.

The film *Muhammad: The Last Prophet* (2002), which was directed and written by Richard Rich, has interesting content and valuable insight. Therefore, this article tries to analyse this subject because it can provide beneficial insight both from the perspective of Islamic history and in the communication style of the characters. For instance, the film is talking about the prophetic journey of Muhammad. The

journey began when he was in the Hira Cave and saw a bright white light surrounding him. When he looked up, he saw the Angel Gabriel standing before him. Overwhelmed, he fell silent. Then, the Angel Gabriel instructed the Prophet Muhammad to read the revelation. After that incident, the Prophet Muhammad went home feeling afraid and anxious. He told Khadija about what he had experienced. At that time, with her belief, Khadijah converted to Islam. One by one, the Prophet Muhammad's friends converted to Islam, as did others around him who resonated with his teachings.

Based on the preceding description, several important insights emerge, including the representation of social status. This aspect reflects the dynamics and hierarchies embedded in character interactions, providing a deeper understanding of their relationships and social positions. From a linguistic perspective, these phenomena can be accounted for through the concept of deixis.

Regarding the deixis types, Levinson (1983, pp.68-94) categorized deixis into five types: person deixis, time deixis, place deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. In terms of social deixis, Fillmore's book (1975, p.76) mentioned that social deixis refers to the analysis of sentence components that reflect, verify, or rely on a specific aspect of the social situation in which the speech act occurs. Similarly, Fillmore's description of deixis, as cited in Levinson (1983, p. 89), defines social deixis as the study of that aspect of sentences which reflect or establish or are determined by certain realities of the social situation in which the speech act occurs. Given the context, this study aims at identifying the deixis expressions within "Film Muhammad: The Last Prophet (2002)".

Examining this topic, it can give additional insight and references for further study, especially on deixis topics in Islamic films. In linguistics study specifically in Pragmatics, deixis has become a fascinating discussion within the pragmatics field. Pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding (Levinson, 1983, p.21). Meanwhile, Yule (1996, p.3) argues that pragmatics is the study of the meaning conveyed by speakers or writers and interpreted by listeners or readers.

Research on deixis has attracted considerable attention from previous researchers; the first study was written by Noerrofi'a and Bahri in 2019, entitled "The Analysis of Social Deixis in the Film Beauty and the Beast". They describe the kinds of social deixis and the function of social deixis in the film by using the theory of Levinson. The research identified two types of social deixis: relational social deixis and absolute social deixis. The next research was done by Khoeroh in 2020, entitled Social Deixis in Malcolm X (1992) Film. The study analysed social deixis in Malcolm X (1992) and described its functions.

The recent studies were the graduating paper from Salam (2023). He conducted the research entitled "Social Deixis Used by Kumail Nanjani in The Big Sick (2017)". Based on Fillmore's social deixis theory, the researcher classified the data into five types of social deixis: person, speech level, names, titles, and kinship terms. Linguistic performance can count as a social act, and linguistic performances can accompany social acts. Then, the recent research also conducted by Atsiil (2025) has a similar topic to this study.

Building on the discussion above, this study offers a distinct perspective compared to previous research by employing a different data source and theoretical framework approach. Accordingly, it contributes new insights to the field of Pragmatics, particularly in advancing the analysis of social deixis in Islamic films.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to analyse the data. The data are derived from Muhammad: The Last Prophet film by Richard Rich, released in 2002 with a running time of 95 minutes. The movie can be accessed on the YouTube channel through the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfDsedlR6F0>. The data of the film is transcribed based on the dialogue of all the characters.

Moleong in Nasution (2023, p.34) mentioned that qualitative research focuses on understanding participants' experiences, including their behaviours, perceptions, motivations, and actions. Qualitative

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research aims to provide a detailed description of people, objects, events, places, conversations, and more. Furthermore, Hariyanto (2023) mentioned that qualitative approaches are used to study and analyse the phenomenon descriptively. Similarly, Creswell (2014) and Merriam (2016), who argue that the other feature of the qualitative method is about the interpretative study. Meanwhile, Rasinger, as mentioned in Litosseliti (2010, p.52) mentioned that qualitative research concerns the structures and patterns of how something is.

In the data collection process, the researcher employs observation and documentation techniques. Through these methods, several systematic steps are undertaken to obtain the required data. First, during the observation stage, the researcher carefully watches the film to produce a transcription of the characters' dialogues. After completing the transcription, the researcher cross-checks it against the film to ensure accuracy and to identify any missing utterances, and it's important to capture all nuances in the transcription (Hale & Napier, 2013).

For the data analysis, the researcher classifies the data based on Fillmore's theory of social deixis, which includes five categories: person marking, speech level, honorifics (names, titles, and kinship terms), social acts, and linguistic performance. Social acts refer to how specific linguistic choices function to perform social roles, such as asserting authority or expressing intimacy, while linguistic performance relates to the ways speakers use language to enact their social identity or roles.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This paper identified several types of social deixis in the film *Muhammad: The Last Prophet* (2002), they are 1) Person marking, 2) Speech level, 3) Honorifics category (names, titles, and kinship), 4) social acts, that concerns on how certain linguistic choices can perform social functions, such as asserting authority or establishing intimacy), and 5) linguistic performances that can accompany social acts (it relates to the specific ways of the speakers to use language to perform their social identity or role).

The first finding, Person marking. This case consists of more than six hundred utterances, which are spoken by different characters. Second, Speech level. This type consists of fifteen utterances. Speech level can be divided into three categories: plain, polite, and respectful. The third type of Fillmore's social deixis is honorifics (names, titles, and kinship) (1975, p.76). They include 1) the speaker using the actual name of the speech partner (names). The fourth type of Fillmore's social deixis is linguistic performance. The last type of Fillmore's social deixis is linguistic performance that can accompany social action. It consists of five utterances in the film *Muhammad: The Last Prophet* that fall into this category. In this film, the utterances classified into this category are utterances that contain social actions where the speaker expresses their utterances, accompanied by supporting gestures.

### Discussions

#### *Person Marking*

Fillmore explains that person markings are pronouns used in each society, a device for marking people, such as pronouns in English and other languages (1975, p.76). Some words that can be classified as person-marking type are the words or utterances that classify individuals according to their social circumstances. The data identified that person marking consists of more than six hundred utterances. The following is an example.

Data 01

Line 9 (00:02:18 - 00:02:20)

SIHAM: Aba, where are you going?

ARWA: We can't just leave. We have to take care of this man first.

MALEK: (SILENT)

The data above gives an illustration from the conversation; there is a type of social deixis related to the person marking type conveyed by one of the participants in the film to label other participants in the dialogue. The participants in the dialogue were Siham as the speaker and Malek, as the partner. In the conversation, the term “you” is used. Siham uses the word ‘you’ when she addresses her father, Malek. The term “you” is a form of person marking because it expresses their closeness.

### *Speech Level*

This type is used to express direct speech clearly, politely, and humbly when interacting with others. Plain (clear) speech level consists of two utterances, polite consists of four utterances, and respect consists of nine utterances.

#### a) Plain

Plain is a category of speech level types that functions as a marker of a person in a conversation, where the speaker labels the speech partner as someone younger. Here is the example.

Data 02

Line 35 (00:05:32 – 00:05:43)

ABU LAHAB: You! Out of the way! Throw them again, boy. Remember, lose, and you become my slave.

HARITH: No!

ABU LAHAB: Come on! Hahaha.

The excerpt above shows how the word 'boy' is used by one of the participants in this dialogue, Abu Lahab to Harith, as an expression of mentioning someone younger. The word 'boy' in the excerpt can be categorized as a social deixis of speech level because of the different ages between the speaker and the speech partner. Within the dialogue, Abu Lahab's age is older than his speaking partner.

#### b) Polite

As mentioned by Fillmore in his book, the term “miss” is used to express politeness for older women (1975, p.81). Given the context, some terms from the dialogue can be classified as polite social deixis in this study, and there are four utterances that can be categorised as polite statements. Here is the example.

Data 03

Line 552 (01:29:50 - 01:29:55)

SIHAM: Sir, you can have bash wool.

POOR MAN: No, no, it belongs to you.

SIHAM: No, it belongs to you now.

In the above dialogue (Data 03), the word ‘sir’ is classified as a social deixis type of speech level of polite category, because, in this context, the speaker uses the word 'sir' to show respect for older people.

The context of this conversation is the story of a poor man who stayed at Malek's house and told him about his life. Then, he told me that he used to be a loom weaver. After listening to the poor man's story, Siham's heart was touched, and she wanted to help him. Then she offered her wool to the poor man. But the poor man refused because it belonged to Siham. But Siham insisted on giving him the wool anyway.

#### c) Humble/respect

Respect is one of the three categories in the type of social deixis speech level mentioned by Fillmore. Respect is used by people with a lower position to those with a higher position. The example can be similar, such as in data 03 between Siham and the Poor man.

### *Honorifics*

In this type of social deixis, names, titles, and kinship terms function as markers that include a person's name, the title a person receives, and kinship designations between people. It can be categorised as an honorific type. Names, titles, and kinship terms have different forms, and they are used depending on the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, the listener, and the person in question. For instance, the name is used to label the actual name, and the title is used for the individuals. Then for kinship in social deixis refers to a category that includes in the type of names, titles, and kinship. It is used as a personal reference depending on the relationship between the speaker and the addressee within a family (Fillmore, [1975](#), p.81).

Data 04

Line 1: (00:01:48–00:01:49)

ARWA: Slow down, Siham.

SIHAM: If they want Bashu's wool, I'll get all the money, right?

In the conversation above, the utterance is identified as social deixis with the kinship category, namely 'Siham'. The word 'Siham' is uttered by Arwa to express the actual name of one of the participants in the film Muhammad: The Last Prophet. The word 'Siham' refers to a person and can be classified as a kinship type because of the family relationship between the speaker (Arwa) and the speech partner (Siham), where the speaker (Arwa) is the mother of the speech partner (Siham).

### *Social Acts*

This type consists of insults, greetings, and expressions of gratitude. Insults are indecent expressions uttered by someone to label their speech partners. Insults can appear either by switching from formal to informal or by switching from informal to formal. Then, greetings can also refer to a warm welcome extended to someone or to good wishes expressed for a special occasion or event. In this film, the researcher found 3 utterances that belong to the social deixis type of linguistic performance. The last is gratitude, which includes utterances containing expressions of gratitude or thankfulness from speakers. In the English language, although this may not hold true for all languages, it is considered appropriate to express gratitude following the giving of a gift, the provision of a favour, the offering of a compliment, and in various other social interactions (Fillmore, [1975](#), p.85). In this movie, there are four instances of the type of linguistic performances that can count as social acts of gratitude.

### *Person Marking*

In this category, an utterance can be categorised as social deixis if the utterance is accompanied by an action by the speaker. The use of certain demonstrative gestures differs depending on whether the speaker takes his own point of view or that of the addressee (Fillmore, [1975](#), p.84). In this type, there are five pieces of data that are uttered by the characters in the film Muhammad: The Last Prophet. Here is an example:

Data 05

Line 20: (00:03:33 – 00:03:34)

MALEK: Please, I need it. My family is hungry.

AMR IBN ALAS: You should have thought of that before.

GUARD: Hey!

AMR IBN ALAS: Get him!

The excerpt from data 05 above can be categorised as social deixis, with the type of linguistic performance that can accompany social acts. The speaker uttered 'Get him', and it is used by the participants in this excerpt of the scene to give a command to the guard while pointing their hand toward

Malek, who ran away. Therefore, the statement of 'Get him' in the dialogue can be classified as a social deixis for the type of linguistic performance that can accompany social acts. The speaker's statement categorized as a social act because of the interaction between the speakers with speech partners, accompanied by supporting movements.

## CONCLUSION

This section concludes the discussion of the study above. The analysis has identified several utterances that illustrate the realisation of social deixis in the film *Muhammad: The Last Prophet* (2002). Given the context, the realisation of deixis within the film can be identified into five types: person marking; speech levels, consisting of plain, polite, and respectful forms; honorifics, including names, titles, and kinship terms; social acts; and linguistic performance, which accompanies social acts.

The characters performed the utterances that contain social deixis may change depending on the context of the situation. The way the characters express social deixis between individuals refers to their social level, which is influenced by the participants involved, the purpose of the interaction, their relationship, the situation and conditions, and the context of the conversation.

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