

# A Pragmatic Empathy Analysis of the Personal Deixis in the Queen's Anti-epidemic Speech

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**ABSTRACT.** On April 5th, British local time, the Queen of England delivered an special speech on COVID-19. The significance of this speech can also be said to be extraordinary. This paper will take the Queen's anti-epidemic speech as the corpus to study the personal deixis in this speech and explore the pragmatic empathetic function of personal deixis in this speech, so as to help people better interpret this anti-epidemic speech.

**KEYWORDS:** Personal Deixis; Anti-Epidemic Speech; Pragmatic Empathy

## 1. Introduction

“Better days will return”. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II delivered a nationally televised address on April 5, local time. It was the fifth time in the Queen's 68 years on the throne that she has made a special address to the nation outside Christmas. As we all know, the world is in the grip of the COVID-19 epidemic, and the situation in the UK is very serious. In this special address, the Queen praises those who have stayed in their jobs during this special period, and encourages the whole country to strengthen their confidence in the fight against COVID-19.

Queen Elizabeth II symbolizes national unity in the eyes of the British people. Whether it is the Christmas Speech or her special speech, the Queen's Speech is represented in a variety of speech texts. Xu Changcui analyzes the Queen's Christmas Speech from the perspective of conceptual function and interpersonal function under the framework of systemic-functional grammar [1]; Jiang Di uses the transitivity system of Halliday functional grammar to analyze the discourse of the Queen's Christmas Speech [2]; On the basis of critical discourse analysis, Du Xinxin makes a critical discourse analysis of the Queen's Christmas Speech [3]. This paper will take the Queen's special anti-epidemic speech as the corpus, combine the relevant research of other scholars, try to discuss the pragmatic empathetic function

of personal deixis in the discourse, and analyze the pragmatic information conveyed by personal deixis in this speech.

## **2. Personal Deixis and Pragmatic Empathy**

Deixis is a traditional topic in pragmatics research. The term Deixis comes from the Greek and means to use the language to “pointing” or “indicating” [4]. Deixis can be divided into five types: personal deixis, time deixis, place deixis, discourse deixis and social deixis [5]. Among them, personal deixis is an important part of deixis research, which is the mutual address used by the two speakers when they communicate with each other by discourse [4]. Pragmatically, personal deixis can be divided into three categories: first person deixis, including the singular first person pronoun “I” and the plural pronoun “we”, mainly referring to the speaker; Second person deixis include the second person pronoun “you”. “You” can refer to either single or multiple pronoun, mainly indicating the listener; And third person deixis, including the third person singular “he” and “she” and the plural “they”. Third person deixis are participants other than the speaker and listener.

Empathy first appeared in the related concept of German aesthetics, and then gradually attracted the attention of scholars in various fields and applied it to the research in different fields. Fillmore believed that different pragmatic perspectives could reflect the speaker's affective or cognitive tendencies [6], this tendency of the speaker to relate to the participants in the context is called empathy [7]. From the perspective of pragmatics, He Ziran proposed the concept of “Pragmatic empathy” : “Pragmatic empathy refers to the emotional connection between two parties in communication, the ability to imagine and understand the other's intention, and involves how the speaker deliberately confides his or her intention to the listener, and how the listener puts himself or herself in the listener's position to understand the speaker's meaning” [8]. At the same time, the personal deixis with pragmatic empathic and dissociative functions are mainly the first and third personal deixis, and the emergence and functions of personal deixis are mainly subject to the social world and psychological world and their cross-influences [9].

Deixis is a speaker-centered and context-related words that indicate descriptive information. According to different contexts, speakers will also choose different deixis to complete empathy or other pragmatic effects. At the same time, in most contexts, the speaker will satisfy a certain interpersonal purpose from the perspective of the listener in the conversation, or take into account the physical, psychological, or emotional aspects of the listener to empathize. This is empathy. Therefore, empathy can be achieved by choosing different personal deixis and, and the choice of deixis is not completely restricted by syntax and semantic reference. The pragmatic empathy function of language is mainly to reflect the emotional or psychological approximation between communicative subjects [9].

### 3. Analysis of Pragmatic Empathy of Personal Deixis in Anti-Epidemic Speech

#### 3.1 Use of Personal Deixis

In this Queen's anti-epidemic speech, there are a total of 524 words, of which the personal deixis appeared 29 times. The number of appearances of each personal deixis and their corresponding proportions are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1 The number of occurrences of each personal deixis and the corresponding proportion*

Personal Deixis	Times	Proportion / %
I	7	24
We	15	52
You	6	21
He	0	0
She	0	0
They	1	3

From table 1, we can see that the Queen used the most first-person deixis in this speech, which appeared 22 times, accounting for 76% of the total. Second, second person deixis, accounting for 21% of the total. The third person deixis appears only once in the whole text, accounting for 3% of the total.

The use of personal deixis mentioned above also conforms to Levison's "egocentric theory", that is, deixis is speaker-centered. In fact, the purpose of empathy is to achieve emotional convergence between the two sides of communication and shorten the psychological distance between them [9], the use of first-person deixis can better achieve this emotional approximation and thus achieve the desired pragmatic effect. The statistics in Table 1 confirm this as well.

It can also be seen from the table that in the use of first-person deixis, the first-person singular pronoun “I” appears only 7 times, while the first-person plural pronoun “we” appears 15 times, and the use of “we” is also the highest in the overall use of personal deixis. This indicates that the Queen prefers to use the first person plural in her speech to achieve the expected pragmatic effect.

### ***3.2 The Pragmatic Analysis of the First Personal Deixis “I” in the Speech***

In this anti-epidemic speech, “I” appeared 7 times, and by observing the text, it can be found that “I” mainly appears in the upper part of the speech, and the use of “I” is mainly divided into two types.

In the first case, the Queen expresses her subjective emotions by using the first-person deixis “I”, and at the same time it can shorten the distance with the audience. For example:

Example 1: I want to thank everyone on the NHS front line, as well as care workers and those carrying out essential roles, who selflessly continue their day-to-day duties outside the home in support of us all.

Example 2: I also want to thank those of you who are staying at home, thereby helping to protect the vulnerable and sparing many families the pain already felt by those who have lost loved ones.

In Example 1, the Queen mainly thanked every medical staff who fought on the front line and the staff who still stood by their jobs. In Example 2, the Queen also thanked the people who responded to the country's call for home quarantine. From these words, it is not difficult to see the Queen's sincere gratitude. In addition, the Queen uses the first-person singular “I” to reduce the sense of distance between the Queen and the audience watching the TV speech, making the audience feel as if the Queen is talking to him or her. The Queen is talking to himself or herself and the Queen is thanking himself or herself. At the same time, audiences can feel that the Queen is standing on the other side's perspective, understanding the hardships of medical staff and the worries of people living in isolation, and has achieved the effect of pragmatic empathy. And it also has the effect of encouraging the people to make firm determination and stick to the end to fight against the epidemic together.

In the second case, the British Queen, as a symbol of national unity, made a promise to the audience in her personal capacity, which enhanced the credibility and authority of the words, enhanced people's trust in the Queen, and greatly enhanced people's confidence in defeating the epidemic. For example:

Example 3: I am sure the nation will join me in assuring you that what you do is appreciated and every hour of your hard work brings us closer to a return to more normal times.

Example 4: Together we are tackling this disease, and I want to reassure you that if we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it.

In Example 3, the Queen said to the staff who were fighting on the front line that she and the people of the whole country would be grateful for their efforts, which strengthened people's confidence in defeating the epidemic. In Example 4, the Queen assured the people of the whole country that as long as they are united, the epidemic will eventually be defeated. The use of the first-person singular "I" here has increased people's expectations and trust in overcoming the epidemic, so that people no longer panic because of the severe epidemic. The Queen's words seem to be a "reassurance", making people feel that the epidemic is not "Invincible". At the same time, the use of "I" also won the support of the people, demonstrating the Queen's authority.

### ***3.3 The Pragmatic Analysis of the First Person Deixis "We" in Speech***

The first person plural "we" appears 17 times in this particular speech, and is the most frequently used personal deixis in the speech. When the first person singular "I" is used, it often refers to the speaker himself, while when the first person plural "we" is used, it refers to the audience together with the speaker. The Queen uses the word "we" in the hope that the audience will feel that they are "fighting side by side" with them and that it will strengthen the cohesion of the country. For example:

Example 5: The pride in who we are is not a part of our past, it defines our present and our future.

Example 6: Across the Commonwealth and around the world, we have seen heart-warming stories of people coming together to help others, be it through delivering food parcels and medicines, checking on neighbours, or converting businesses to help the relief effort.

Example 7: While we have faced challenges before, this one is different. This time we join with all nations across the globe in a common endeavour, using the great advances of science and our instinctive compassion to heal. We will succeed and that success will belong to every one of us. We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again.

In Example 5, the Queen said that "we" are proud of themselves not only for the past, but also for "our" present and future. At this time, the Queen and the people as a whole, past, present and future, "we" can be proud of ourselves. In Example 6, the Queen seemed to stand with everyone, seeing what everyone saw and feeling what everyone felt. The Queen and the British people witnessed heart-warming stories happening all over the world. In the passage of Example 7, the Queen used "we" 7 times, which further shows that the Queen has always been "fighting side by side" with the people, fighting the epidemic together, and winning together. She and the British people meet this worldwide challenge and work together with all countries in the world. The epidemic will eventually end, and the Queen will look forward to meeting with friends and family, and looking forward to reunion, just like other British people. The use of these "we" can bring closer the distance with the British people, and can also reflect the function of pragmatic empathy, enhance cohesion,

and also achieve the pragmatic effect of encouraging people to actively fight the epidemic.

What's more, the meaning of "we" in this anti-epidemic speech is not the same. In addition to the above-mentioned referring to the entire audience, it also has the function of forward-referring in specific context. For example:

Example 8: We, as children, spoke from here at Windsor to children who had been evacuated from their homes and sent away for their own safety.

In the speech, the Queen referred to the first time she gave a speech on the radio with the help of her sister, and the "we" here refers to the Queen and her sister.

### ***3.4 The Pragmatic Analysis of the Second Person Deixis "You" in Speech***

The "you" in this speech is in the second person plural, namely "you". Besides, through the analysis of the full text, we can find that the use of "you" is mostly in the first half of the speech except for the last sentence to express good wishes, For example:

Example 9: I am speaking to you at what I know is an increasingly challenging time.

Example 10: I am sure the nation will join me in assuring you that what you do is appreciated and every hour of your hard work brings us closer to a return to more normal times.

Example 11: I also want to thank those of you who are staying at home, thereby helping to protect the vulnerable and sparing many families the pain already felt by those who have lost loved ones.

Example 12: Together we are tackling this disease, and I want to reassure you that if we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it.

The first and second person are specific in a communicative situation, with the ortho-speaking side always expressing itself in the first person and the obedient side always expressing itself in the second person [10]. Therefore, as the first sentence of the speech, Example 9 indicates that the Queen is giving a speech to British nationals, and this "you" also means that all British people, rich or poor, belong to a whole. The "you" in Example 10 mainly plays a forward-referring role, referring to those medical staff, and expressing gratitude to the medical staff. At the same time, Example 10 and Example 11 are the words of the queen when expressing gratitude to people. The "you" here can make the audience feel that the Queen is talking to himself or herself, which is not like a speech given by a Queen in the royal family. It is a cordial conversation between two people, and the use of "you" also enhances the sense of ownership of the specific referent. In Example 12, the Queen once again made a solemn promise to everyone by using "you". The "you" here not only shortens the relationship between the Queen and the audience, but also plays a role of emphasis.

### **3.5 The Pragmatic Analysis of the Third Person Deixis “They” in Speech**

Example 13: I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge.

The third-person indicator appeared only once in this speech, as in Example 13. The queen's use of the third person plural “they” also means that the fight against COVID-19 requires the efforts of everyone, and everyone should be proud of themselves. This has once again strengthened people's determination to fight the epidemic.

## **4. Conclusion**

By analyzing the personal deixis in the queen's special speech, we found that the first person deixis appeared most frequently in this speech. The main purpose of the speech was to increase the national cohesion and make the people more united; Second person deixis secondly, its main purpose is to enhance the sense of ownership of the listener. Appropriate use of second person deixis can also shorten the distance between the speaker and the audience. Moreover, the use of first person and second person deixis can best realize the function of pragmatic empathy, so as to achieve the purpose of the Queen’ s speech, which is to encourage the people to actively fight the epidemic and unite to fight the epidemic. I also hope that the epidemic will end soon and we can meet again soon.

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