

## **A Study of Person Deixis Used in Place of Pronouns in the Myanmar Language**

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### **Abstract**

In communicating through the use of language with one another for a variety of social purposes on an everyday basis, people use deictic expressions to address themselves or others. It is found that there are various deictic expressions depending on the addresser and the addressee or the hearer. By politely using the deictic expressions in a social field, a successful social relationship will come up with the development of language and society. This paper presents from the point of view of semantics the person deixis used in place of pronouns in the Myanmar language.

**Key words:** pronouns, deictic expressions, language, semantics

### **Introduction**

Like a bridge connected for people to travel from a place to another, language serves as a medium for people to communicate smoothly with one another. People essentially speak for a variety of their daily social purposes. They address one another through the use of deictic expressions. Behind the deictic expressions, there is a reflection of soft social relations. It is found that there are various deictic expressions depending on the addresser and the addressee or the hearer. There are different deictic expressions depending on language users' sex, age, rank, position, behavior, character and background situations. In linguistics, such spoken terms are called address terms. The deictic expressions used in place of pronouns can be used in all places of pronouns as the addresser and those as the addressee. Likewise, it is found that unlike uses of pronouns in other languages, those in Myanmar are widespread on the basis of the fact that they are addressed. In this paper, different uses of deictic expressions are studied from the point of view of semantics.

### **Aim**

This paper is aimed at effectively depicting the relations between language and society through the effective use of deictic expressions in Myanmar, better understanding the nature and features of the Myanmar language, and relevantly applying language use. In addition, it is also aimed at building up a successful social relationship through the relevant use of deictic expressions in the social field, and strengthening communicative skills through the use of language.

### **Data and Method Used**

Collecting the deictic expressions used in the field of daily social relations, those used in social media, data from the articles in the daily-published Sandawchein newspaper, and the Rector's speech delivered on the occasion of the 19<sup>th</sup> convocation ceremony of Yangon University of Foreign Languages held on 12 January 2019, this paper was conducted from the view-points of Sociolinguistics and Semantics.

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### Research Questions

- (1) How important are deictic expressions in the field of social relations?
- (2) How are person deixis in the Myanmar language used differently?
- (3) Can person deixis set up a successful social relationship?
- (4) Unless the deictic expressions used in social media are used systematically, which difficulties may rise up in safeguarding the Myanmar language and literature?

### Literature Review

As regards deictic expressions, Ma Soe Soe Myint's dissertation on "A Pragmatic Study of Interactive Speech Patterns", Ma Aye Mi Aung's dissertation on "Address Terms in the Myanmar Language", and Ma Nwe Ni Tin's paper on "A Study of the Vocabulary Used in Social Media" have already come out. However, dissertations and research papers which focus on person deixis have not come out yet. With a view to filling the gap, this paper studied person deixis classified.

#### 1. Deictic Expressions and Experts' Views

As regards deictic expressions, language experts define them in various ways. A language expert Finch (Finch, 2000, 214) said, "Deixis is a Greek word meaning 'indicate or show'".

Likewise, a language expert Yule (Yule, 1996, 10) said, "Deixis is a technical term from Greek. It means 'points' via language. Any language form used to accomplish this pointing is called a deictic expression."

Deixis is of three kinds: person deixis, temporal deixis, and spatial deixis. It is found that in quite a number of languages including Myanmar, person deixis is of different uses and expanded with specialized words and expressions depending on age, status, gender, extent of familiarity, background situations.

Myanmar language expert Sayagyi U Pe Maung Tin also said, "The words used in place of nouns both in writing and in speaking are termed pronouns." (U Pe Maung Tin, Myanmar Grammar, 1954).

'I', 'we', 'you', 'he', 'she', and 'it' can be said to be direct person deixis. In addition, in the Myanmar language, the use of တို့. ('we') is found to be generally indicative of the inclusion of the addresser and others.

In saying, တို့ကတော့ မုန့်ဟင်းခါးကြိုက်တယ် (I/we like mohingha), တို့. refers to the addresser as a single person, but it is also used in a situation in which others are included and referred to. The addresser can be addressed as ငါ၊ ကျွန်တော်၊ ကျွန်မ၊ ကျုပ်၊ ကိုယ် and တို့. The addressee can be addressed as မင်း၊ ခင်ဗျား၊ နင်၊ and ညည်း. The deictic expressions are used in various ways depending on intimacy and background situations.

#### 2. Deictic expressions in personal names

Deictic expressions in personal names are found to indicate familiarity, formality, respect and value, but sometimes politeness or rudeness arising out of one's feelings or emotions. Deictic expressions in personal names can be divided as full-name deixis, prefixed-name deixis, shortened-name deixis, and duplicated-name deixis.

## 2.1. Full-name deixis

As regards deictic expressions, personal names are used in various forms depending on one's feelings and emotions. For example,

- (1) ခင်ခင်ထား စာမကျက်ဘူးလား: (“Khin Khin Htar, won't you memorize your lessons?”)
- (2) သန္တာအောင် မြန်မြန်လုပ်လေ (“Thanda Aung, hurry up!”)
- (3) နွယ်နီတင် နေကောင်းလား: (“Nwe Ni Tin, how are you?”)

In the above-mentioned sentences, the emotional states held by the addresser towards the addressee can be seen. In sentence (1), in a situation which a girl named Khin Khin Htar was asked by her mother to memorize her lessons, the addresser used her given name instead of the common term of dearness သမီး: (daughter) indicating her impatience towards her daughter. In sentence (2), the addresser's impatience can be seen by addressing her friend who was getting late for school through the use of her given name.

In sentence (3), the greeting နွယ်နီတင်နေကောင်းလား: seems to be indicative of unintimacy and formality. Deictic expressions on given names indicate the fact that the elder address the younger, the higher-ranking official his or her subordinate, and the peers among themselves. On the other hand, depending on the situations between the addresser and the addressee, they seem to express intimacy, unintimacy, or unfamiliarity.

## 2.2. Prefixed-name deixis

Prefixes are used in addressing names. For example, deictic expressions addressing girls such as Ah Hla, Mi Chaw and Ma Maw are the uses indicating intimacy. Name prefixes such as Maung, U and Daw are also used in different situations depending on age, rank and formality. For example, it is found that U Tun Oo, Ko Than Soe, Maung Myat Thu, Daw Thuzar, Ma Nilar, Ah Hla, Ah Tun, Mi Chaw, Ma Naw, and so on are in common use. Likewise, name prefixes such as ‘င’ , ‘ဖိုး’ and ‘မိ’ are also used. The prefix ‘င’ seems to indicate intimacy or belittlement. In ancient judicial trials, the use of ‘င’ is found to be meant for male persons, for example, ငစံအောင်. Likewise, the use of ‘ဖိုး’ is a term of dearness addressed to male persons, for example, ‘ဖိုးအောင်’ for မောင်မောင်. For female persons, ‘မိ’ is used before their given names as a term of dearness among themselves such as ‘မိအေး’ and ‘မိဖြူ’. ‘မိ’ is also used for degrading others. However, the use of ‘မိ’ before female names of Mon is culturally indicative of gentleness.

## 2.3. Shortened-name deixis

Myanmar people use various deictic expressions in addressing each other depending on background situations, feelings, emotions and intimacy. For example, the name သီတာစန်း: is shortened as စန်း:, မိုးယဉ်ငြိမ်း: as မိုးငြိမ်း:, and အေးမြမြစိုး: as အေးမြ. Such shortened-name deixis indicate friendship and kindness between the addresser and the addressee.

The use of shortened names is found not only in Myanmar people but also in other nationalities. For example, in English names, ‘Rob’ is dearly used for ‘Robert’, ‘Elizabeth/Liz’ for ‘Elizabeth Taylor’, and ‘Jolly’ for Angelina Jolly. The use of shortened names to address each other depending on the intimacy between the addresser and the addressee is lovely.

#### 2.4. Duplicated-name deixis

Duplicated-name deixis indicates the intimacy between the addresser and the addressee. For example, 'Soe Soe' is duplicated for 'Marlar Soe', 'Naing Naing' for 'Shwewah Naing', and 'Aung Aung' for 'Thiha Aung'. In duplicating names, the final element is found to be duplicated.

#### 2.5. Deictic expressions combining occupations and names

Some deictic expressions are found to be used by the addresser in addressing the addressee. Deictic expressions combining occupations and names are, for example,

ဆရာကြီး ဦးသိဟ၊ ဆရာအေး၊ ဆရာစ and ဆရာသောင်း

တီချယ်မီး၊ တီချယ်မိုး (တီချယ် is used for female teachers.)

ဒေါက်တာတင်ဆွေလတ် (medical doctor)

ဗိုလ်မှူးဘသောင်း (army officer)

Deictic expressions combining occupations and names seem to be indicative of formality and respectfulness.

#### 2.6. Deictic expressions combining degrees and names

The educational degree one holds is used before one's given name. (For example, those who hold doctoral degrees are formally addressed 'Dr' before their given names.)

Dr. Kyi Shwin

Dr. Mi Mi Aung

Dr. Yin Myo Thu

Such deictic expressions are used formally at respective workplaces. They indicate respectfulness and formality.

#### 2.7. Deictic expressions used in kinship terms

There are such deictic expressions used in kinship terms addressed to one's own relatives as အဖေ၊ အမေ၊ အဘိုး၊ အဖွား (မေကြီး)၊ ဦးလေး၊ အဒေါ်၊ ဘကြီး၊ အစ်ကို၊ အစ်မ၊ မောင်လေး၊ ညီလေး၊ ညီမလေး၊ တူလေး၊ တူမလေး၊ သားလေး၊ သမီးလေး and မြေးလေး. Such kinship terms are also used in addressing those who are not one's own relatives, but treated as though they were one's own relatives. In addition, spouses tend to address each other through the use of the terms addressed to them by their offspring such as အဖေကြီး and အမေကြီး. Deictic expressions used in kinship terms indicate dearness, warmth, and intimate family relations.

#### 2.8. Deictic expressions on occupations

On the basis of the addressed persons' occupations, there are deictic expressions used in place of pronouns. For example, ဝန်ကြီး (minister), ပြန်ဝန် (minister for information), ဆရာကြီး (headmaster), ဝါချုပ် (rector), ညွှန်ချုပ် (director general), ဗိုလ်မှူးကြီး (colonel),

ဒေါက်တာ (doctor), ဆရာ (teacher), ဆရာဝန် (medical doctor), ကျောင်းဆရာ (male school teacher), ဆရာမ (female school teacher), မန်နေဂျာ (ဂျာကြီး) (manager), ရှေ့နေကြီး (lawyer), မင်းသား (actor), မင်းသမီး (actress) ကားဆရာ (driver), ပန်းချီဆရာ (artist) ကာတွန်းဆရာ (cartoonist), စားဖိုမှူး (chef).

Deictic expressions on occupations are indicative of formality and respect on the one hand, and non-intimacy on the other hand.

**2.9. Deictic expressions on appearance**

In addressing people, Myanmar people use deictic expressions on appearance rather than names. For example, အရှည်ကြီး၊ လန်ဘား၊ အပုလေး၊ အသေးလေး၊ ဖက်တီး၊ ဝတ်တံ၊ ကုလားမ၊ စီးကွက်၊ ငမဲ၊ ပိုးဟတ်ဖြူ and ငါးဖောင်ရိုး.

Deictic expressions on appearance are used to show respect to and to look down on others.

**2.10. Deictic expressions on habitual actions**

On the basis of the people's mental states and their habitual actions, deictic expressions on habitual actions are used. For example, အရက်သမား၊ ဖဲသမား၊ လူလိမ်၊ ဆေးသမား၊ စာကြမ်းပိုး၊ ဦးကပ်စေး၊ ကော်တစ်ရာ၊ စပ်စုမ၊ ငပိချက်၊ ငတုံး၊ စိတ်ပုတ်၊ ငပျင်း၊ လော်စပီကာ၊ မျောက်လွှဲကျော်၊ မျောက်မူးလဲ၊ ရေခဲတုံး၊ လေအို၊ ဂျင်းကောင်၊ စာကြမ်းပိုး၊ စာအုပ်ကြီး၊ မလှချင်၊ ဆန်းဆန်းတင်၊ ဝေသာန္တရာ၊ တေမိ၊ ကာလနဂါး and နူကော.

Deictic expressions on habitual actions are indicative of other people's weaknesses.

**2.11. Deictic expressions on emotions**

Certain deictic expressions are found to indicate the addresser's attitudes towards the addressee. For example,

- သားလေး၊ မီးငယ်လေး၊ ကလေး
- အချစ်လေး၊ အသဲလေး၊ သဲတုန်လေး
- ချစ်မကြီး၊ ချစ်ကိုကြီး
- ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်ကြီး၊ ဘိုးတော်၊ ဘွားတော်၊ လူကြီး
- ဂေါက်ကြောင်၊ လူဆိုး၊ အကောင်၊ အရူး၊ မိန်းမ၊ မယ်မင်းကြီးမ

Deictic expressions on emotions are found to vary depending on the addresser's emotions towards the addressee. In particular, they reflect the addresser's attitudes towards the addressee.

**2.13. Deictic expressions on loan words**

A contact between the two languages enables the words of a language to enter the vocabulary of the other language. The loan words that enter a language in this way are used as

deictic expressions. For example, the loan words from English coming into Myanmar are found to be used as deictic expressions, for example,

အန်ကယ်၊ အန်တီ၊ တီချာ၊ ဒယ်ဒီ၊ မာမီ

အယ်ဒီတာ၊ ဒါရိုက်တာ၊ မန်နေဂျာ

I, You, MD, AE, EC, Driver, CEO

The above-mentioned loan words are found to be used as deictic expressions in the Myanmar language.

#### 2.14. Deictic expressions mixed with language codes

While a language is basically being used, certain elements of another language are mixed into it. For example,

“You” ကို “I” ပြောသားပဲ၊ စာကြိုးစားပါလို့.

I told you to study hard.

“engineer” ကြီး ဘာတွေအလုပ်ရှုပ်နေလဲ

Hi, Engineer, what are you busy with?

ဒါကတော့ ကျွန်မတို့ကျောင်းရဲ့ “rector” ပါ

He’s the “rector” of our university.

သမီး ဒီနေ့ခွင့်တိုင်ချင်လို့ပါ “teacher”

Today, I’d like to ask leave from you, teacher.

Deictic expressions mixed with language codes are widely used among educated persons.

#### 2.15. Deictic expressions used in respective regions

Certain deictic expressions are found to vary depending on different regions. They include (1) deictic expressions addressed to young people and (2) deictic expressions addressed to old people.

- (1) Deictic expressions addressed to young people

မိုးသား (မန္တလေး)(Mandalay)

သားငယ်/ကောင်လေး၊ ငယ်ငယ်/မိငယ် (Mawlamyaing)

သားဂန်း/မီးဂန်း (Dawei)

ကောင်ငယ်/နောင်ငယ်၊ ကောင်မငယ် (Myeik)

အပု (Kyangin)

လုံမ (Mid-land Myanmar)

- (2) Deictic expressions addressed to old people

အဘ (Father) [Mid-land regions – Butalin, Monywa, Minhla] {used for one’s own relatives}

အမ (Mother) [Mid-land regions – Butalin, Monywa, Minhla] {used for one’s own relatives}

ဘကြီး (Uncle) [Gyobingauk] {used for one’s own relatives}

ပေါင်စန်းရင်/ဖွားစန်းရင် (Grandmother) [Ohnhtwe Village, Htilin] {used for both relatives and non-relatives}

မိကြီး၊ မိလေး၊ မိလတ် (Aunt) [Htilin] {used for both relatives and non-relatives}

ကျွန်တော် / ကျွန်မ/ ငါ၊ အကျွန် (I) [Htilin]

Deictic expressions used in respective regions are lovable, and provide a large number of regional knowledge. However, some deictic expressions addressed to races are found to face them certain difficulties in doing office work and some other matters. For example, when they are enrolled for registration, they just give their so-called names instead of their given ones, causing difficulties to them.

**2.16. Deictic expressions used based on background situations**

Deictic expressions used based on background situations include မင်း၊ နင်၊ ခင်ဗျား၊ ရှင်၊ တော်၊ ငါ၊ ကျုပ်၊ ကျွန်တော်၊ ကိုယ်. In situations where intimate friends address each other, they say မင်း၊ နင်၊ ငါ, and in situations where spouses angrily address each other, they say:

Husband: မင်းကို ကလေးတွေကို ဂရုစိုက်ပါလို့ ငါဘယ်နှစ်ခါပြောရမလဲ။

*How many times do I have to tell you to take care of the children?*

Wife: ရှင်က ကျုပ် ကိုချည်းလွှဲမချနဲ့လေ။ ရှင်မှာလည်းတာဝန်ရှိတယ်။

*Don't blame me alone repeatedly. You are also responsible.*

The two male friends address each other in an intimate situation, as indicated below:

A: ဟေ့လူ ခင်ဗျားဘယ်တော့လာမလဲ။

*Hey, man, when are you coming?*

B: ကျွန်တော် အခုတော့မအားသေးဘူး။ ရှေ့တစ်ပတ်လောက်တော့လာခဲ့ပါမယ်။

*I'm not free now. I think I'll come next week.*

Therefore, what is said by intimate friends themselves changes on the basis of background situations. For example, they usually address each other with their names, but when a ceremony or a meeting is held, they address each other using “U” or “Daw” before their names according to such background situations.

**2.17. Deictic expressions used on wedding ceremonies**

On wedding ceremonies, the Master of Ceremonies addresses the bride and the bridegroom in the midst of the audience as:

မင်္ဂလာမောင်မယ်/ မင်္ဂလာမောင်နှံ/ မင်္ဂလာသတို့သား/ မင်္ဂလာသတို့သမီး

**2.18. Deictic expressions used on convocation ceremonies**

The Head of Education, who awards degrees to the candidates who attend the convocation ceremony as မောင်တို့ / မယ်တို့, as indicated by his speech extracted below:

[Extracted from the Rector’s speech delivered on the occasion of the 19<sup>th</sup> convocation ceremony of the Yangon University of Foreign Languages held on 12 January 2019.]

**3. Deictic expressions used in social media**

If deictic expressions used in social media are studied, what is addressed to male and female persons is found to be interesting. However, although it seems to be a good symbol from the point of view of linguistics on the one hand as the vocabulary of the Myanmar language increases, the form, essence and characteristics of the language may disappear on the other hand as its speech sounds and orthography are changed. Therefore, deictic expressions used in social media are not to be overused.

**3.1. Deictic expressions addressed to male persons**

- သူငယ်ချင်း - သားကြီး/သားရီး
- ကိုကြီး- ကွီး
- ကိုကို- ခိုခို
- အစ်ကို- အယ်ကို/ဘခို
- ညီလေး- ညေး

**3.2. Deictic expressions addressed to female persons**

- Sister → Sis
- ညီမလေး → ညလေး
- အမ → အယ်မ
- ကလေး → ခေး/ခလိန်
- အမကြီး → မွီး
- မမ → မတ်မတ်
- ချစ်မ → ချိုမ
- သမီး → စမီး



It is found that စမီး is widely used for သမီး (daughter) in social media. Such wider uses in social media spread to printed media. The use of စမီး as in စမီးလှလားဟင် (Am I beautiful?) said by a female person addressing herself, is found to be mentioned on pages (a) and (b) in the special section of the daily newspaper “Sandawchain” (Volume 3, No. 1001) published on 20 January 2016:

A girl on Facebook looked lovely on well-known B6 12 with her lips pouted a little. I really gave her a ‘LIKE’. I happened to remember such a girl in the habit of taking her selfies posted on Facebook and asking, “Am I beautiful?” (Sandawchain, 20-9-2016, pages (b) and (c), lines 6-10)



Therefore, the deictic expression ‘စမီး’ is found to come to printed media through social media. It can be assumed that the use of ‘သ’ from သမီး is changed to ‘စမီး’, which is more dearly addressed. In fact, the use of the consonant ‘သ’ is changed to the use of the consonant ‘စ’ .

**3.3. Deictic expressions expressing dearness**

Deictic expressions depend on a situation relating to both the addresser and the addressee. Such expressions are basically used in face-to-face communication. (Khin Aye, 2014, p 240)

အချစ်လေး	→	ချစ်လေး
အချစ်ဆုံးလေး	→	အချစ်တုန်းလေး
ချစ်ချစ်တုန်းလေး	→	စေ့ငှ
ကလေး	→	ခေး
ချစ်စရာကောင်းသူ	→	ကျူတီလေး
အတိုအပြတ်လေးများဝတ်၍ကြည့်ကောင်းသူ	→	ရှော်တီလေး
ကိုယ်ခန္ဓာတောင့်ဖြောင့်သူ	→	အကိတ်လေး

As these expressions are basically used in face-to-face communication, they are also basically used in online media, thereby indicating the relationship between language and social community.

**3.4. Loan deictic expressions used in social media**

It is a characteristic of language that language contact enables the words of a language to come into another language and to become loan words that have come to exist in that language. (Khin Min, 1997, p 138)

Since ancient times, there has been a tradition in which contact between nations enables foreign words to come into the Myanmar language as loan words. In the same way, since the colonial period, contact between languages due to political and military affairs has enabled English loan words to come into the Myanmar language. Nowadays, thanks to sophisticated technologies, people around the world can easily communicate each other. From that, English loan words have entered the Myanmar language with momentum. Now, such words as computer, internet, e-mail, and Facebook have been internalized and familiarized in the Myanmar language.

Saya Maung Khin Min (Danubyu) shed light on the fact that “the computer and the internet have emerged for easy communication. People from afar can not only speak but also see each other. They can do the chatting. Through Facebook, broad communication can be done. Video conferencing can be done. Communication technologies that will emerge in the future are open-ended.” (Khin Min, 2015, p 47) Therefore, English words have entered Myanmar vocabulary used in social media through technologies, and mixed with Myanmar words as loan words widely used in the language. For example,

sister → sis

brother	→	bro
friend	→	fri
expired	→	ex
temporary love/ secret love	→	crush
secret dater	→	silent
lovely person	→	cutie
lonely person	→	FA

It is found that the loan words entering the Myanmar language are widely used in social media.

### **Benefits of deictic expressions used in social media**

It is found that deictic expressions used in social media bring benefits and bad effects as well to language. According to the nature that language increases, new words are loaned, expanded, and created. As demanded by the current period, a large number of words have entered the language on the basis of new ideas, new situations, new businesses, and new technologies. Thanks to new words, new pieces of knowledge have increased. Therefore, by relevantly using new words used in social media in accordance with the criteria, rules and regulations of a society, the language in the society can be used effectively.

### **Bad effects of deictic expressions used in social media**

Most of the young people are familiar with social media. They adorably use social media. When the use of social media is repeated, new words are created. The existing words such as ကိုကြီး and ကလေး are shortened as ကွီး and ခေး and the use of ဘဲကြီး is changed to ဘီးကျဲ as a tongue twister. Such uses were first started with some person, and are gradually followed by other people around him or her spreading to many persons who have come to think that such uses are modern. In the course of time, such errors may be thought as correct, and the features of language and literature may be lost.

From the point of view of sociology, if such deictic expressions used in social media are used in great numbers, it will be difficult to hear and read genuine Myanmar language in Myanmar society. With the passing of time, the features of the Myanmar language may be lost. Although the fact that language is productivity is true, the idea that only if one speaks deictic expressions used in social media, one may attain social acceptance and be modern may deviate the trends of Myanmar language and literature.

### **Findings on Person Deixis**

As there are deictic expressions used in terms of direct relationship, there are also those used in terms of friendship and respect. One's real mother is addressed "mum" in terms of kinship, but women of one's mother's age are usually addressed "mum" in terms of respect. However, a male person at the age of one's real father is not addressed "dad" apart from one's father-in-law. It is found that deictic expressions used at home and those used outside are different.

### Overview

Person deictic expressions are found to vary depending on age, occupation and extent of intimacy. In the Myanmar language, a systematic use of person deixis is to reveal Myanmar people's respectfulness, adoration, value, dearness and friendship. An effective use of deictic expressions in place of pronouns may lead to a situation in which they flourish in the field of social relations.

### Conclusion

Deictic expressions in the Myanmar language explicitly indicate the relationship between language and society. By using them relevantly depending on the social situations of the society concerned, a variety of social matters that are to be carried out within a social community will be smoothly accomplished, and communicative skills will advance. With that, deictic expressions in foreign languages will then be comparatively studied with those in the Myanmar language.

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