



Person Deixis in EFL Classroom Interaction: A Comparative Pragmatic Study of Kazakhstani and Indonesian Students

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Abstract

This study examines person deixis in EFL classroom interaction through a comparative pragmatic analysis of Kazakhstani and Indonesian students. The research aimed to identify the person deictic expressions used in classroom discussion and to analyze their pragmatic functions in interaction. A qualitative comparative design was employed with simple frequency support. The participants were 20 students enrolled in a Pragmatics course at an Indonesian university, consisting of five Kazakhstani and fifteen Indonesian students. Data were collected through audio-recorded group discussions across three classroom meetings and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The findings show that first person singular was the most frequently used form, followed by first person plural, second person, and third person plural. Pragmatically, person deixis functioned to express personal stance, build solidarity, engage listeners, manage interaction, and refer to external groups. The study highlights that person deixis operates not only as a grammatical category but also as a pragmatic resource for meaning construction in multilingual EFL classroom interaction.

Keywords: deixis; efl; pragmatic; classroom

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1. Introduction

EFL classrooms are no longer understood merely as spaces where learners practice grammatical structures or memorize vocabulary lists. They are interactional environments where meaning is negotiated, identities are performed, and communication is continuously shaped through social exchange. Classroom talk includes questioning, clarifying, responding, disagreeing, negotiating understanding, and managing participation. In this sense, language learning happens not only through exposure to linguistic forms but through active engagement in situated communication. This becomes even more visible in multilingual classrooms, where participants bring different linguistic repertoires, communicative expectations, and cultural



interaction styles into the same learning environment (Gesuato, 2022; Iliovits et al., 2022; Picciuolo, 2023; Prado, 2024).

Within language education, this perspective places pragmatics in a central position. Communicative success depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the ability to interpret speaker intention, infer implied meanings, recognize interpersonal stance, and respond appropriately in context. Learners may produce structurally correct sentences yet still experience communication breakdown if pragmatic meaning is misunderstood. This issue remains particularly relevant in EFL contexts, where classroom interaction often serves as one of the primary sites for authentic communicative practice. Pragmatic competence, then, is not peripheral to language learning; it is part of communicative competence itself (Jeffries & Giovanelli, 2020; Milošević, 2021; Retnowaty, 2022; Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2022).

One important area within pragmatics is deixis. Deixis refers to linguistic expressions whose interpretation depends heavily on contextual information, including who is speaking, to whom, when, and under what circumstances. Among its categories, person deixis deserves particular attention because it directly indexes discourse participants. Expressions such as *I*, *we*, *you*, *he*, *she*, and *they* are not fixed in meaning; their interpretation shifts depending on the interactional context. Person deixis is therefore more than a grammatical category of pronouns. It functions as a pragmatic resource that helps speakers construct relationships, distribute roles, and position themselves socially within interaction (Mayori et al., 2020; Picciuolo, 2023; Prado, 2024).

In classroom interaction, person deixis plays a particularly dynamic role. The use of *I* may indicate personal stance, explanation, responsibility, or authority. The pronoun *we* may suggest inclusion, collaboration, or institutional alignment, though its interpretation often depends on whether it includes the hearer. *You* can function as direct address, instruction, encouragement, evaluation, or even distancing. Third-person references such as *they* may position external groups, absent participants, or generalized others. These choices are rarely



neutral. Pronoun selection may reflect classroom power relations, solidarity building, pedagogical strategy, or interactional alignment between teachers and students (Fuh, 2024; Hidayati et al., 2022a; Picciuolo, 2023).

The pragmatic meaning of person deixis becomes even more interesting in multilingual and intercultural classroom settings. EFL interaction among students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may involve shifting assumptions about participation, politeness, directness, and collective identity. Pronoun choices that appear straightforward in one context may carry different social meanings in another. For instance, inclusive expressions may be interpreted differently depending on cultural norms regarding group membership or interpersonal distance. In intercultural communication, person deixis can function as a subtle indicator of alignment, accommodation, or relational negotiation (Iliovits et al., 2022; Prado, 2024).

This study is situated in a distinctive EFL classroom context involving Kazakhstani and Indonesian students. This context offers a meaningful site for pragmatic investigation because classroom interaction occurs not only through English as a target language but also through intercultural engagement between participants with different linguistic backgrounds and communicative conventions. Such a setting creates a naturally rich environment for examining how speakers use person deixis to construct meaning, establish participation roles, and manage interpersonal relationships. Rather than observing pragmatics in isolated or scripted communication, this study focuses on naturally occurring classroom interaction where pragmatic choices emerge in real time.

Although person deixis has received attention in pragmatic research, much of the existing literature appears concentrated in non-classroom domains. Recent studies frequently examine person deixis in political discourse, public speeches, media communication, song lyrics, sermons, film dialogue, and literary texts. These studies have contributed useful insights into how pronouns construct ideology, solidarity, persuasion, emotional stance, and audience alignment. However, this emphasis also reveals a noticeable imbalance. Spoken educational



interaction, particularly multilingual EFL classroom discourse, remains less extensively explored compared with other discourse settings (Abellán, 2025; Gobel et al., 2023; Jabbar et al., 2024a; Marlinda & Susanto, 2022a; Satyadewi et al., 2023a).

Given these considerations, the present study aims to identify the forms of person deixis used in EFL classroom interaction involving Kazakhstani and Indonesian students and to analyze their pragmatic functions within naturally occurring communication. By focusing on authentic multilingual classroom discourse, this study seeks to contribute to pragmatic research in educational settings while offering insight into how person deixis operates as a resource for meaning-making, participation management, and intercultural interaction in EFL learning contexts.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative pragmatic design to examine the use of person deixis in EFL classroom interaction. A qualitative approach was considered suitable because the study focused on how meaning was constructed through language use in a real classroom context. The analysis did not only identify the forms of person deixis but also interpreted their pragmatic functions in relation to the speakers, addressees, and interactional situations. To support the qualitative interpretation, simple frequency counts were also used to show the distribution of person deictic expressions used by Kazakhstani and Indonesian students. This design is consistent with qualitative research principles that emphasize context, participant meaning, and systematic interpretation of social interaction (Hurst, 2023).

2.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in a Pragmatics course at Universitas Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda. This setting was selected because the class involved Kazakhstani and Indonesian students learning English in the same EFL classroom. The multilingual nature of the class provided a relevant context for examining how students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds used person deixis during interaction.



The participants were 20 students, consisting of five Kazakhstani students and fifteen Indonesian students. All participants took part in classroom discussions during the data collection process. The study used convenience sampling because the researcher had direct access to the class. The aim was not to generalize the findings to all Kazakhstani or Indonesian students, but to understand person deixis use in this specific classroom context. The students were divided into small groups of four to five members, with at least one Kazakhstani student in each group. This grouping was intended to encourage active and natural interaction among participants.

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observation and audio recording of students' group discussions. Each group used a smartphone to record its discussion. The phone was placed in the center of the group to capture the voices of all members clearly. Classroom observation was also used to note the interactional context, classroom situation, and group dynamics.

The data were collected over three classroom meetings. In the first meeting, students discussed the most effective ways to learn English. This topic encouraged the use of person deixis for expressing opinions, especially forms such as *I*, *we*, and *you*. In the second meeting, students discussed whether English should be the main language of international communication. This topic encouraged interaction and negotiation of meaning through forms such as *we* and *you*. In the third meeting, students discussed whether cultural background and identity influence communication in English. This topic generated the use of *I*, *we*, *you*, and *they* in expressing evaluation and perspective.

2.4. Data Analysis

Paragraphs contain descriptions of subtitles. The recorded discussions were transcribed verbatim before analysis. The analysis began by identifying all person deictic expressions in the transcripts, including *I*, *me*, *my*, *myself*, *we*, *us*, *our*, *you*, *your*, *they*, *them*, and *their*. These



expressions were then classified into four categories: first person singular, first person plural, second person, and third person plural.

After classification, each occurrence was interpreted based on its pragmatic function in the interaction. The analysis considered who produced the utterance, who the utterance was addressed to, and what interactional purpose the deictic form served. The pragmatic functions included expressing personal stance, building solidarity, managing interaction, giving advice, sharing responsibility, and referring to external groups. Frequency counts were used as supporting data to identify general patterns across the three meetings, while the main interpretation remained qualitative. This coding-oriented analysis follows qualitative data analysis procedures that emphasize the development of coding systems, analysis of coded data, and interpretation grounded in the research context (Gizzi & Rädiker, 2021).

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts and checked the consistency of the coding. Selected excerpts were then used to represent the most relevant uses of person deixis in the classroom interaction. This process helped ensure that the interpretation was grounded in the actual data and not separated from the classroom context.

3. Result and Discussion

This study reveals the utilization of person deixis and its functions by Indonesian and Kazakhstani students in EFL classroom interactions. First, the findings indicate that both Kazakhstani and Indonesian students employ four primary forms of person deixis during these interactions, namely: first-person singular (I, me, my, myself), first-person plural (we, us, our), second person (you, your), and third-person plural (they, them, their). Second, these deictic forms serve various pragmatic functions, such as expressing personal opinions, building group solidarity, engaging interlocutors, offering suggestions, managing interactions, and referring to external groups. Consequently, person deixis in the present data functions not merely as a grammatical marker, but rather as a pragmatic strategy to construct meaning and foster social relations during classroom discussions.



3.1 Person deictic expressions

Overall, 951 occurrences of person deixis were found across the three meetings. Variations in discussion topics appeared to influence the patterns of person deixis use. Topics requiring personal reflection tended to elicit the use of the first-person singular, while topics emphasizing collective perspectives or social issues encouraged the use of the first person plural and third person plural. The following table presents the frequency distribution of person deixis use across all meetings.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the use of person deixis

Jenis Person Deixis	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Total Frequency	Percentage
First Person Singular (I / me / my / myself)	118	137	102	357	37.54%
First Person Plural (we / us / our)	54	141	53	248	26.08%
Second Person (you / your)	58	68	59	185	19.45%
Third Person Plural (they / them / their)	3	79	79	161	16.93%
Total	233	425	293	951	100%

Based on Table 1, first-person singular was the most dominant form of person deixis, with a total of 357 occurrences (37.54%). This finding indicates that students most frequently used language to express opinions, experiences, and personal positions during discussions. Forms such as "I think," "in my opinion," "I feel," and "my experience" appeared consistently across all meetings. The dominance of these forms indicates that EFL classroom interactions in this study were largely oriented toward expressing individual perspectives.

The second most frequent category was first-person plural, with a total of 248 occurrences (26.08%). The use of forms "we," "us," and "our" indicates students' tendency to build collective identity, group solidarity, and shared responsibility during discussions. The highest frequency for this category occurred in Meeting 2 (141 occurrences), when students discussed the issue of English as a primary language in international communication. This topic appeared to encourage students to use group positions and shared perspectives, for example through expressions such as "we think," "we should consider," and "we need to balance."



Second-person deixis came in third, with a total of 185 occurrences (19.45%). The forms "you" and "your" were primarily used to engage the interlocutor, provide general examples, convey suggestions, or manage the flow of interaction. This usage demonstrates that person deixis functions not only as a referential marker but also as an interactional tool in building communication between participants.

Meanwhile, third-person plural was the category with the lowest frequency overall, with 161 occurrences (16.93%). However, its distribution pattern showed an interesting shift. In Meeting 1, this category barely appeared (3 occurrences) but increased sharply in Meetings 2 and 3 (79 occurrences in each meeting). This suggests that as the discussion topic shifted from personal experiences to social, cultural, and identity issues, students more frequently referred to other groups or parties outside the immediate interaction, such as the general public, specific cultural groups, or speakers from other countries.

Looking at participant contributions, Speaker 1, representing the Kazakhstani students, generated 338 occurrences of person deixis (35.75%), while the Indonesian students combined generated 607 occurrences (64.25%). The Indonesian students' frequency was higher due to their greater number in each group. However, the percentage of Speaker 1 remains quite prominent, namely 45.89% in Meeting 1, 28.30% in Meeting 2, and 38.62% in Meeting 3. This finding indicates that Kazakhstani students remain active in using person deixis, while Indonesian students are more dominant in total due to the collective contribution of four speakers.

3.1.1 First Person Singular

Data 1 KZ-S1-M3

“In my opinion, students should adapt their communication style in international settings. It help avoid misunderstanding and makes communication more effective with people from different backgrounds.”

In this data, the use of “my” in the phrase in my opinion shows the function of personal stance, namely when the speaker marks the opinion as a personal position.



Data 2 ID-S2-M3

“In my opinion, when someone speak too directly, I might feel uncomfortable or surprised, especially if I am not used to that style.”

In this data, the use of “I” and “my” indicates the expression of personal experience and subjective evaluation of other people's communication styles.

3.1.2 First Person Plural

Data 1 KZ-S1-M2

“We need know English, but we need not forget our mother tongue language.”

In this data, the use of "we" demonstrates collective positioning and shared responsibility. The speaker is not simply conveying a personal perspective but constructing a shared position that encompasses members of a broader group or community as language users.

Data 2 ID-S2-M2

“We think that English is useful, but we should still use and respect our native language.”

In this data, the use of “we” shows the function of group solidarity and collective opinion, where the speaker frames the opinion as a shared voice, not an individual opinion.

3.1.3 Second Person

Data 1 KZ-S1-M3

“Use your, uh, listen carefully, avoid judging, and try to understand the other person culture.”

In this data, the use of "your" demonstrates direct engagement and advice-giving. The speaker directly engages the interlocutor and provides guidance on how to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds.

Data 2 ID-S2-M2

“You can see that English helps us access more knowledge and communicate with others.”



In this data, the use of “you” demonstrates the functions of generalized address and listener involvement. The speaker uses “you” not to address a specific individual, but to involve the listener in general in the argument being constructed.

3.1.4 Third Person Plural

Data 1 KZ-S1-M3

“They usually communicate differently. For example, some people speak very directly, while others are more polite and indirect.”

In this data, the use of “they” demonstrates the function of referring to external groups. The speaker uses “they” to refer to people from other countries or cultural backgrounds outside the immediate interaction. This function demonstrates how third-person deixis is used to generalize the characteristics of specific groups in cross-cultural discussions.

Data 2 ID-S2-M3

“They will surely need to be more flexible when communicating with people from different backgrounds.”

In this data, the use of “they” indicates the function of referencing other participants or social groups. The speaker uses “they” to refer to other individuals or groups being discussed in the context of international communication.

3.2 Deictic Function of Expressions

3.2.1 First Person Singular

In EFL classroom interactions, the first person plural serves to establish collective voice, solidarity, and shared responsibility. Kazakh students use this form when positioning their opinions as part of a common interest. For example, in data from KZ-S1-M2, a student states, “We need to know English, but we need not forget our mother tongue.” The use of “we” in this utterance indicates that the speaker is not speaking solely as an individual but is embracing the broader group's position as English speakers and native speakers.

Indonesian students also use the first person plural to demonstrate shared perspectives in discussions. In data from ID-S2-M2, a student states, “We think that English is useful, but



we should still use and respect our native language." The forms "we" and "our" are used to establish solidarity and group agreement. Thus, Kazakh students emphasize collective positioning, while Indonesian students emphasize group solidarity and shared responsibility.

3.2.2 First Person Plural

The use of first person plural reveals how students construct shared meaning in EFL classroom discussions. For Kazakh students, this form is evident in the KZ-S1-M2 data: "We need to know English, but we need not forget our mother tongue." The word "we" indicates that the speaker is not only expressing a personal opinion but also representing a collective position as English speakers who still have a responsibility to their mother tongue.

For Indonesian students, a similar function appears in the ID-S2-M2 data: "We think that English is useful, but we should still use and respect our native language." The forms "we" and "our" are used to build group solidarity and emphasize shared responsibility for preserving the native language. Thus, Kazakh students emphasize collective positioning more, while Indonesian students emphasize group solidarity and shared responsibility more.

3.2.3 Second Person

The use of the second person demonstrates how students directly engage their interlocutors in classroom interactions. For Kazakh students, this function is evident in data from KZ-S1-M3: "When you want to express something in an honest and direct way, you also need to find the appropriate words." The use of "you" in this utterance does not refer to a specific individual, but is used generally to engage the listener in the communication situation being discussed. Its pragmatic function is to provide advice while building interpersonal engagement in the discussion.

For Indonesian students, a similar function is evident in data from ID-S2-M2: "You can see that English helps us access more knowledge and communicate with others." In this context, "you" is used to direct the interlocutor's attention to the argument being presented. Thus, both groups use the second person as an interactional strategy to engage listeners, but



the Kazakh students are more prominent in the advice-giving function, while the Indonesian students are more prominent in the listener engagement and general reference functions.

3.2.4 Third-Person Plural

The third-person plural indicates how students refer to individuals or groups outside of direct interaction during discussions. For Kazakh students, this function is evident in data from KZ-S1-M3: "They prefer to say things clearly without too many explanations." The use of "they" in this utterance serves to refer to the specific social or cultural group being discussed, allowing the speaker to generalize about the communication styles of other groups. The pragmatic functions that emerge are referring to external groups and social generalization in the context of cross-cultural communication.

In contrast, Indonesian students also use the third-person plural to refer to other groups in a broader social context. This is evident in data from ID-S2-M3: "They need to be more flexible when communicating with people from different backgrounds." In this example, "they" is used to refer to others outside of the direct conversation, particularly individuals involved in international communication. Thus, both groups use the third-person plural to discuss external parties, but Kazakh students tend to use it more to make cultural generalizations, while Indonesian students emphasize the social reference function in the context of global communication.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that person deixis worked as a practical resource for meaning making in the EFL classroom. The students did not use pronouns only to refer to themselves or others. They used them to position ideas, build relationships, manage interaction, and talk about cultural groups. This supports the view that deixis is strongly tied to context, speaker intention, and the social situation of an utterance. In this study, the classroom became a small intercultural space where Kazakhstani and Indonesian students used English not only to answer



questions, but also to negotiate identity, solidarity, and interpersonal distance (Alkhalid, 2022; Febriza, 2020; Jabbar et al., 2024b).

First person singular was mainly used to express personal stance and individual reflection. Both Kazakhstani and Indonesian students used forms such as *I*, *me*, and *my* to mark personal opinions, learning experiences, and emotional responses. This pattern shows that classroom discussion gave students space to speak as individual language users, not merely as members of a group. The Kazakhstani students tended to use this form to state clear positions on communication and culture, while Indonesian students often linked it to personal learning experience and self-evaluation. This finding is in line with recent studies showing that personal deixis can help speakers construct identity, stance, and speaker involvement in discourse (Barus, 2023; Gobel et al., 2023; Margareta et al., 2024).

First person plural showed a different pragmatic direction. Forms such as *we*, *us*, and *our* were used to create collective positioning and shared responsibility. The Kazakhstani students used this form to frame broader concerns, such as the need to learn English while maintaining one's mother tongue. Indonesian students also used it to build group solidarity and to present ideas as a shared classroom position. This suggests that *we* was not a neutral grammatical form. It helped students create a sense of togetherness and soften individual claims by presenting them as collective views. Similar functions of *we* have been reported in studies of political, religious, and educational discourse, where it often works to create alignment, shared identity, and group responsibility (Dimaculangan & Dimaculangan, 2018; Marlinda & Susanto, 2022b; Mayori et al., 2020).

Second person deixis functioned mainly as a tool for engagement. The students used *you* and *your* to address classmates, give advice, invite agreement, and make general statements about language learning or intercultural communication. In the Kazakhstani data, second person forms were often used to guide listeners toward a suggested way of communicating. In the Indonesian data, they were frequently used to involve listeners in an explanation or argument. This shows that *you* can shift between direct address and generalized reference,



depending on the classroom context. Such flexibility supports the idea that second person deixis is highly interactional because it helps speakers manage addressee involvement and interpersonal orientation (Nafi'ah et al., 2021; Putri & Yana, 2020; Rahmawati et al., 2023; Satyadewi et al., 2023b).

Third person plural was especially visible when the discussion moved toward culture, identity, and communication style. Forms such as *they*, *them*, and *their* allowed students to refer to people outside the immediate interaction, including other cultural groups, English users, young people, or speakers from different countries. The Kazakhstani students used this form to make general observations about how people from particular backgrounds communicate. Indonesian students used it to discuss broader social groups and the possible effects of English on local languages and cultural identity. This finding suggests that third person plural helps students create social distance and categorize others in intercultural talk. It also shows how classroom discourse can become a space for comparing self, group, and other (Jupriaman et al., 2023; Solihah et al., 2022; Sultana, 2023).

The comparison between Kazakhstani and Indonesian students should be read carefully. The study does not prove fixed national communication styles. The data come from one classroom, and the number of Indonesian students was larger. Still, the interaction suggests useful patterns. Kazakhstani students appeared more willing to formulate direct positions, especially when discussing language, culture, and communication. Indonesian students often used deixis to support collaborative talk, personal reflection, and group-based agreement. These tendencies may reflect classroom participation patterns, language proficiency, task design, and cultural expectations at the same time. In this sense, person deixis became a small but revealing window into how students positioned themselves and others in multilingual EFL interaction (Marasabessy et al., 2023; Saha, 2020).

Overall, the findings support the argument that person deixis is not only a linguistic category but also a pragmatic strategy. Through *I*, students claimed personal voice. Through *we*, they built shared responsibility. Through *you*, they involved listeners and managed



interaction. Through *they*, they referred to external groups and constructed cultural comparison. For EFL teaching, this has a clear implication. Pragmatics classes should not treat deixis as a memorized list of pronouns. Students need opportunities to analyze how pronouns work in real interaction, especially in multilingual classrooms where meanings are shaped by culture, task, and interpersonal relations. This kind of awareness may help students develop pragmatic competence, intercultural sensitivity, and clearer communication in English (Hidayati et al., 2022b; Sultana, 2023).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that person deixis functions as an important pragmatic resource in multilingual EFL classroom interaction, allowing students to express personal stance, construct collective identity, engage interlocutors, and refer to broader social groups. The findings suggest that pronoun choice reflects not only grammatical competence but also pragmatic awareness shaped by interactional context, discussion topics, and intercultural communication dynamics. While both Kazakhstani and Indonesian students used similar deictic categories, their pragmatic tendencies showed subtle differences in stance-taking, collaboration, and social referencing. These results reinforce the view that classroom interaction can serve as a meaningful site for pragmatic development, particularly in culturally diverse learning environments. However, this study was limited to one classroom with a small number of participants, especially from Kazakhstan. Future research should involve larger multilingual samples, longer observation periods, and comparative analysis across different educational contexts. Further studies may also explore how other deictic categories or pragmatic features emerge in digital and hybrid EFL communication settings.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used AI tools, including ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot, to assist with language editing and improve grammatical accuracy. The author has carefully reviewed and edited the results generated by these tools and takes full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.



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Page : 325-343

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