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**Published by Faculty of Adab and Humanities**

**Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia**

**Website :** <http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/insaniyat> | **Email :** [journal.insaniyat@uinjkt.ac.id](mailto:journal.insaniyat@uinjkt.ac.id)

e-ISSN : 2541-500X

p-ISSN : 2614-6010



# INSANIYAT

*Journal of Islam and Humanities*

*Vol. 10(1) November 2025*



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<https://doi.org/10.15408/insaniyat.v10i1.42413>

# INSANIYAT

## Journal of Islam and Humanities

### Social Deixis and Power Relations in Habib Ja'far's YouTube Preaching

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#### Abstract

*This study examines how personal and social deixis function as pragmatic strategies in the YouTube sermons of Habib Ja'far, a key player in popularizing contemporary Islamic discourse. Adopting a qualitative sociopragmatic approach, the research analyzes twenty-two video excerpts across multiple YouTube channels—Jeda Nulis, VINDES, Metro TV, and Close the Door—to investigate how linguistic choices mediate persona construction, audience engagement, and digital religious authority. The analysis integrates Levinson's (1983) framework of deixis, Goffman's (1981) concept of footing, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, and Bell's (1984) audience design model, contextualized within Campbell's (2012) notion of performative digital authority. Findings reveal four dominant patterns: (1) personal deixis (saya, aku, gua, kita) as a tool for negotiating persona and inclusivity; (2) social deixis (Mbah, Bang Haji, Sahabat saya yang non-Muslim) as a resource for structuring hierarchy and solidarity; (3) intertextual deixis linking modern egalitarian speech with prophetic authority; and (4) cross-format deixis variation reflecting adaptive pragmatics across genres and platforms. The study concludes that Habib Ja'far's deixis exemplifies a hybrid, performative, and participatory model of religious authority, where linguistic adaptability and relational sincerity underpin the effectiveness of Islamic communication in the digital public sphere.*

**Keywords:** Personal Deixis; Social Deixis; Digital Religion; Habib Ja'far; Youtube; Pragmatic Analysis

**How to cite:** Abdullah, (2025). Language and Contemporary Preaching: Tracking the Power of Habib Ja'far's YouTube Preaching Through Personal and Social Deixis. *Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities*, 10(1), 69-82. <https://doi.org/10.15408/insaniyat.v10i1.46500>

#### Introduction

In contemporary Indonesia, preachers who natively inhabit social media occupy a dual role, they act as mediators of Islamic ethics and as cultural brokers who translate religious sensibilities into the idioms, aesthetics, and tempos of platformed life. Habib Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar is emblematic of this shift. Beyond reach metrics on YouTube or Instagram, his public persona frames Islam Cinta as an inclusive ethos that is playful yet morally instructive, speaking directly to digital-native youth who negotiate faith, identity, and aspiration in an attention economy. Recent scholarship on digital religion shows that online environments recalibrate ritual, authority, identity, and community, not simply by “moving” religion online





but by reconfiguring how authority is performed and recognized (H. A. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Within Indonesian Islam, this recalibration intersects with youth trends such as hijrah, aestheticized piety, and platformed da'wah, producing new constellations of legitimacy that sit alongside, traditional infrastructures of authority.

A growing body of work charts these transformations in Muslim Southeast Asia: studies document how social media preachers cultivate affective bonds, remix textual authority, and compete with legacy religious actors; they also show how popular Islamic content becomes a site where orthodoxy, lifestyle, and market logics interpenetrate (Adeni, 2024; Hannan, 2024). Syntheses in the broader field likewise map key trends, actors, and debates in “digital Islam,” highlighting the centrality of platforms and influencers in rearticulating orthodoxy and community (Wahid, 2024). At the same time, youth-oriented scenes from urban salafi pop culture to “aestheticized” piety. That illustrate how Indonesian Muslim millennials and Gen Z leverage media grammars and celebrity to negotiate belonging and authority (Aidulsyah, 2023; Wildan & Witriani, 2021). Despite these advances, much of the existing scholarship remains focused on macro-level analyses of representation, affect, and mediation. What remains underexplored are the micro-pragmatic mechanisms—the fine-grained linguistic choices through which authority, intimacy, and credibility are performed and ratified in real time. Specifically, little is known about how preachers like Habib Ja'far mobilize deixis, addressivity, and relational cues in dialogic, participatory genres such as YouTube talk shows, collaborations, and Q&A session.

Pragmatics offers a precise lens for examining these dynamics. Online discourse research shows that platform affordances (addressivity, threading, live chat) intensify indexical work, how speakers point to persons, time, space, and stance to choreograph intimacy and alignment. Yet we still lack fine-grained accounts of the micro-pragmatics through which authority is interactionally performed and ratified in dialogic, video-based genres (e.g., talk shows, Q&A, collaborations) that dominate Islamic content on YouTube. This is particularly salient for a digital-native preacher like Habib Ja'far, whose language practice routinely toggles between counseling, comedy, and collaboration in front of youthful, highly participatory audiences. Building on these insights, prior sermon-focused studies on deixis and digital preaching further clarify how proximity and authority are interactionally accomplished. In Friday-sermon scholarship, recent work consistently shows that personal deixis is a primary pragmatic resource for building closeness, drawing attention, and creating social solidarity between preacher and congregation (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Alkhawaldeh, 2022). Cross-tradition analyses also suggest that rhetorical strategies such as questions, repetition, and metaphor operate alongside deixis to project charisma and communicative authority. In digital settings, the preaching event itself becomes more collaborative and negotiated, as creators and audiences co-produce content; authority is thus relational and mediated by engagement logics and platform affordances (Mannerfelt, 2022). These insights, however, largely emerge from monologic khutbah or pre-recorded services and rarely address the dialogic, influencer-style ecologies that structure Indonesian youth da'wah on YouTube. Open the question of how deixis-as-strategy is mobilized to sustain proximity, guide ethical reasoning, and orchestrate participation among younger publics.

This study addresses that gap by offering a pragmatics-driven analysis of personal and social deixis in Habib Ja'far's YouTube appearances (including sermons, Q&A, and collaborations). Conceptually, we bridge three debates: (1) digital religion, how authority and authenticity are enacted under platform logics; (2) online pragmatics, how deictic anchoring and addressivity organize alignment and moral stance in computer-mediated discourse; and (3) youth Islamic culture in Indonesia, how popular piety and influencer-da'wah reconfigure relations between tradition and popular culture. Empirically, we show

that Habib Ja'far's strategic deictics perform a "convivial authority" an ethic of nearness that normalizes religious counsel while preserving doctrinal seriousness, thereby helping explain why platformed da'wah resonates with Indonesian youth without simply displacing traditional scholarly capital.

### Method

This study employed a qualitative socio-pragmatic discourse analysis to investigate how personal and social deixis function as pragmatic strategies in Habib Ja'far's digital sermons and media appearances. Rather than focusing solely on referential meaning, the analysis examined how deictic choices are used to manage footing (Goffman, 1981), face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and audience design (Bell, 1984) across multiple digital environments. This interpretive design aligns with the epistemological assumption that meaning is interactionally co-constructed and context-sensitive—especially in platform-mediated communication where linguistic form, technological affordance, and audience expectation are intertwined (Androutsopoulos, 2014; H. Campbell, 2010).

The primary corpus consists of twenty-two video excerpts drawn from Habib Ja'far's official YouTube appearances between 2020 and 2024. The selection followed a purposive sampling strategy aimed at maximizing variation in communicative settings and platform ecologies. Three major genres were represented: (1) sermon/monologue, (2) talk show/interview, and (3) Q&A or consultative formats. Likewise, four YouTube channels were included to capture cross-platform variation: Jeda Nulis (Habib Ja'far's official channel), VINDES, Metro TV, and Close the Door (Deddy Corbuzier).

The analysis integrated three complementary frameworks, 1) Levinson's theory of deixis (1983), which provided the categorical foundation (personal, social, and intertextual deixis); 2) Goffman's participation framework (1981), used to trace shifts in footing and role (animator–author–principal); and 3) Brown & Levinson's politeness model (1987), guiding interpretation of positive versus negative politeness strategies.

At the meso level, Bell's model of audience design (1984) and Campbell's theory of performative digital authority (2010) informed the analysis of genre- and platform-specific adaptation. This multi-layered framework enabled the study to examine deixis not only as a grammatical phenomenon but as a performative resource that constructs relational and moral authority in digital religious discourse.

### Results and Discussion

An analysis of twenty-two excerpts from the YouTube videos of Habib Ja'far reveals that personal and social deixis are employed not merely for referential purposes but as complex pragmatic strategies to manage footing, negotiate authority, and maximize audience engagement, particularly among digitally native youth. This finding affirms that deixis in mediated discourse functions as both a linguistic index of stance and a performative tool of identity management (Goffman, 1981; Levinson, 1983). Through the contextual orchestration of "saya/aku-kita-gua/lu-kamu" ("I/we-you"), Habib Ja'far dynamically adjusts his social footing to balance negative politeness and positive politeness as theorized by (Brown & Levinson, 1987). At the same time, these alternations demonstrate audience design in action (Bell, 1984), wherein linguistic choice is continually attuned to audience composition, genre expectations, and platform affordances (Androutsopoulos, 2014).

This analysis shows that deixis operates not in isolation but within a broader ecology of digital interaction, confirming that language on social media is platform-sensitive and audience-responsive. The use of informal pronominals such as *gua/lu* in talk-show contexts or *kita* in collective exhortations reflects an adaptive relational strategy that enables Habib



Ja'far to traverse multiple social registers, from preacher to peer, from scholar to storyteller, without losing credibility. This flexibility echoes (Goffman, 1981) notion of footing shifts, where speakers recalibrate their stance to align moral authority with social accessibility.

At the same time, social deixis, manifested in address forms such as Mbah, Bang Haji, Pak/Bu/sampean, and expressions like “sahabat saya yang non-Muslim”, functions as an index of relational hierarchy and solidarity. These forms regulate the axis of power, distance, and familiarity, effectively stabilizing asymmetrical relations while maintaining interpersonal warmth (Levinson, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Such pragmatic sensitivity reflects what Campbell (2012) calls performative authenticity, the digital reconfiguration of religious authority through relational performance rather than institutional hierarchy. The global findings can thus be summarized in four interrelated patterns. First, negotiating persona and inclusivity, involving a strategic shift in linguistic persona that normalizes closeness while maintaining doctrinal authority. Second, structuring relations and hierarchy, through calibrated use of address terms and honorifics that preserve asymmetry without condescension. Third, anchoring modernity in tradition, by embedding egalitarian, humorous, and youth-oriented speech within undisputed prophetic or textual references, ensuring epistemic legitimacy, and fourth, digital authority as performative proximity, in which authority is mediated by platform dynamics and algorithmic visibility—dependent on the performativity of relational closeness, collaboration, and interactivity (H. A. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

These patterns collectively substantiate a broader theoretical claim, religious authority in the digital age is relational, negotiated, and co-produced through linguistic performance. The findings align with previous studies on Friday sermons, which position we/you as core resources for attention, familiarity, and solidarity (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Alkhawaldeh, 2022), and with recent analyses of digital da'wah, which reveal that online preachers increasingly construct legitimacy through dialogic engagement rather than doctrinal monologue (Mannerfelt, 2022). In this sense, Habib Ja'far exemplifies a hybrid authority model, one that merges theological tradition with pragmatic adaptability, situating religious discourse within the participatory logic of digital culture.

### **Negotiating Persona and Inclusivity**

The shifts in first- and second-person pronoun choice employed by Habib Ja'far across the corpus represent a sophisticated linguistic strategy for managing footing, negotiating social distance, and building rapport with his audience. The distribution of personal tokens—saya (7×), kita (7×), gua (5×), kamu (3×), and others—can be examined within a sociopragmatic framework supported by empirical findings from similar da'wah contexts.

The pronoun saya appears in normative or representative contexts, where Habib Ja'far emphasizes ethical responsibility or personal credentials. In “saya yang akan ngomong sama mertuanya” (“I will be the one to talk to his in-law”) (Ja'far, 2023, Part 09:41-09:44), he assumes the burden of action as a principal (Goffman, 1981), rather than merely an animator. Similarly, in “saya” frames concern over popularity and the risk of istidrāj (Irama, 2022, Part 04:56–05:20), projecting accountability before inviting the audience to self-reflect. Within the politeness framework, saya activates negative politeness—maintaining the while keeping communicative channels open. At the audience-design level, saya indexes an authoritative persona, particularly when topics require ethical or juridical assertion (e.g., Metro TV, 2023, Part 07:20-07:30 and 06:53-07:20).

Habib Ja'far frequently positions his audience as co-owners of a moral project, as in “kita tetap memilih untuk tidak masuk” (“we still choose not to enter,” (Irama, 2022, Part 40:10-40:22); “kita tidak membenarkan, tapi menegur dengan cara... ahsan” (“we

do not justify it, but admonish in a better way,” Irama, 2022, Part 14:42-15:14); or “kita kembali kepada tali Allah” (“we return to the rope of God,” Irama, 2022, Part 13:33-13:43). Pragmatically, this inclusive framing reduces hierarchy and redistributes the moral burden from “them” to “us,” strengthening positive politeness and cohesion (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Studies on Friday sermons confirm that we pronouns dominate in orchestrating congregational attention and emotional alignment (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023) (Alkhawaldeh, 2022). Within the platformed context, kita reflects participatory authority that is strong because it is shared, not imposed.

The dominance of gua/lu (“I/you” in colloquial Jakarta Indonesian) appears in entertainment-oriented settings (e.g., YouTube channels VINDE, (Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 20:30-20:46 and 44:06-44:39), or talk shows (Metro TV, 2023, Part 12:32-13:00 and Corbuzier, 2023, Part 33:51-34:16). Habib Ja’far performs linguistic convergence to reduce social distance and build solidarity (Fowler et al., 25). In Desta & Vincent (2023, Part 44:06-44:39), he alternates lu/kita/gua while discussing the impacts of hate speech. This mixed-register strategy signals persona flexibility-being both a peer who understands online comment culture and an ethical guide. In (Corbuzier, 2023, Part 33:51-34:16), kamu (formal “you”) intertwines with gua in a vivid moral scenario, balancing urgency with personal presence. Within Bell (1984), audience-design model, such variation indexes an urban, youth-oriented audience and a conversational genre characterized by spontaneity and humor.

The appearance of aku in reflective segments (Metro TV, 2023, Part 03:22-03:48) marks a footing shift toward personal introspection on the strategy of “becoming a friend” to young people so that da’wah does not sound didactic. The pronoun aku signals intimacy that saya cannot convey-it invokes empathy and validates lived experience before offering normative guidance. At the same time, it enables a smooth transition to kita (collective invitation) without losing clerical ethos as ulama.

The use of kamu and the possessive -mu emerges in advisory or consultative contexts (Ja’far, 2023, Part 05:22-05:27) (Corbuzier, 2023, Part 33:51-34:16 and 33:39-33:54). In (Corbuzier, 2023, Part 33:39-33:54), the utterance “kalau sekiranya kamu tidak makan babi itu kamu mati” (“if by not eating the pork you would die”) defines emergency ethics in a graded and personalized way. From a politeness perspective, kamu potentially threatens face, but mitigation occurs through contextualized scenarios and shar’i justification, increasing acceptability (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the talk show context (Corbuzier, 2023, Part 33:51-34:16), the interplay of kamu and gua produces a selectively instructive tone, firm on principles yet empathetic toward individual cases.

This strategic combination of pronominal personae facilitates agile footing shifts (Goffman, 1981) from authoritative scholar (saya) to peer (gua/lu), to moral companion (kita), to intimate narrator (aku). Such patterns not only reflect Habib Ja’far’s high sociopragmatic competence but also affirm cross-disciplinary findings that personal deixis in religious discourse functions as a vital discursive instrument. As demonstrated in sermon contexts, the strategic use of “we” and “you” serves to build intimacy, attract attention, and generate solidarity (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Alkhawaldeh, 2022), while simultaneously reinforcing collective belonging and moral authority (Suhair & Abdulameer, 2019). Habib Ja’far employs pronouns not merely as referential markers but as strategic instruments for relational negotiation and identity management within the complex public sphere of digital religion.

### **Relational and Hierarchical Structures**

The next set of findings highlights the use of social deixis through forms of address such as Bang Haji, Mbah, Sayyidah Khadijah, Nabi Muhammad, and “sahabat saya yang

non-Muslim” (“my non-Muslim friend”). These forms are, in principle, conventional in Indonesian linguistic practice, each performing distinct social functions; in Habib Ja’far’s discourse, however, they are orchestrated to subtly structure relations, hierarchy, and authority. Theoretically, social deixis links lexical choice to the roles and social positions of speech participants (Levinson, 1983). Its management is closely tied to face-work (Goffman, 1981) and positive/negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

First, Habib Ja’far opens his personal confession with the address term Mbah (Metro TV, 2023, p. 08:34-09:11) for his senior interlocutor (Sujiwo Tejo): “Tapi saya pernah nyolong rel, lo, Mbah...” (“But I once stole railway tracks, you know, Mbah...”). The term Mbah indexes an age-based and cultural hierarchy while simultaneously maintaining dialogic warmth. Placing the address term at the beginning of the clause functions as a framing device that organizes relational expectations: it conveys respect without suspending solidarity (positive politeness). At the same time, Habib Ja’far activates a narrative of self-disclosure (“past... mischief...”) to build authenticity and a kind of moral credential that later underpins the legitimacy of his religious practice (“creative ways to ruqyah those people”). From the perspective of face-work, this strategy minimizes face-threat when sensitive material (past transgressions) is made public, because a respectful frame has already been set through Mbah (Goffman, 1981; Levinson, 1983).

Second, the term Bang Haji (Irama, 2022, Part 04:56-05:20 and 13:33-13:43) is used when addressing Rhoma Irama. This usage is noteworthy because it combines two dimensions: religious respect (Haji) and local familiarity (Bang). In (Irama, 2022, Part 04:56-05:20), Habib Ja’far addresses him as Bang Haji while articulating his anxiety about the limits of popularity and the risk of *istidrāj*: “Bang Haji, yang saya khawatirkan adalah popularitas... ini masih koridor niat dakwah atau sudah *istidrāj*?” (“Bang Haji, what I worry about is popularity... is this still within the corridor of the intention of da’wah, or has it become *istidrāj*?”). With this framing, Habib Ja’far can critique himself and draw an ethical line without threatening the face of his interlocutor, who holds public-religious authority. Deictically, the address term negotiates two axes of authority: religious pop icon and friend. This stabilizes an asymmetrical relationship so that it remains dialogic (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Levinson, 1983).

Habib Ja’far repeats the address term Bang Haji when formulating the normative core: “Tidak ada konsep... kecuali kembali kepada tali Allah, Bang Haji” (“There is no concept... except returning to the rope of God, Bang Haji”). Here, the relational address and the theological reference intertwine: the metaphor *ḥabl Allāh* (“the rope of God”) functions as an ideological-religious deixis that links contemporary discourse to the authority of tradition. The repetition of the same address term maintains coherence of roles and a consistent respectful tone throughout a morally loaded (sacred) topic, so that the normative message is received without sounding preachy or patronizing. Sequentially, this illustrates a deliberate orchestration: address term → theological grounding → invitation to return to the divine path—a sequence that balances an ethos of familiarity with an ethos of reverence (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Levinson, 1983).

Taken together, the three data points (Metro TV, 2023, Part 08:34-09:11; Irama, 2022, Part 04:56-05:20 and 13:33-13:43) show that the analytic value does not lie in the uniqueness of the address terms themselves (both Mbah and Bang Haji are cultural conventions), but in how Habib Ja’far manages their distribution (when the address term is introduced), co-occurrence (with humor, self-disclosure, or theological reference), and framing functions (opening/closing or shifting topic). The result is a configuration of relations that is “intimate yet respectful,” which: (a) minimizes face-threat when sensitive issues are discussed (self-disclosure and self-critique), (b) maintains a balance between positive and negative politeness,

and (c) connects a dialogic da'wah style with the continuity of tradition through ideological deixis. In this way, relational and hierarchical structures are not imposed externally but are interactionally produced through the well-targeted orchestration of conventional address terms—consistent with formulations of social deixis (Levinson, 1983), face-work (Goffman, 1981), and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Third, references to Sayyidah Khadijah and the Prophet Muhammad (Ja'far, 2023, Part 05:38-05:40; Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 24:00-24:07 and 39:23-39:30) function as religious-historical deixis that link the relaxed, contemporary discourse he performs with uncontested sources of religious authority. Habib Ja'far draws social-ethical principles from the prophetic tradition to frame issues of social interaction and gendered relations. This introduces normative authority without positioning himself as a morally superior, unassailable figure, because the argument is anchored in jointly revered figures (Goffman, 1981). In terms of politeness, the reference to Nabi ("the Prophet," Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 24:00-24:07) acts as a burden-sharing device: corrective messages are delivered through a third-party authority rather than as a direct reprimand, thus minimizing face-threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In (Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 39:23-39:30), Habib Ja'far extracts a model of prophetic relationality by replacing hierarchical labels such as "student/follower" with "friend" (sahabat). Deictically, this softens the asymmetry between authority and follower into a dignified togetherness. Within the framework of positive politeness, the term *sahabat* builds solidarity without erasing negative politeness, respect for the Prophet's authority as a normative reference (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Levinson, 1983).

Fourth, in (Ja'far, 2023, Part 09:45-09:47), "Pak, buk, sip sampean!", we observe a combination of public etiquette (Pak/Bu "Sir/Madam") and Javanese familiarity (sampean, an informal second-person pronoun). On one hand, the expression signals formal respect; on the other, it invites the audience into an in-group. This is an example of social deixis that is not rigid: Habib Ja'far adapts his forms of address to the audience's register, preserving the face of both parties. Fifth, the expression "Sahabat saya yang non-Muslim" ("my non-Muslim friend," Corbuzier, 2023, Part 45:34–45:38) appears when he talks with public figures Bois Bokir and Onad Leonardo in #LogIndiCloseTheDoor – EPS. 21. This deixis is particularly distinctive because it combines recognition of difference in identity (non-Muslim) with relational closeness (friend). In a multireligious society such as Indonesia, such a strategy becomes a model of moderate (wasathiyah) religious communication. The deixis simultaneously rejects identity polarization and avoids the religious exclusivism that often surfaces in conventional da'wah rhetoric. Habib Ja'far foregrounds solidarity and then links difference as an acknowledged attribute rather than an obstacle. This reduces interfaith face-threat and widens the space for egalitarian dialogue (Goffman, 1981).

Overall, the social deixis employed by Habib Ja'far consistently fosters harmonious relations, acknowledges hierarchy, and maintains interpersonal warmth. This pattern demonstrates a high level of pragmatic competence, wherein each form of address functions not merely as a communicative tool but also as a symbol of identity, status, and moral positioning projected through interaction. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of social deixis in pragmatics, which represents social relationships and status hierarchies between speaker and addressee (Levinson, 1983). Safi'i (2025) how's that forms of social deixis in Indonesian religious-political discourse function as instruments for negotiating social distance while preserving culturally embedded norms of politeness. These findings support the view that social deixis reflects linguistic strategies regulating the relationship between power, social distance, and solidarity (Bilá et al., 2020; Buyle & De Smet, 2018; Taan & Lasaten, 2021). In this light, Habib Ja'far's linguistic strategies can be understood as a pragmatic effort to negotiate his social position at the intersection of religious frameworks and local culture,



without sacrificing the affective and inclusive dimensions of communication.

### **Intertextual–Religious Deixis**

Beyond its social relational function discussed earlier, these religious references also perform an intertextual anchoring role, linking modern discourse to prophetic tradition and ensuring that Habib Ja'far's egalitarian digital persona remains grounded in normative Islamic epistemology. While Structuring Relations and Hierarchy focused on the management of interpersonal respect through social deixis (e.g., Mbah, Bang Haji, Sahabat saya yang non-Muslim), the present section examines how intertextual deixis extends this relational strategy into the theological and ideological domain. Here, deixis not only marks relationships between people but also between texts, traditions, and discursive authorities.

The intertextual deixis used by Habib Ja'far demonstrates a deliberate weaving between rhetorical modernity and theological continuity. His references to sacred figures and prophetic narratives serve as epistemic anchors that ensure doctrinal legitimacy within a conversational and humorous style. This phenomenon is evident in (Ja'far, 2023, Part 05:38–05:40; Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 24:00–24:07 and 39:23–39:30), where expressions such as “Sayyidah Khadijah” and “Nabi Muhammad” are invoked as moral and historical exemplars. For instance, in (Ja'far, 2023, Part 05:38–05:40), the phrase “pernikahan agung” calls forth a shared moral memory and sacralizes the discussion of love and partnership. Similarly, in (Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 24:00–24:07), the colloquial saying “orang tergantung circle-nya” is intertextually linked to a Prophetic maxim, persuading younger audiences that advice on peer influence derives from hikmah nabawiyyah (prophetic wisdom) rather than moral panic. Moreover, Habib Ja'far's repeated assertion that the Prophet referred to his followers as “sahabat” (Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 39:23–39:30) validates his own use of “sahabat” as an inclusive address term, aligning his digital rhetoric with a prophetic model of companionship rather than hierarchical discipleship.

This strategic anchoring illustrates what (Kristeva, 1986) describes as intertextuality as ideological mediation—the process through which present discourse derives meaning and legitimacy by invoking prior authoritative texts. In Habib Ja'far's case, intertextual deixis functions as a pragmatic bridge that legitimizes new forms of religious expression (casual, dialogic, humorous) while maintaining theological orthodoxy. It represents a kind of “discursive ijtihad”, where the preacher modernizes delivery without detaching from scriptural lineage.

From a pragmatic standpoint, this form of deixis transcends referentiality to embody ideological deixis (Suhair & Abdulameer, 2019), positioning the speaker and audience within a shared sacred worldview. By invoking canonical figures, Habib Ja'far implicitly reaffirms the authority of revelation while distributing interpretive agency across the community of listeners. In this sense, deixis operates as a semiotic bridge between revelation and reception, turning traditional symbols into accessible points of identification for a digital audience.

Recent studies in Indonesian discourse (Safi'i, 2025) reinforce this interpretation, showing that religious deixis often mediates between tradition and innovation in contemporary preaching, allowing clerics to translate classical Islamic concepts into the idioms of popular culture. The intertextual reference in digital sermons enhances epistemic credibility while fostering dialogic participation, a finding that resonates strongly with Habib Ja'far's rhetorical strategy.

Habib Ja'far's intertextual deixis exemplifies what can be called “rooted modernity”, the modern in its linguistic performance yet traditional in its theological grounding. Through the interweaving of informal, egalitarian, and inclusive styles with prophetic and Qur'anic allusions, he enacts a communicative model where religious authority is not diminished by



humor or digitality but renewed through them. This pragmatic and intertextual hybridity situates his da'wah as both culturally adaptive and doctrinally anchored, demonstrating Islam's discursive flexibility in navigating the complexities of modern media environments.

### **Deixis and Digital Religious Authority**

As discussed above, Habib Ja'far's use of inclusive and flexible deixis extends beyond interpersonal solidarity to function as a performative strategy of digital religious authority. In the ecology of online preaching, authority is not merely asserted but enacted, negotiated, and ratified through discourse. Each deictic shift, between *saya* (formal), *gua/lu* (colloquial), and *kita* (inclusive). Constitutes a micro-performance of authority that balances epistemic legitimacy with relational accessibility. This performative model resonates with Goffman (1981) notion of footing shifts, in which speakers strategically modulate stance to align with diverse audiences, and with H. Campbell (2010) conception of performative authenticity. The idea that religious credibility online emerges from perceived sincerity and dialogic engagement rather than inherited institutional status.

In digital religious spaces, authority becomes a co-constructed phenomenon, shaped through the reciprocal recognition between preacher and audience. The affordances of digital platforms, comment sections, live chat, and algorithmic visibility. Transform preaching into an interactive co-performance (Hjarvard, 2008). Habib Ja'far's deixis-driven addressivity (e.g., direct second-person targeting, collective *kita* framing, and strategic *gua/lu* switches) enables this co-performance by collapsing hierarchical boundaries and fostering the illusion of conversational immediacy. As Solahudin & Fakhruroji (2019) note, online da'wah increasingly requires a re-enactment of authority, a continual linguistic reaffirmation of legitimacy achieved through participation, responsiveness, and interactivity.

At the same time, the shift from "*saya* → *kita*" in collective exhortations exemplifies what Ding et al. (2025) terms distributed agency, a redistribution of moral responsibility from the individual preacher to the collective ummah. Through this shift, Habib Ja'far constructs a theology of participation, situating the audience not as passive recipients of guidance but as co-actors in moral reasoning. This redistribution of agency reflects the broader transition from hierarchical to networked authority (H. A. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), in which legitimacy circulates horizontally within digital publics rather than descending vertically from established institutions.

Doctrinal references, such as Sayyidah Khadijah or Nabi Muhammad (Ja'far, 2023, Part 05:38-05:40; Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 24:00-24:07 and 39:23-39:30) serve as epistemic anchors that stabilize this performative flexibility. They ensure that the preacher's casual, humorous, and egalitarian rhetoric remains tethered to Islamic orthodoxy. In doing so, Habib Ja'far exemplifies describe as the reconstruction of religious legitimacy through performance, an adaptive mode of authority where the ulama's traditional role as moral guide is preserved but reformulated through interactive and media-sensitive discourse.

On a micro level, deixis functions as a discourse-level mechanism for aligning affect and belief, on a meso level, it becomes a pragmatic instrument for managing co-presence and mutual engagement through direct address, and on a macro level, it mediates between theological intention and technological infrastructure. The digital platform itself rewards intimacy, visibility, and algorithmic resonance conditions that favor relational over doctrinal forms of authority. The algorithmic environment thus amplifies linguistic strategies that project warmth, responsiveness, and humility, granting relational authority a visibility premium over formal sermonizing styles. Habib Ja'far's deixis exemplifies the mediatization of religious authority (H. A. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Hjarvard, 2008). A process whereby sacred discourse adapts to the communicative logic of digital media. His language choices

reveal that in the age of platforms, being authoritative requires being relatable. Deixis, as both a pragmatic and semiotic device, becomes the linguistic infrastructure through which Islamic knowledge, moral agency, and digital charisma are dynamically negotiated and sustained.

### Cross-Format and Cross-Channel Comparison

Empirically, this performative authority manifests differently across formats and channels, illustrating how Habib Ja'far's deixis dynamically adapts to the semiotic logic of each communicative environment. In digital preaching, the meaning of deixis is not inherent in the word itself but co-determined by the genre of talk, the mode of production, and the platform's affordances. Within the platform ecology, format regulates the turn-taking order (who speaks, when, and how spontaneously), while channel determines register, audience expectation, and community norms (Androutsopoulos, 2014). As deixis is a primary linguistic resource for managing footing, face, and audience design (Bell, 1984; Goffman, 1981), variations across these communicative contexts yield distinctive pragmatic patterns even when the thematic content remains constant.

From a socio-pragmatic perspective, each format offers a different locus of authority performance. Sermons and monologues privilege epistemic authority, where deixis such as *saya* and *kita* dominate because they project accountability (*saya*) and collective moral inclusion (*kita*). This aligns with the logic of broadcast authority (Hjarvard, 2008), where speech acts emphasize theological legitimacy and public responsibility. In contrast, talk shows (Desta & Vincent, 2023, Part 20:30-20:46 and 44:06-44:39; Metro TV, 2023, Part 12:32-13:00; Corbuzier, 2023, Part 33:51-34:16) favor *gua/lu* deixis, reflecting the interactional requirements of spontaneity, humor, and banter. The genre itself demands conversational parity rather than hierarchical instruction. Here, Habib Ja'far's deixis shifts from prescriptive to performative, that transforming teaching into relational entertainment (H. A. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Likewise, Q&A or consultative sessions intensify *kamu* and *kita*, illustrating a pragmatic transition from teaching (didactic) to accompanying (dialogic) roles, consistent with the participatory turn in digital religion (H. Campbell, 2010).

Across channels, these deixis patterns become even more revealing. On his personal channel Jeda Nulis, Habib Ja'far maintains a stable persona oscillating between *saya* (normative) and *kita* (collective), using *gua/lu* strategically to mediate humor in informal segments. This stability reflects, calls discursive identity consistency—a cohesive persona across topics. On METRO TV (2023, Part 07:20-07:30; 03:22-03:48 and 06:53-07:20) and Irama (2022, Part 13:33-13:43), honorifics and formal register dominate, signaling deference to broadcast decorum and institutional norms; while on the Bang Haji channel (Irama, 2022, Part 04:56-05:20 and 13:33-13:43), Habib Ja'far integrates religious honorifics (Bang Haji) to balance respect for cultural icons with dialogic familiarity. Conversely, on VINDES (2023, Part 20:30-20:46 and 44:06-44:39), *gua/lu* deixis aligns with the channel's laid-back and comedic ethos, producing a contextually resonant authority—serious in substance but casual in form. On Deddy Corbuzier's platform (2023, Part 33:51-34:16; 34:44-34:54; 45:34-45:38; and 33:39-33:54), *kamu* emerges as an ethical deixis, tailored to case-based moral scenarios (e.g., *darurat babi*), merging clarity of Islamic law with empathy.

These cross-channel variations confirm that Habib Ja'far fine-tunes his deictic repertoire to accommodate the norms of each discourse community, a process (Bell, 1984) would describe as audience design at scale. In this sense, deixis operates as a pragmatic calibration tool—realigning register, intimacy, and authority according to the communicative ethos of each space. What emerges is not fragmentation but pragmatic elasticity, a hallmark of the digitally fluent preacher who navigates between sacred, popular, and commercial

discourses while sustaining coherence of moral voice.

This analysis underscores that platformed da'wah is governed by the logic of mediatized authenticity (H. A. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). In different genres, Habib Ja'far's deixis performs the same relational function—affirming authority through proximity—but the form of proximity changes. In monologic preaching, it is ritual and collective; in talk shows, conversational and affective; in Q&A, participatory and pedagogical. Such flexibility exemplifies performative proximity. The capacity to project authenticity through linguistic adaptability. The deixis becomes not merely a marker of presence but a performative sign of relational credibility within algorithmically mediated publics.

These cross-format and cross-channel distinctions provide empirical evidence for the earlier theoretical claim that digital religious authority is negotiated through audience-responsive deixis. The pragmatic agility displayed by Habib Ja'far suggests that authority in digital religion is less about dogmatic stability and more about contextual coherence, the ability to remain authentic across shifting communicative terrains. Deixis, therefore, functions as the linguistic architecture that allows the preacher to inhabit multiple publics, academic, popular, and devotional, without fracturing his moral persona

### Counter-Evidence and Boundary Conditions

Two important observations constrain the generalizability of these findings. First, co-occurring forms that appear “contradictory” may emerge within a single segment, for instance, (Corbuzier, 2023, Part 33:51-34:16), where *kamu* (directive or case-specific imperative) coexists with *gua* (casual self-reference). Rather than indicating inconsistency, this represents a dual-track strategy that simultaneously performs epistemic clarity (clarifying a moral or legal rule, particularly in life–death scenarios) and relational empathy (sustaining peer-level rapport that prevents the message from sounding judgmental). In Goffman (1981) terms, such instances illustrate deliberate footing shifts, where the speaker alternates between the roles of animator and principal to manage the interpersonal and normative dimensions of discourse concurrently. Hence, the presence of seemingly conflicting deictic choices demonstrates pragmatic adaptability, not incoherence, that showing the preacher's capacity to micro-calibrate stance and alignment within a single interactional frame.

Second, in highly formal or sensitive contexts, Habib Ja'far deliberately avoids using *gua/lu* and instead foregrounds *saya/kita* to maintain discursive dignity and uphold the collective face of the interaction. This selective restraint exemplifies what scholars describe as relational work, a process through which speakers negotiate politeness, appropriateness, and authority in accordance with social expectations and institutional norms. In digital environments with heterogeneous audiences, formality is not merely a marker of politeness but a semiotic cue of legitimacy, signaling awareness of register, decorum, and audience diversity. In this respect, genre, platform, and topic sensitivity act as contextual regulators governing deictic selection, consistent with Bell (1984) principle of audience design: style is not an intrinsic property of speakers but a dynamic response to the audience they imagine and address.

These cases underscore that Habib Ja'far's deictic system does not function as a fixed template but as an elastic and contextually responsive mechanism. This elasticity strengthens the argument for deixis-as-strategy: linguistic choice is not random but a multidimensional calculation balancing audience design, footing, and face management simultaneously. In Verschueren's (1999) terms, such behavior exemplifies adaptability. The ability of language users to continuously align linguistic forms with shifting social contexts, communicative goals, and interactional frames without losing ideological coherence.

More broadly, these boundary cases demonstrate that digital religious authority is

situational rather than absolute. In some contexts, performative familiarity (gua/lu/kita) effectively fosters solidarity and approachability; in others, linguistic formality (saya/kita) reinforces moral integrity and epistemic accountability. This oscillation exemplifies what scholars term hybrid authority, in which digital preachers must navigate two seemingly contradictory imperatives: communicative openness and theological solemnity. Thus, what may appear as deictic tension is, in fact, a strategic balancing act—a pragmatic space where authority, intimacy, and respect are continuously renegotiated in response to the platform’s affordances and audience expectations.

In summary, the so-called “anomalies” in deictic usage are not weaknesses of the model but rather evidence of its adaptive sophistication. Through these variations and boundary conditions, Habib Ja’far’s discourse demonstrates that pragmatic elasticity is the foundation of effective digital da’wah. It is within this linguistic adaptability that authenticity and authority coexist—sustaining a credible moral voice while engaging a digitally diverse public.

### Conclusion

This study shows that Habib Ja’far’s use of personal, social, and intertextual deixis in digital sermons functions as a pragmatic strategy for shaping persona, negotiating authority, and engaging diverse audiences. Drawing on Levinson, Goffman, and Brown & Levinson, the analysis demonstrates that deixis is a performative tool aligning linguistic choices with social intention and platform dynamics. Four patterns emerge: personal deixis negotiates proximity and credibility; social deixis manages hierarchy and solidarity; intertextual deixis links modern rhetoric with sacred tradition; and cross-platform variation reveals the adaptive, situational nature of digital religious authority. Together, these patterns show how Ja’far constructs a hybrid, participatory form of authority rooted in linguistic flexibility and ethical engagement.

The study contributes to digital pragmatics and religious communication by extending classical pragmatic theories into algorithmically mediated contexts. Methodologically, it highlights the value of cross-platform analysis in understanding how digital affordances shape linguistic authority, and it points to future research possibilities involving female preachers, transnational Muslim influencers, or AI-assisted da’wah to explore whether similar pragmatic elasticity appears across different cultural or gendered settings.

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