



The Love Represented through Deictic Expressions in Love Songs

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Deictic Expressions;
Love Songs;
Pragmatic.

Abstract: *This study aims to identify the types of deixis found in three selected songs and explain how deictic expressions represent love based on the Triangular Theory of Love. The findings provide a deeper understanding of how love is represented in love songs lyrics. Qualitative research was chosen to interpret the contextual meaning and the pragmatic approach was applied to analyse deixes found and explain how they represent love. The study reveals that the three songs construct distinct architectures of love. I and you, are the most frequent used deixis in the lyrics. These pronouns identify the songwriter and the addressee as the main participants in the speech event, creating direct and personal communication. The dominant component of love developed is intimacy over commitment and passion. Future research should employ coding guidelines that distinguish purely lexical deixis from contextual expressions.*

Kata Kunci:

Ungkapan Deiksis;
Lagu Cinta;
Pragmatik.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis deiksis dalam tiga lagu pilihan serta menjelaskan bagaimana ungkapan deiksis merepresentasikan cinta berdasarkan *Triangular Theory of Love*. Temuan penelitian memberikan pemahaman mendalam bagaimana cinta direpresentasikan dalam lirik lagu bertema cinta. Metode penelitian kualitatif dipilih untuk menginterpretasi makna kontekstual, sementara pendekatan pragmatis diterapkan untuk menganalisis deiksis yang ditemukan dan menjelaskan bagaimana komponen cinta direpresentasikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga lagu tersebut membangun konstruksi cinta yang berbeda. Kata ganti "aku" (*I*) dan "kamu" (*you*) merupakan deiksis yang paling sering digunakan. Kata ganti ini mengidentifikasi penulis lagu dan orang yang dituju sebagai partisipan utama dalam peristiwa tutur, sehingga menciptakan komunikasi yang bersifat langsung dan personal. Komponen cinta yang paling dominan dimunculkan adalah keintiman dibandingkan dengan komitmen dan gairah. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk menggunakan pedoman pengodean yang membedakan antara deiksis yang bersifat murni leksikal dan ungkapan yang bersifat kontekstual.

Article History:

Received : 10-09-2026
Revised : 21-09-2026
Accepted : 29-09-2026
Online : 30-09-2026



<https://doi.org/10.31764/pendekar.vXiY.ZZZ>



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A. INTRODUCTION

Songs are one of the media used to convey messages, emotions, and experiences through their lyrics (Kaulika & Sakinah, 2025). Beyond entertainment, song lyrics enable songwriters to express feelings, personal experiences, and social messages through language. Often, songs are used both for the expressions of close friendship and romance or love (Bamford et al., 2024). In fact, songs have the ability to influence human's aggressiveness, thoughts, feeling or even dating behaviour through the lyrics. Song lyrics mostly contain implicit meaning going beyond the literal one. It reflects the dynamic of language which cannot be explicitly understood (Putri et al., 2026). A pragmatic approach is essential for understanding the contextual meaning embedded in song lyrics. Deixis, in particular, is used to identify contextual references to participants, time, and place in an utterance.

Meanwhile, love is one of the most frequently explored themes in song lyrics because it represents a universal human experience (Kusnadi, 2025). Through lyrics, songwriters portray various dimensions of love, including emotional intimacy, romantic desire, and long-term commitment, which play important roles in maintaining romantic relationships (Joel et al., 2020). When played

with music, song lyrics serve as a stimulus that does not require active participation from the listener (Moreno-Lobato et al., 2023). Several relevant studies have analyzed the deixis found in song lyrics and highlighted its contribution to interpret the contextual meaning (Liztiawati, 2021); exploring the pragmatic contexts (Amanda et al., 2024); types of deixis used to represent internal conflict and self-reflection (Lailiyah et al., 2026). However, previous studies generally only focused on linguistic features. Not many studies explored the components of love through the deixis or deictic expressions. Limited attention has been given to study how deixis contributes to the representation of love through the Triangular Theory of Love within the broader framework of the RELIC (Real Love in Context Theory) (Mira Saktiana, 2022).

The RELIC theory is three-component interrelated (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2024). They are the triangular theory of love, the theory of love as a story, and an eco-contextual theory of love. In triangular theory of love, there are three essential components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. The intimacy is the feelings of closeness, connection, care, trust, friendship, and communication. Meanwhile, passion is the feelings of attraction, strong desire, longing, need, and even addiction (Junaid et al., 2025). The last, commitment is the feeling of wanting to be with someone for a very long time, possibly indefinitely, no matter what happens. The theory of love as a story leading to stories with different types of love as described in the triangular theory. This theory considers the idea that the formation of all loves has their own hierarchical stories (Santika & Syafryadin, 2023). Unlike the previous two components, the eco-contextual theory focuses on the individual's desire to fix their love relationships, or even to find and build new love. To fulfil this desire, one must work not only with the triangular components and love stories but also with the concrete life context in which these things occur (Rohner, 2021).

This gap indicates the need for a study integrating pragmatic analysis with the psychological perspective of love. The novelty of this research lies in combining theory of deixis with the Triangular Theory of Love as part of the RELIC Theory to examine how deictic expressions represent intimacy, passion, and commitment in James Arthur's selected song lyrics. James Arthur is well-known for his songs, many of which explore themes of love, relationships, and emotional experiences. Moreover, deixis is categorized in three: person, spatial and temporal deixis. They help identifying the relationship between the songwriter, the addressee, and the situation described in the song. In song lyrics, deictic expressions not only indicate contextual references but also contribute to constructing emotional meaning and illustrating interpersonal relationships. Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of deixis found in James Arthur's selected song lyrics and explain how deictic expressions represent love based on the Triangular Theory of Love. The findings are expected to contribute to pragmatic studies, particularly deixis analysis, and provide a deeper understanding of how love is represented in song lyrics.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a pragmatic approach. The design was selected to study on interpreting the contextual meaning of language rather than measuring numerical data (Longo et al., 2024). The pragmatic approach was applied to analyze deictic expressions in song lyrics and explain how they represent love through the *Triangular Theory of Love*. The data source consisted of the lyrics of three selected songs written by James Arthur, namely *Say You Won't Let Go*, *Can I Be Him*, and *Train Wreck*. These songs were selected because they contain various deictic expressions and portray different components of love. The data were obtained from the official lyrics and were collected using the documentation method. The researcher identified all deictic expressions containing person, spatial, and temporal deixis as the primary data of this study.

The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis procedures consisting of data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and drawing conclusion. First, the data were collected by identifying deictic expressions found in the song lyrics. Second, the collected data were analyzed and classified based on theory of deixis into person, spatial, and temporal deixis. Third, the analyzed data were interpreted using the RELIC Theory of Love proposed deictic expressions represent intimacy, passion, and commitment in the song lyrics. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the findings to answer the research objective.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Frequent Deixis Found in the Selected Songs of James Arthur

The findings reveal that the lyrics of three selected songs by James Arthur contain three categories of deixis. They are person, temporal, and spatial deixis. It was found that person deixis appears the most with 248 occurrences, while temporal, and spatial deixis are 34 and 11 respectively. Table 1 presents the frequency of person, temporal, and place deixis found in James Arthur's selected songs.

Tabel 1. Frequency Distribution of Deixis Types in James Arthur's Selected Songs

Frequencies (in occurrences)	Selected Songs		
	Say You Won't Let Go	Can I Be Him	Safe Inside
Person Deixis	91	83	74
Temporal Deixis	14	10	10
Spatial Deixis	5	1	5

As the most dominant type, person deixis indicates that the lyrics mainly emphasize the relationship between the songwriter (*I, I'm, I've, I'd, and I'll*) and the addressee (*You*). The use of first and second person pronouns is a reflection of the close relationship between the songwriter and the addressee. These findings support theory that person deixis functions to identify the emotional distance among participants in a speech event, whereas time and place deixis establish the contextual background of an utterance.

2. Person Deixis in The Representation of Love

There are sixteen combinations of "*Component of Love*" and "*Psychological Experience*" across the three songs on basis of the person deixis (see Table 2). Based on the table, the person deixis is unevenly distributed in. Song *Say You Won't Let Go* accounts for 53 occurrences of person deixis, song *Can I Be Him* for 82 occurrences, and song *Safe Inside* for 77 occurrences. Although the difference in occurrences compared to *Safe Inside* is only five, *Can I Be Him* exhibits the highest frequency of person deixis. This difference indicates that while both songs are heavily centered on interpersonal relationships, they construct distinct psychological experiences. When the overall results are combined, intimacy emerges as the most dominant component of love, appearing 128 times in conjunction with person deixis. Passion follows with 58 occurrences, while commitment is the least frequent component, appearing only 26 times. These findings indicate that the use of person deixis in the three songs primarily serves to establish closeness, communication, care, and a sense of connection between the songwriter and the addressee. Although dominated by component of intimacy, the three songs do not represent love in the same way. In *Say You Won't Let Go*, commitment is the primary component of love represented. In *Can I Be Him*, the components of passion and intimacy exist at nearly balanced levels. Meanwhile, *Safe Inside* is heavily dominated by the element of intimacy. Thus, an overall pattern indicating a high level of intimacy is found only in *Safe Inside*.

The dominance of "*commitment*" in *Say You Won't Let Go* reflects a relatively stable, long term orientation toward love. The use of "*I*" and "*you*" in decisions to maintain the relationship positions the songwriter and their partner as the two primary participants in future projections. The person deixis "*you*" appears ten times within the category of very long-term relationship decisions far more frequently than "*I*," which only appears twice. This pattern indicates that the songwriter's commitment is explicitly directed toward the addressee. Findings in Table 2 indicate that first-person and second-person pronouns, particularly *I* and *you*, are the most frequently used forms of person deixis in the lyrics. These pronouns function to identify the songwriter is in the speech event to create direct and personal communication throughout the songs. In contrast, third-person pronouns occur

less frequently and are mainly used to refer to other participants mentioned in the lyrics. Therefore, the predominance of I and you demonstrate that James Arthur's selected songs emphasize interpersonal interaction between the songwriter and the direct addressee.

Table 2. Person Deixis and Most Frequent Component of Love in James Arthur's Selected Songs

Selected Songs	Person Deixis (occurrences)	Components of Love	Psychological Experience
Say You Won't Let Go	I (2); You (10) — total 12	Commitment	1. Decision that the relationship is very long term
	I (2); You (3); Me (1); We're (3) — total 9		2. Decision that the relationship is forever
	We're (1); I (1); Our (1) — total 3		3. Decision that the relationship is forever, come what may
	I (3); you (4); your (1); me (1) — total 9	Intimacy	Caring or compassion
	I (5); you (2); ya (1) — total 8		Communication
	I (5); you (5); your (2) — total 12	Passion	Intense longing
Can I Be Him	I (20); my (1); you (7); you're (1); he (1); him (8) — total 38	Passion	1. Intense longing
	I've (1) — total 1		2. Feeling of addiction
	I (7); I'm (3); me (5); my (3); you (12); your (3) — total 33	Intimacy	1. Closeness / Connection
	I (3); me (2); you (5) — total 10		2. Communication
Safe Inside	I (2); I'm (2); me (4); my (1); mine (1); we (1); you (2); you're (5) — total 18	Intimacy	1. Closeness / Connection
	I (14); my (2); you (4); you're (11); your (1) — total 32		2. Caring / Compassion
	I (2); me (6); you (4); you're (3) — total 15		3. Communication
	3 (7.0%) I'm (1); you (1); their (1) — total 3		4. Empathy / Respect
	I (5); you (2) — total 7	Passion	1. Inability to be without the partner
	I (1); you (1) — total 2	Commitment	1. Decision that the relationship is forever, come what may

3. Spatial Deixis in The Representation of Love

The spatial deixis is meant to indicate the location referred to or implied by the the songwriter (see Table 3). In English, there are two spatial deictic labels. They are proximal spatial deixis showing closeness and distal spatial showing remote or out of reach. There are 8 occurrences of spatial deixis in the song *Say You Won't Let Go*. The most dominant is the co-location "*with you*" (appearing four times), representing commitment and the decision to maintain the relationship over the long term. The next dominant deictic expression "*over your shoulder*" appears once, representing passion, specifically, intense longing. Following is the expression to trace the progression of love: an encounter "*in the dark*" and togetherness in the private space "*in bed*" showing permanent co-location. The deictic expression "*there for me*" is metaphorical referring not to physical distance but to emotional presence within the intimacy specifying the caring or compassion.

In song *Can I be Him* occurred six spatial deixis. All are distal forms: there (four times), that (three times, serving two functions), and those (two times). The most dominant spatial deixis "*there*" represents intimacy to specify closeness and the feelings of connection including the the songwriter desires the partner to be present in the private space close to them. *Those* maintains the object of desire as something cognitively salient yet not directly possessed; both reflect the the songwriter's passion. There are eleven spatial deixis in the *Safe Inside* song. "*Inside*" and the proximal "*this*" are the most dominant, appearing four times each, while "*home*" appears three times. All spatial deixis primarily represent intimacy. "*Inside*" and "*home*" establish caring and compassion by creating a safe space for the addressee. In addition, "*this*" in "*this way*" represent closeness and connection. This is particularly to avoid the separation and the state of being left behind.

Table 3. Spatial Deixis and Most Frequent Component of Love in James Arthur's Selected Songs

Selected Songs	Frequency		
	Spatial Deixis (occurrences)	Component of Love	Psychological Experience
Say You Won't Let Go	1. <i>With</i> (4 times)	Commitment	Decision that the relationship is very long term / forever: continued co-presence becomes the spatial form of commitment.
	2. <i>In the dark</i> (1 time)	Passion	Intense longing
	3. <i>Over</i> (1 time)		
	4. <i>In bed</i> (1 time)	Intimacy	Caring
	5. <i>There</i> (1 time)		Caring or compassion
Can I Be Him	6. <i>There</i> (4 times)	Intimacy	Closeness or Connection
	7. <i>That</i> (2 times)	Passion	✓ Intense longing. ✓ Feeling of addiction
Safe Inside	Inside (4 times)	Intimacy	Caring or compassion
	This (4 times)		Closeness or Connection
	Home (3 times)		Caring or Compassion

4. Temporal Deixis in the Representation of Love

Temporal deixis serves the point or interval within time. It is used as the reference point at which the utterances take moments. There are three main divisions on the time axis: (i) before the moment of utterance, (ii) at the moment of utterance, and (iii) after the moment of utterance (Cruse, 2000). "*Will*" and "*will not*" is a modal verb embedded to a bare infinitive showing actions or events in the future. Both are top-listed with each appearing to represent all component of love. "*Will*" primarily reflects intimacy through communication, care, and hope; only the phrase "*I will love you either way*" clearly represents commitment. "*Won't sleep*" consistently indicates intimacy specifically caring or compassion. They are followed by now (five times), till (four times), and the phrases the whole night, older, time to let go, and repeat, each appearing three times. "*Now*" appears five times, marking a shift in the relationship within the present. As the most basic temporal deixis in English, "*now*" refers to a precise instant. A future time orientation is most dominant, yet it reflects care and anxiety more than permanent commitment. Passion is the least dominant component in the three songs, represented the past time ("*already*"; "*that night*") and by expressions of limited or short range of time such as "*for a minute*"; "*the very first moment*"; "*never*".

Table 4. Temporal Deixis and Most Frequent Component of Love in James Arthur's Selected Songs

Selected Songs	Frequency		
	Temporal Deixis (occurrences)	Component of Love	Psychological Experience
Say You Won't Let Go	1. Will not (8 times)	Commitment	Decision that the relationship is very long term: repeated future-oriented refusal to separate becomes the song's temporal refrain.
	2. For a minute (1 time)	Passion	Intense longing
	3. Already (1 time)	Intimacy	Communication
	4. That night (1 time)		Connection and respect:
Can I Be Him	5. Will (4 times)	Intimacy	Closeness and connection
	6. Back in time (1 time)		Closeness and connection
	7. Now (2 times)	Passion	Intense longing
	8. The very first moment (1 time)		Intense longing:
	9. I've been thinking (1 time)		Feeling of addiction
Safe Inside	10. Will not (7 times)	Intimacy	Caring and compassion
	11. Now (5 times)		Closeness and connection
	12. (Un)'til (4 times)		Caring and compassion
	13. The whole night (3 times)		Caring and compassion
	14. Older (3 times)		Closeness and connection
	15. Time to let go (3 times)		Closeness and connection
	16. Repeat (3 times)		Empathy or respect and caring:
	17. Never (1 time)	Passion	Inability to be without the partner: the impossibility is represented as valid across an unlimited temporal span.

The analysis of person, spatial, and temporal deixis in *Say You Won't Let Go*, *Can I Be Him*, and *Safe Inside* reveals that deixis not only points the who, where, and when of an event but also constructs the psychological experience of love. Person deixis shapes the relationship between the songwriter and one's addressee; spatial deixis maps relational proximity or distance; and temporal deixis illustrates the evolution of love spanning memories, the present state, and projections of the future. These three elements function in unison, though with varying degrees of emphasis across the songs. Technically, person deixis constitutes the most dominant deictic expressions in the three love songs discussed above. It appeared 64 times, far outnumbering the temporal and spatial deixis. This finding indicates that the person deixis tends to dominate lyrics as they are used to construct a direct relationship between the the songwriter and the addressee (Dilla et al., 2023; Inayah et al., 2023; Rokhmah & Santoso, 2022). I, me, my, you, and your serve as the primary devices for articulating the psychological experience of love. However, there is no specific component of love represented by the person deixis.

In the song "*Say You Won't Let Go*," the distribution of person deixis is relatively balanced between "*I*" and "*You*." This balance points a reciprocal relationship. The songwriter does not merely convey personal desires but connects oneself with his partner through acts of caring, living together, raising children, and growing old together. The inclusive forms "*we*" and "*our*" expand the connection from two individuals into a single relational unit. Consequently, the person deixis in this song primarily represents commitment specifically, the decision to maintain the relationship over the long term or indefinitely. Simultaneously, acts of care and interpersonal communication activate

Intimacy, while the expression of needs and attraction generates Passion. The combination of these three elements most closely approximates "*consummate love*" within Sternberg's framework.

In contrast, "*Can I Be Him*" is dominated by the "*I*", "*You*", and "*him*". The frequent use of "*I*" points a perspective centered strongly on the the songwriter, while "*you*" serves as the object of longing. The pronoun "*him*" introduces a romantic rival situated outside the songwriter - addressee relationship. This structure shapes a dynamic of unreciprocated love: the songwriter desires closeness but has not yet gained recognition as a partner. The repeated questions reveal a need for validation. Thus, person deixis in this song primarily represents passion (intense longing) and intimacy (closeness or connection) that are still being hoped for, rather than an established. In "*Safe Inside*," there is "*I*" and "*You*" relationship that reveals the patterns of caregiving and concern. The "*I*" functions as a center of consciousness that observes, waits, and watches over, while the "*You*" represents an individual who is changing, aging, and moving toward independence. The dominance of the intimacy experienced through caring or compassion highlights a love that is not primarily erotic. However, the expression of an inability to live without the loved one introduces the element of passion specifically, the inability to be without the partner. Compared to the other two songs, "*Safe Inside*" presents the strongest tension between caring for someone and letting them go.

Additionally, temporal deixis reveals the most distinct differences in the love components of the three songs. *Say You Won't Let Go* moves from the past toward a permanent future. Deictic expressions referencing the initial meeting, the present state, daily life, aging, and death construct a relatively cohesive timeline. The past serves as the foundation for intimacy experienced through connection; the present reinforces passion and intimacy; while the future represents commitment obtained from decision made for forever relationship. *Can I Be Him* has a fragmented temporal orientation. Expressions such as "*now*," "*back in time*," "*the very first moment*," "*when*," and "*again*" link the initial experience with a desire to repeat it. The repetition of "*again*" indicates that the songwriter is tied to the same emotional moment. Its temporality is circular rather than progressive: the songwriter returns to the same song, performance, and question without any certainty of the relationship's progression. This pattern specifically represents passion experienced from intense Longing and a potential feeling of addiction, as there is a desire to continuously reproduce the emotional experience.

In *Safe Inside*, "*will*" and "*won't sleep*" dominates through hopes for a call, safety, tranquility, and the enduring nature of love. Although "*will*" is commonly associated with the future, not all its occurrences signify commitment; most represent projections of care or potential actions. Only statements regarding continued love under any circumstances explicitly represent the commitment of deciding that the relationship is forever, come what may. Conversely, "*won't sleep*" consistently signifies intimacy specifically experienced from caring or compassion and at the same time reflect the wakefulness or emotional vigilance. Love songs can function in the formation and maintenance of romantic bonds (Bamford et al., 2024). As a matter of, the three songs demonstrate that such bonds are not always identical; they may manifest as an established partnership, an aspiration to become a couple, or a protective affection as the loved one drifts away. These results also diverge from the historical trend identified, i.e., the rise of themes involving lust without love in popular music. The three songs analyzed instead situate passion within the context of connection, care, or commitment; none are dominated by sexual desire devoid of a relational dimension.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, person deixis is the most dominant category, as love is constructed through the relationships between participants. The dominant component of love developed is intimacy over passion and commitment. Temporal deixis serves as the primary instrument for distinguishing the stages and trajectory of the relationship, while spatial deixis even appearing least frequently effectively conveys closeness, estrangement, and protection. In short, person deixis identifies who is loving, spatial deixis indicates the closeness of the relationship, and temporal deixis shows the direction in which the love is moving. The above analysis reveals that the three songs construct distinct architectures of love. *Say You Won't Let Go* depicts love that has evolved into long-term companionship. The dominance of "*I -you -we*" relationships, the domestic setting, and projections extends to old age or death. Commitment has been the strongest component, supported by intimacy and passion. *Can I Be Him* portrays an aspirational, unreciprocated love. The dominance of "*I -you -she/ he*" dynamics, a setting of separation, and temporal repetition highlight a speaker striving to

secure a place in the beloved's life. Passion specifically intense longing, is the dominant component, followed by intimacy in the form of desired closeness. Commitment cannot yet be considered strong, as the songwriter has not even attained the status of a partner. *Safe* Inside depicts protective love amidst change and letting go. Person deixis positions the speaker as an emotional guardian; spatial deixis conveys both movements away and the need for a safe haven; and temporal deixis projects vigilance into the future. The strongest component is Intimacy specifically caring and compassion. Passion emerges through the act of imagining life without the beloved, while commitment is most clearly evident in the vow of unconditional love.

Future research should employ coding guidelines that distinguish purely lexical deixis from contextual expressions. A distinction must be made between the locative and existential functions of words like "*there*"; "*that*" needs to be categorized according to its use as a spatial or temporal demonstrative or for discourse deixis; and the modal form "*will*" require analysis based on its function whether expressing futurity, intention, prediction, or a promise.

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