

THE FUNCTIONS AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF DEICTIC UNITS IN RELIGIOUS TEXTS

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Abstract: *This study examines the functions and emotional impact of deictic units in German religious texts. It focuses on how person, social, spatial, temporal, and textual deixis structures discourse, establishes hierarchical and communal relationships, and elicits emotional engagement. By analyzing selected passages from German liturgical, scriptural, and homiletic texts, the research demonstrates that deictic expressions not only organize the text but also strengthen the reader's affective involvement, highlighting divine authority, moral guidance, and shared religious identity.*

Keywords: *German religious texts; deixis; deictic units; social deixis; textual deixis; emotional impact; discourse analysis*

German religious texts, including biblical translations, liturgical writings, sermons, and theological commentaries, provide a rich field for examining deictic units—linguistic expressions that rely on contextual information for their interpretation. These units serve multiple functions: they structure discourse, establish relationships between participants, and evoke emotional engagement. In religious discourse, deixis is not merely a grammatical or lexical phenomenon; it is a pragmatic mechanism that reinforces authority, communal identity, and spiritual experience.

In German, person deixis (e.g., du, Sie), social deixis (e.g., Heiliger Vater, Bischof), spatial deixis (hier, dort), temporal deixis (heute, damals), and textual deixis (wie oben erwähnt, im folgenden Abschnitt) are particularly significant. Person and social deixis position readers relative to divine figures or religious authorities, reflecting hierarchical relations and communal norms. Spatial and temporal deixis situate sacred events within space and time, while textual deixis ensures coherence, linking theological arguments, scriptural references, and interpretive commentary.

Moreover, deictic units in German religious texts contribute to emotional resonance. They create intimacy between the reader and the divine, emphasize moral guidance, and strengthen communal identity. For example, the use of du in prayers fosters personal closeness with God, while honorific titles such as Heiliger Vater establish reverence and social distance. Demonstratives and temporal markers guide the reader through sacred events, heightening the sense of immediacy and presence.



This study aims to analyze the multifunctional role of deictic units in German religious texts, focusing on their structural, social, and emotional functions. By examining authentic-style passages, the research demonstrates how deixis simultaneously organizes discourse and elicits affective responses, revealing the pragmatic power of language in religious communication.

Deixis is a central concept in pragmatics, referring to expressions whose interpretation depends on the communicative context. Scholars generally categorize deixis into person, social, spatial, temporal, and textual types. Each type plays a distinctive role in German religious discourse:

1. Person Deixis

Person deixis involves pronouns and forms of address that identify the speaker, the addressee, and third parties. In German religious texts, these expressions establish relationships between humans and the divine. For instance, the informal pronoun *du* in prayers creates intimacy, while *wir* or *uns* includes the congregation within the spiritual narrative[1]

2. Social Deixis

Social deixis encodes hierarchical relations and respect. Titles such as *Heiliger Vater*, *Bischof*, and *Pfarrer* function as markers of authority and reverence. The alternation between formal and informal forms of address (*Sie* vs. *du*) signals social distance or closeness, shaping both communicative roles and emotional response.

3. Spatial and Temporal Deixis

Spatial deixis (*hier*, *dort*, *in der Kirche*) locates sacred events, rituals, or divine actions within specific places. Temporal deixis (*heute*, *damals*, *für immer*) organizes events chronologically and thematically, linking past narratives to present experiences or eschatological expectations. Both types help construct a vivid mental and emotional representation of sacred events[2]

4. Textual (Discourse) Deixis

Textual deixis ensures coherence and continuity, guiding readers through the argumentation or narrative. Phrases like *wie oben erwähnt* (as mentioned above) or *im folgenden Abschnitt* (in the following section) point backward or forward within the text, connecting ideas, scripture, and commentary while reinforcing key theological points.

5. Interaction of Deictic Types

In German religious texts, multiple deictic types often interact. For example:

“Liebe Gläubige, wie wir zuvor gesehen haben, ruft uns der Herr zur Umkehr auf.”

Liebe Gläubige → social deixis (establishing communal relationship)

wie wir zuvor gesehen haben → textual deixis (linking prior discussion)

uns → person deixis (including the audience in the divine call)[3]

This interaction demonstrates that deixis is not merely referential but also emotional and social, enhancing reader engagement and structuring sacred discourse.

Deictic units in German religious texts perform multiple roles, influencing both discourse structure and emotional response. Their functions can be examined through different types of deixis:

1. Person Deixis

Person deixis identifies the speaker, addressee, and referents. In religious texts, this often includes God or divine figures:

“Herr, wir bitten Dich um Vergebung.”

(Lord, we ask You for forgiveness.)[4]

Here, wir (we) and Dich (You) establish the relationship between believers and God, creating intimacy and spiritual closeness.

2. Social Deixis

Social deixis conveys hierarchy and respect through titles and forms of address:

“Der Heilige Vater ermahnt die Gläubigen zur Geduld.”

(The Holy Father admonishes the faithful to patience.)

The title Heilige Vater signals authority and reverence, shaping emotional response and aligning the audience with hierarchical norms.

3. Spatial and Temporal Deixis

Spatial and temporal markers situate events within space and time:

“An jenem Tag in der Kirche versammelten sich alle Gläubigen.”

(On that day, all the faithful gathered in the church.)

An jenem Tag (on that day) and in der Kirche (in the church) help readers visualize the scene, enhancing emotional involvement.

4. Textual (Discourse) Deixis

Textual deixis maintains coherence and emphasizes key points:

“Wie oben erwähnt, sollten die Gläubigen Nächstenliebe üben.”

(As mentioned above, the faithful should practice charity.)

This backward reference reinforces moral instruction and directs readers' attention.

5. Interaction of Deictic Types

Often, different deixis types work together:

“Liebe Brüder und Schwestern, wie wir zuvor gesehen haben, ruft uns der Herr zur Umkehr auf.”

Liebe Brüder und Schwestern → social deixis (affective bond)

wie wir zuvor gesehen haben → textual deixis (connecting past discussion)

uns → person deixis (including audience)[5]

The combination organizes discourse and enhances emotional resonance, illustrating the multifunctionality of deictic units in German religious texts.

Deictic units in German religious texts play a crucial role in shaping both the structure and the emotional impact of the discourse. Person deixis, through pronouns and inclusive forms, establishes a close relationship between the believer and the divine, fostering intimacy and spiritual engagement. Social deixis, expressed via titles, honorifics, and formal forms of address, reflects hierarchical and ritualized relations, guiding readers' attitudes and promoting reverence. Spatial and temporal deixis situates sacred events within specific places and moments, allowing readers to visualize scenes and connect emotionally with the narrative. Textual deixis ensures coherence and continuity, linking different parts of the text and emphasizing key moral or theological points.

The interaction of these deictic types demonstrates that deixis is not merely a linguistic or grammatical feature; it is a multifaceted pragmatic tool that simultaneously structures discourse and evokes affective responses. In German religious texts, deictic units facilitate understanding, reinforce communal and spiritual identity, and enhance the emotional experience of the reader. Through their strategic use, authors guide the audience not only cognitively, by clarifying relationships and events, but also emotionally, by creating intimacy, awe, and moral awareness. Overall, deixis functions as an essential mechanism through which German religious texts communicate meaning, authority, and shared belief.

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