

Research Article

Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (QJSSH)

An Analysis of Pragmatic Semantics of Second Person Deixis in the Play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by Gore Vidal

Sana Fatima ¹



Abstract: Deixis is the study which refers that words in a language are wholly dependent to its context. It stresses that clearance of context is quite important to derive exact meanings. Relying on the former studies this study is stemmed on the analysis of pragmatic semantics of second person deixis in the play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal'. In present research, the researcher used the research method which was projected by (Miller, 2018). He divided the methodology into three steps: collection of the data, analysis of the data, and presenting the result of the analysis. The researcher also used the notes-taking technique to explain second person deixis. It was descriptive research based on qualitative method in which observation was used as a tool to make analysis. The results have pedagogical implications as well.

Key Words: Pragmatic Semantics, Visit to a Small Planet, Gore Vidal, Language, Researchers

Introduction

Concern of person deixis is to encode the role of people, involved in a speech act where utterance is in the query, being delivered (Stapleton, 2017). As it is quite clear that it is undoubtedly concerned to the grammatical categories of person. The speaker of narrator can be diverse from the source of its utterance and the receiver from the targets and the hearer of the by standards is dissimilar from the addressee or targets. The first person in grammatical categorization, is one's reference to himself in speech. The encoding of the speaker's reference, in second person deixis, is to one or more than one addressee. Contrary to above two, the third person deals to personal and entities who are neither speakers nor addressees of the utterance in question (Lyons, 1977). Person deixis is no doubt, an important part of pragmatics. Especially with reference to the addresser, the addressee and the third party involved in a conversation, person deixis highlights the social status, interpersonal relationship and many other factors of the conversational parties.

Analysis of second person deixis shows that speaker's selection of form is directly a linguistic cue of status relationship with the addressee rooted on the mixture of situational factors, determines the style, expansion, along with ensuing product of the conversation. There are many second person deictic systems, found in the world's languages from moderately simple to complex types. Second person deixis refers to the transmission of the speaker's reference to one or more listeners (Levinson, 1983). Normally second person is referred towards a person or persons who are addressed. The word 'you' – personal pronoun is second person deixis. 'You' as a second person deixis is a deictic reference towards one or more than one person identified as addressee. The second person deixis has been used as:

- a) Singular second person deixis: you, yourself, your, yours.
- b) Plural second person deixis: you, yourselves, your, yours

As for as the second person deixis is concerned, most of the European languages talk about both types of deixis. One is T-form that is mostly applied to converse with close relationships; while other is V-form, used in plural terms to give respect or for showing difference to unfamiliar people (Duck, 2007). V-form

¹ Assistant Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

✉ Sana2733@uog.edu.pk

▪ **Corresponding Author:** Sana Fatima (✉Sana2733@uog.edu.pk)

▪ **To Cite:** Fatima, S. (2025). An Analysis of Pragmatic Semantics of Second Person Deixis in the play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal'. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(2), 118–124. <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.vi-ii.25348>

and T-form both were in Old English which truly reveal the social status, position and reverence of the addressee involved in communication. In old English there were two forms *thou* and *ye*. *you* replaced the *ye* later. Hence, the selection of (thou or you) as a single form, highlights the speaker's familiarity level to the addressee i.e. intimacy or social relationship. 'You' was in clear terms applied for the persons superior to someone in social status or ranking whereas 'thou' was attached with people divergent status as compared to oneself. Besides, 'thou' was also used as something reserved for insult, moral distance or someone's being inferior when two people were otherwise socially equal.

Contrary to T form, for having sarcastic comments or satire on a person belonging to a lower status, the speaker can apply V- form. In Old English, we can find that the use of V form and T form in order to refer someone, tell much of the social information as far as the status of a person while communicating. The present study is strongly in line with the above given justification. The present research is set out to make analysis of second person deixis with an objective to find out the true meaning of you in a particular context. Regarding this the research question was posed.

Research Question

As it had been described earlier, the present study focused on the analysis of second person deixis 'you' and worked on the following question particularly:

1. How many types does second person deixis 'you' imply in the play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal'?

Literature Review

A considerably detailed study on deixis had been made by many researchers. Lyons in his 'Semantics' published in 1977, had a detailed study of deixis and mainly focused over time, space and person deixis. His (Lyons, 1977) definition of dioxies has been categorized among the most reliable till present day. The occurrence of deictic projection as an imitative use of deixis had also been discussed by him but he had not given an elaborative account of it. Another study made by Fillmore, had similar views as are given by Lyons and argued that to explain deixis stood for, explaining reference in a set context, that would be like that of speaker-centered context. He took interest in the study of time, space, social and discourse deixis and recommended about the deictic and non-deictic usage of deixis.

The study of person deixis was first mentioned in "The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity" (Brown & Gilman, 1960) so, many scholars, undoubtedly had probed over person deixis from sociolinguistic, semantics, pragmatics and contrastive perspective of linguistics. In article, 'The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity' by Brown and Gilman worked on all the historical factors in which second person plural pronoun got remarkable repute in the Romance and Germanic languages and was embellished with new meanings such as the address form with the social superiority. Brown and Levinson (1979) cited in (Li, 2009) took to the point how do the social factors and different aspects of verbal interaction relate to each other. The person deixis as a vast field to work on, was also probed deeply by the Chinese scholars. Zhang (2013) had great interest over the explanation, categorization and basic implication of the deictic expressions. For working on the person deixis particularly, on lexical and grammatical level by (Zhao, 2012) systemic and functional theories were applied. Sociolinguists highlighted the social evidence regarding the addresser and recipient in the communicative background, until the 1970s or 1980s, by embracing effect of discourse analysis. A discourse analysis, by Li (1999), was carried out, depending on the personal pronoun contrary to that Hailong (2001) cited in (Li, 2009), who by keeping the foundation of work on the selection of the option between "we" and "wo-men" in modern Chinese monologues, carried out sociolinguistic research and resulted that a number of communicators implied two personal pronouns on a different rate for expressing their ideas. The outcomes so far highlighted the addresser's prominent traits of self-expression like that of self-reliance and modesty. Dylgjeri & Kazazi (2013) enquired the unconventional use of person deixis in the 'Scarlet Letter' to measure the effect of pragmatics and unconventional selection of person deixis in artistic style. Taking the above-mentioned research as a foundation, this paper focuses on the analysis of pragmatic semantics of the second person deixis in English play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal'. The results of the present research analysis are applicable to the adequate translation of second person deixis 'you'.



Research Objectives

The objectives of present research are:

- ▶ The main focus of the research was to find out how had second person deixis 'you' been applied in the play?
- ▶ Secondly, the present study was in search to find the value/importance of context for deriving the accurate meaning.
- ▶ Thirdly, the objective was to help EFL learners to differentiate among different applications of 'you' in varied contexts.

Research Methodology

In present research, the researcher used research method, which was projected by, (cited in (Universitas Andalas). He categorized the methodology in the following three steps: collection of data, analysis of data, and presenting the results of analysis. Collection of data for analysis was based on a play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal'. It was a descriptive or qualitative study in which observation was used as a tool of analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was based on the content of a play. The researcher studied the whole play and applied the technique of note-taking in order to separate and highlight all the dialogues to analyze second person deixis 'you' in its particular context, for perceiving the true nature of meaning (Sundaryanto, 1993).

Data Analysis Procedure

The second step was analyzing the data. Second person deixis according to their nature of meaning were identified and classified through referential method in which certain kind of speaker, setting, background of use, and other factors helped in perceiving a particular meaning of 'you'.

Results

To be able to know the outcomes of the research, the presented result is descriptive in nature. We came to know that 'you', *regardless of age, social status gender and etc. could only be used for an addressee or addressees*. Application of 'you' for someone on different occasions had implicit variety of meanings based on pragmatics, as are presented in the following analysis. The analysis of present play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal' shows that the application of second person deixis 'you' works in order to refer three kinds of pragmatic meanings. As:

"You" as V form

V form of 'you' is analyzed through the conversation on formal occasions to a superior or an unfamiliar person. In general, the researcher found many contextual clues in the conversation for making a judgement of the relationship or bonding between the addresser and addressee in the play 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal'.

Use of Title and Family Name

In 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal' the addresser explicates reverence or specific distance to the addressee by using "title and family name" together with 'you', as in the play after the T.V broadcast Roger Spelling was talking with the technicians. Here are some examples:

a. Technician: See you next week, Mr. Spelling.

Spelling: Thank you, boys.

In the example, second person deixis 'you' has been used in its connection to title and family name as well as, the context also indicates that technicians are juniors of the Roger Spelling. So here we get the meanings of reverence and respect from the second person deixis 'you'.

In the same way, when spaceship of Kreton lands, the conversation in between kreton and Spelding refers the relationship of *respect* and *unfamiliarity* because of the formal discussion in which second person deixis 'you' has been applied with title and family name as:

b. Spelding: Where are *you* from Mr. Kreton?

Kreton: (Evasively) another place.

This form of expression is usually used in first meetings. In above mentioned example 'you' is used together with Mr. Kreton by Spelding to find out the identity of kreton which is a burning question and whole media is trying to solve the riddle of spaceship owned by Kreton. So, the context tells that both of the persons, involved in conversation are unfamiliar. So, here, 'you' suggests meaning of *respect* and *unfamiliarity*. This type of expression is once again used in the play when Spelding's house was under martial law because of the adventurous arrival of Kreton and Spelding got irritated because of this sudden martial law. So, Kreton showed his sympathy towards Spelding in the following dialogues:

c. Kreton. Poor Mr. Spelding! If *you* like, I shall go. That would solve everything.

Once again *title and family name* are used together so, here, 'you' encode pragmatic meaning of *reverence*.

Pronominal Expression

It is about the co-occurrence of 'you' that gives the differential connotations with pronominal expression in the same utterance. The power semantics were expressed in 16th century by the use of pronominal expression. But consequently, such terrific footings were not welcomed for a regular practice specifically to English culture. In the play, pragmatic meanings of power are found in the very beginning of the play after the telecasting of Spelding's T.V show.

a. Technicians: Good show tonight, Mr. Spelding.

Spelding: Thank you.

Technician: Yes *sir*, *you* were right on time.

In these lines, second person deixis 'you' denotes *power semantics of reverence* as *sir* is an indication of being a boss of someone. So, the appearance of 'you' soon after this power title *sir* refers power semantic of reverence or respect.

Lexical Items or Syntactic Patterns

Not only 'you' implied a deferential reading in above two examples but also such interpretations were also gained through periphrastic expressions., and/or modal verbs and syntactic structures. In the play when Powers takes permission of Spelding in order to have investigation from Kreton (a visitor from another planet).

a. Powers: Roger, do *you* mind if we use *your study*.

In the above examples, second person deixis 'you' alone actually does not show any deference. In the given example, Powers is a General of army and he uses a polite expression *do you mind* in order to take the permission of Roger Spelding for using his study. The expression '*your study*' refers to the ownership of Spelding and gives a sense of superiority.

Differential expression has been used once again in the play when Powers tells Kreton that he is going to take his ship apart and kreton states that powers and Aide would never be successful in his mission because he has made an invisible wall around this ship. So, Aide surprisingly appears and talks about their inability to get an access to the ship because the invisible wall is protecting it. Powers surprisingly asks how he did this. Then kreton replies:

b. Kreton: I could not begin to explain. Now if *you* don't mind, I think we should go in and see our hosts.

In the second example we get a differential meaning through the polite expression '*if you don't mind*' by Kreton who a visitor from other planet and lands in Spelding's house is who becomes a host of him. Being a host and owner of the house Spelding is superior to Kreton.



We get power semantics of 'you' based on differential expression of superiority in the play when Kreton insists to go out of study at the arrival of the Aide with the report of an invisible wall around the ship. Kreton comes out to see his hosts and power gives instruction to the Aide:

c. Powers: Don't let him out of *your* sight.

'You' in this dialogue don't make any special difference. '*Don't let him out of your sight*' is an ordering statement which refers to the superiority of rank of General over the Aide in his social circle. Therefore, here is the domination of power semantics.

To reimburse the loss of V vs T divergence in deixis, the difference is measured by the mentioned devices which have been discussed above. To Give a respectful impression, People of higher status speak politely so that they may be recognized as belonging to the higher social status.

Differential expression of 'you' is also applied to highlight the superiority of an addresser in terms of age, occupation, wealth, education and so on. On formal occasion, people also use the differential expression to address each other. Despite the different social status, strangers or unfamiliar persons in their first meeting mostly use the second person deixis 'you' with a combination of differential expression for giving an expression of politeness.

'You' for Generic Reference

Generic reference is, hence forth, a non- deictic use of 'you' which is free from referring to any particular person(s). In the play, second person deixis 'you' have also been used to refer the whole humanity or earth people. Kreton while having a conversation with John uses 'you' for the earth people generally:

a. Kreton: *You* simply go on the way *you* are, living *your* exciting primitive lives...*you* have no idea how much fun *you're* having now.

In this dialogue, 'you' works for people in general terms and justifies a slight formal tone, a bit defying, being the member of personal pronoun prototypical category (Pullum, 2005). Through the above-mentioned lines, it can be measured that 'you' can be used for the illustration of a universal truth or a common rule of life.

'You' as a T form

Let's now take an analysis of the perspective in which 'you' plays as a T form. Largely, 'you' in one of the following situations is considered a T form. No doubt an addressee can be in inferior in age, wealth, rank, status, and so on from the speaker as well two people whose relationship is based on familiar terms like that of husband and wife, siblings, family members, friends or share the same fate tend to use T form of 'you' to address each other.

As in the play, When Mrs. Spelding after the landing of spaceship talks to her husband Roger Spelding:

a. Mrs. Spelding: Why, there's a man getting out of it! (Sighs). I feel much better already. I'm if we ask him, he will move that thing for us. Roger, *you* ask him.

T form of 'you' is an indication of *familiarity* in between the husband and wife. 'You' in these lines present the intimacy between husband and wife. T form of 'you' is also presented through vocatives. Vocatives are identified as noun phrases. They directly identify the person being spoken to without being incorporated to the argument of the predicate syntactically, semantically and prosodically from the sentence which accompanies it. As in the play, while investigating, **General Powers** asks **Kreton** where he is from? and he answers:

b. Kreton: I don't know.

Powers: *You* don't know. Now look, Mister, *you* are in pretty serious trouble. I suggest *you* do a bit cooperation. *You* claimed *you* travelled here from outer space in a machine with no instruments....

Once again, T form of 'you' as a vocative directly refers towards *insulting meanings* because General Powers is irritated over the *non-serious* reply of kreton. The direct derogatory uses of Powers can be identified in lines:

"You don't know. Now look, Mister, you are in pretty serious trouble".

He again warns in a degenerated way by saying:

"I suggest you do a bit cooperation".

Afterwards, he tries to make kreton embarrassed by using T form of 'you' and repeating his own statement in a quite insulting and mocking way, in a pricking style, directly by saying:

"You claimed you travelled here from outer space in a machine with no instruments...."

Discussion

The outcomes of the present research explicitly revealed that second person deixis 'you' was explicitly robed in various meanings under changed pragmatics. As the present study was concerned to the analysis of second person deixis 'you' in 'Visit to a Small Planet' by 'Gore Vidal' found that meanings of 'you' transformed according to the nature of environment under certain set ups that work as context of second person deixis.

In addition, the present research proved that context or pragmatics for the application of 'you' kept evolved and resulted in encoding different meanings based on *power semantics*, *reverence semantics*, *generic references* or *insulting meanings*. So, the present research is strongly in line with the past research, who found that social factors have strong influence on verbal interactions. They are inter- twinned. So, the findings of research quite evidently portrayed that the change of context or pragmatics in which social factors mostly got involved, caused the change in the semantics of second person deixis 'you'.

Further, the present study has pedagogical implications. It can be used in improving teaching and learning process by helping them in differentiating among the different expressions of 'you' while translating.

Conclusion

Considering all the procedure, the outcomes of research suggest that we cannot devise a rule that could tell that 'You' would always give a single meaning in all circumstances rather it is almost impossible. The present research found that the meanings of 'you' were wholly dependent on the nature of environment in which it appeared. Hence, ignoring the perspective or pragmatics to derive the true sense could damage the essence of true nature of meaning. The findings explicitly revealed that social factors like age, status, relationships and ranks gave differential expression to translate 'you' differently.

In addition, the study also observed some considerable limitations. First, the present research was based on the play 'Visit to a small Planet' particularly which had very limited content so, the researcher could find out only some aspects of application of second person deixis 'you' in changed context. Secondly, the results of the play cannot be generalized because of the shortness of the play. As play also did not have any example with specific reference to the application of 'you' in place of first-or third-person deixis.

Nevertheless, the findings of present research recommend for further research: first to analyze second person deixis in soliloquies, comparative analysis of Persian and Arabic languages and how it is used by common man in Pakistan particularly.



References

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1979). Social structure, groups and interaction. In *Social markers in speech* (pp. 291–341). Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, R., & Gilman, A. (1960). *The pronouns of power and solidarity* (pp. 253–276). Bobbs–Merrill.
- Duck, S. (2007). *Human Relations*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Dylgjeri, A., & Kazazi, L. (2013). Deixis in Modern Linguistics and Outside. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(4), 87. <https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2012.v2n4p87>
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, Y. (2009). A Social and Pragmatic Analysis of the Second Person Deixis You. *Asian Social Science*, 5(12), 130–133. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v5n12p130>
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics*. Cambridge university press.
- Miller, A. (2018). Text Mining Digital Humanities Projects: Assessing Content Analysis Capabilities of Voyant Tools. *Journal of Web Librarianship*, 12(3), 169–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19322909.2018.1479673>
- Pullum, R. H. (2005). *A student's Introduction to English Grammar*. Cambridge university press.
- Stapleton, A. (2017). Deixis in Modern Linguistics. *Essex Student Journal*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.5526/esj23>
- Sudaryanto. (1993). *Metode dan aneka teknik analisis bahasa: Pengantar penelitian wahana kebudayaan secara linguistik* (Vol. 64). Duta Wacana University Press.
- Tian, H. (2001). Book reviews. *Discourse & Society*, 12(2), 252–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926501012002010>
- Universitas Andalas. (n.d.). <http://scholar.unand.ac.id/15006/4/2.%20Chapter%201.pdf>
- Zhang, Y. (2013). Pragmatic Functions of Anti–Pre–Emptive Use of Person Deixis and Pre–Emptive Use of Social Deixis in Chinese. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 03(04), 305–307. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2013.34038>
- Zhao, H. (2012). Cognitive and Pragmatic Motivations for the Dissymmetry between Deictic Expression and Denoting Expression in Person Deixis. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(5). <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.5.1008-1012>