



## Exploring Personal Deixis in Western Music: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract

*Pragmatics informs us about the relationship between the use of language and its context. This relationship is identified through person deixis. This research interprets the reference meaning of personal deixis and looks at the most frequent personal deixis used in the lyrics of male and female English singers. This research uses a corpus method for the analysis. The data was collected from online sources to compile corpora of songs sung by male and female singers. The research has adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches for the analysis of corpora. The corpus was tagged using parts-of-speech tagger (POS Tagger) and analyzed using AntConc software. The findings suggest that personal deixis are frequently used by both male and female singers.*

**Key Words:** Pragmatics, Deixis, Song Lyrics, Western Music, Corpus-Based Study

### Introduction

This paper deals with the use of personal deixis in western music. Language serves as a tool having an organized system of symbols that are designed for interaction and communication (Lyons, 2002). As we know that language is used for sharing our thoughts, ideas, information and for expressing our feelings and emotions. Music is also a form of communication between the singer and the audience. Songs are used to express emotions and desires in every language. In the modern age, music holds an important place in our lives. People listen to music for various purposes. Therefore, there are different types of music available in the world. According to Juslin and Sloda (2010), songs are the language of emotions.

Nowadays, listening to songs has become a favorite activity, especially for young people. They play songs while performing their routine actions, such as learning, driving, sleeping, playing different games, and bodybuilding in the fitness center and even during eating. Generally speaking, songs have become part of their everyday life because songs evoke different types of feelings among the listeners (Raj & Munipan, 2012). The song is the blend of words and lines which are termed as lyrics, and they are accompanied by music. A singer sings those lyrics to express his feelings and imagination and take his listeners to the imagined world (Raj & Munipan, 2012). Additionally, the lyrics of songs also provide a sense of imagination for life. Hence, when the listener listens to lyrics, occasionally he does not only strive to comprehend the sense of lyrics but also the meaning of the speaker or singer. The study of the singer or speaker's intended meaning is known as pragmatics.

A pragmatic investigation of language is done to understand the use of words in a language. Pragmatics is related to meaning uttered by the speaker or writer and comprehended by the listener or reader in a communication process. While relating to that, it can be said that pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning, implied meaning, contextual meaning, and the articulation of relative distance. Communication is based not only on knowing the meaning of words used in the expression but also on comprehending the utterances of the speaker (Yule, 1996). Sometimes misinterpretation of meaning could occur in language users. Therefore, according to

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[Saeed \(2003\)](#), pragmatics deals with the study of language understanding in a context. Context is a fundamental aspect for understanding expressions and utterances ([Cruse, 2006](#)). Pragmatics includes the study of presupposition, deixis, reference, speech, and implication. In this paper, the researchers use a pragmatic approach to analyze personal deixis in the lyrics of the songs. In technical terms of utterances, deixis is considered as one of the most fundamental things ([Yule, 1996](#)). Deixis is used to inspect the utterance or conversation because it is used to point people, things, time, or place. Therefore, the researchers like to investigate personal deixis, its kinds, and its contextual meaning using TagAnt and AntConc software.

Corpus linguistics considers the actual usage of language in a certain context, describes language variation and use of language by looking at a large amount of data produced in similar circumstances and situations. The concept of a “context,” “situation” or “circumstances” depends on the researcher how he defines it ([Crawford & Csomay, 2015](#)). Corpus linguistics is defined as an empirical approach to the analysis of a language based on a representation of a sample stored as a corpus (electronic data) ([Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1998](#)).

To explore the use of personal deixis in western music, we have selected two English singers. Jason Thomas Mraz is a male American singer and songwriter, while Celine Marie Claudette Dion is a Canadian female singer. The gender-based pragmatic analysis of the personal deixis used in English song lyrics was performed.

## Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the gender-based pragmatic use of personal deixis in English song lyrics.
2. To explore the most frequent personal deixis used in song lyrics sung by male and female English singers.
3. To use the computer-based software in the analysis of personal deixis used in song lyrics.

## Research Questions

1. What are the most frequently used personal deixis used by male and female English singers?
2. How are personal deixis used by the singers in their songs?

## Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study can demonstrate the use of personal deixis, explains the reference and contextual meaning of those deixes in both male and female English song lyrics. Practically, the findings and discussion of this study will likely be of assistance to future researchers who will be interested in this genre or related topic. This study is also helpful in the sense of pragmatic study to understand the use of personal deixis in any genre using AntConc and TagAnt software tools.

## Delimitation of the Study

This research focuses on the gender-based pragmatic analysis of personal deixis in the English song lyrics of two singers, one male, and one female. The researchers only investigated the most frequent personal deixis used in song lyrics with their context. Literature Review This section includes important literature-related elements that cover the theoretical framework of pragmatics, context, reference, deixis, forms of deixis, and associated studies to assist the study.

## Pragmatics

The term pragmatics has been defined differently by different linguists. Pragmatics is considered an important branch of linguistics that deals with meaning in relation to the context in any communication process. So, it deals with the meaning of words in communication ([Kreidler, 1998](#)). [Cruse \(2006\)](#) has the same definition of pragmatics that it is the study about characteristics of meaning that depends on the context. According to Griffith (2006), it is related to the features used in meaningful conversation.

According to [Yule \(1996\)](#), pragmatics deals with speakers’ or writers’ intended meaning. It deals with what the speaker wants to communicate and what is the meaning of the words spoken by the speaker. In meaningful

communication, it is necessary to understand the expressions that the speaker produces in order to express his emotions, ideas, information, concepts, etc. [Yule \(1996\)](#) defined pragmatics in four ways. First, it deals with the study of the meaning of the speaker. Second, the contextual meaning is a key aspect of pragmatics. Third, it deals with meaning in such a way that the listener can understand more by using fewer words spoken by the speaker. Fourth, it deals with the expression of the respective distance in which the speaker has the knowledge of what needs to be said.

According to the above definitions and views of different linguists, we gather that pragmatics deals with the study of the meaning with relation to the context.

### Context

Pragmatics, deixis, and reference are associated with the context. In pragmatics, the study is about different aspects of meaning in relation to the context ([Cruse, 2006](#)). Meantime, the addressee should be able to recognize the context of expression, so, in this way, he/she can understand the reference of utterance comprised of deictic expression.

Context is an important aspect of the analysis of expressions and utterances ([Cruse, 2006](#)). According to [Mey \(2001\)](#), it reduces the likelihood of ambiguity in the utterances and expressions in any form, whether written or spoken. He also claimed that the context was superior to the reference. It's an action that means how the person, the place, and the time have the potential to make a referent. Many researchers conclude that the context is information consisting of a person, place, or thing and that it is necessary to interpret the sentence or expression in written or spoken form. It plays an important role to give the complete meaning of a sentence or utterance. Reference The term 'reference' is a general used to point out things, and deixis is the process of achieving a reference. Reference denotes the potential of the writer or speaker to allow the reader or listener to associate something with each other ([Cruse, 2006](#); Yule, 1993). [Yule \(1996\)](#) has a broad definition of the linguistic structure which also assumes that deictic expressions are referred to as referring expressions.

### Deixis

Deixis is a study of the relationship between the context and the situation in which it is used. It is obtained from the Greek word, which means 'to refer' or 'to indicate' ([Saeed, 2003](#)). It is used to denote or display elements in any language that directly refer to the situation in which they are used. [Levinson \(1983\)](#) also defined the meaning of deixis as 'pointing or indicating.' According to [Moore \(2001, 14\)](#), deixis is considered an important linguistic field and is very important for all language learners. It also has a certain relationship with the analysis of conversation and pragmatism. It is also described as "verbal pointing", and linguistic forms of this type of pointing are known as deictic expression, deictic word, and deictic marker, and sometimes indexical.

### Types of Deixis

[Cruse \(2000\)](#) defined five types of deixis. Personal Deixis Personal deixis is basically about the speaker(s) who produces utterance to his addressee. It is commonly familiar with the use of pronouns ([Kreidler, 1998](#)). According to [Yule \(1996\)](#), personal deixis incorporates the speaker or writer and addressee, and functions as three parts; first person, second person, and third person. Furthermore, it nominates primary roles in a speech event, the speaker or writer as the first person, the person(s) spoken to or addressee as the second person, and person(s) who does not participate in the conversation as a third person ([Cruse, 2000](#)).

First-person: this type of person deixis is a reference that is used to refer to a speaker or writer. It involves singular pronoun (i.e., I, me, my, myself, mine) and plural pronouns (i.e., we, us our, ourselves, ours). Second person: this type of person deixis is a reference to a person (or persons) recognized as addressee (i.e., you, your, yours, yourself, yourselves). Third-person: this type of person deixis is a reference to a person (or persons) not identified as an addressee or speaker, and it is usually implied to the gender that the utterance refers to (i.e., he, she, they, him, his, her, them, their, himself, herself, themselves).

Personal deixis is perceived by a personal pronoun (Renkeme, 1993). The speaker or writer as first-person delivers the utterance to the addressee as the second person and involves a third person. Personal deixis is related to the role of person and participants in any conversation or communication process. The person may be

identified as first-person as speaker or writer, second-person as addressee, and third person as another person who is not directly involved in the communication process (Cruse, 2000). Kraidler (1998) defined personal deixis as the pronoun used in any communication process. The table is proposed to represent different types of personal deixis (Lavinson, 1983).

**Table 1.** Types of Personal Deixis

Person	Singular	Plural
1 <sup>st</sup> Person	I/me/my	We/us/our
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	You/your	You/your
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	He/him/his She/her	They/them/their

### Spatial Dixies

Spatial deixis is usually referred to as the place deixis in which the respective location of people and things is specified. It is used to express location in a conversation (Kraidler, 1998). Cruse (2006) also explains that spatial deixis is used to indicate a location in space with respect to the speaker. This type of deixis is commonly demonstrated in this, that, these, those, here, and there. The fixed references to place discover a person or object in a particular latitude and longitude, while spatial (relational) references find people and place with reference to each other and speaker (Crummings, 2005).

The primary focus of spatial deixis is the use of demonstrative words, i.e., this and that, even though they also have some abstract meaning. Cruse (2000; 2006) has categorized this and here as proximal deixis, and that and there as distal deixis. Yule (1996) stated that proximal deixis is generally understood in terms of location, which is near to the speaker and distal deixis interprets the location away from the speaker. However, place deixis deals not only the location or distance relative to the speaker but also the motion or movements occurred either near or away from the speaker, i.e., in the room, in Islamabad and so on, and these are specific location (Cruse, 2006).

Rather than proximal and spatial deixis, place deictic word also involves projected deixis. This type of place deixis is used to discuss the location (Yule, 1996). It is a deictic word used in a common way; however, the speaker is not the focus of the deictic center but can be several other members in the speech event, usually the addressee (Cruse, 1996). Yule (1996) gave an example as ‘come here! Here in this example, the word ‘come’ is taken as the movement or action towards the speaker. Grundy (2000) also cited other spatial deictic words as right, there, here, left, down, below, up, go, up, come, above, behind, in front, take and bring.

### Temporal Deixis

Temporal deixis is commonly known as time deixis. It is a reference to a time in relation to a temporal reference point and is usually known as a moment of utterance (Renkema, 1993). Levinson (1983) also defined it as a time deictic word, and this type includes adverbs and adverbials, i.e., today, yesterday, last Sunday and next year, etc. Time deixis word shows the timing of any event with relation to the timing of the speaking. It functions to locate intervals or points on the time axis (Cruse, 2006). Temporal deixis is adjectives of time such as now, yesterday, tomorrow, and the verb tenses. Sometimes verb also has another function other than referring to a tense.

The time axis is divided into three major categories: (i) the time before expression, (ii) at the hour of expression, (iii) after the hour of expression. The temporal deictic words are now, then, tomorrow, the previous year (Cruse, 2006).

### Social Deixis

This type of deixis is used to show the position or place of the referent on the scales of intimacy and social status relative to the utterance producer (Cruse, 2006). Also, Saeed (2003) discussed that some languages also use pronouns for referring linguistic information about the social relationships and identities of the participants in the communication process or conversation. In contrast to English, other languages such as German, French, Korean, Japanese, and Balinese share rich systems for grammaticalizing and indicating the social relations of participants

in the conversation. Most of them clearly show the social context of an utterance relative to the higher or lower social status to the speaker (Cruse, 2000; Saeed, 2003; Crummings, 2005). Crummings (2005) stated that even in the English language, the social attributes of the participants are not grammaticalized easily, and social context is necessary sometimes to the position of the person referent.

Despite, like other languages, English does not have respectful pronouns and references to represent social deixis (Cruse, 2000, 2006). Sometimes, the use of modal auxiliary verbs (would, could) to ask a question and seek permission shows the relationship between addressee and speaker, respectively (Cummings, 2005). These verbs indicate politeness and respect. Discourse Deixis

This type of deixis is also known as text deixis. It refers to such situations in which 'this' is used to point to future discourse elements and 'that' is used to point past discourse elements. Sometimes its function is to refer to already or previously occurring items or elements and coming items, and it finds a connection between the previous discourse and upcoming discourse. Sometimes, the sentence adverbs, i.e., 'therefore' and 'furthermore' refer to the element of discourse (Cruse, 2000, 2006). Moreover, Levinson (1983) gave examples of the words and phrases like therefore, but, still, to the contrary, however, besides, actually, in conclusion, all in all, after all, so, well, and so on. These words and phrases are used to indicate the connection between an utterance and the previous discourse. According to Cummings (2005), sometimes discourse deixis can also be an anaphoric reference in which it indicates a previous reference and gives extra information about that. Additionally, the anaphoric word is a type of secondary reference in which special function words are used to refer to a previous reference (Kreidler, 1998). Hence, the discourse deixis and anaphora are the same, or if there is any difference between them, it is invisible. Levinson (1983) described the variation between discourse deixis and anaphora that when a pronoun refers to a linguistic utterance itself, it is called discourse deixis; when a pronoun refers to the same body or unit as an earlier linguistic utterance refers to, it is known as anaphoric.

## Research Methodology

The corpora collected for analysis consists of a total of 60 English song lyrics; 30 song lyrics by the male singer, Jason Mraz, and 30 song lyrics by the female singer, Celine Dion. All lyrics have been obtained randomly from the <https://www.allthelyrics.com> website. All of the lyrics are compiled into two text files categorized by their singers, i.e., Jason Mraz Song Lyrics, Celine Dion Song Lyrics. Song titles were removed, and the actual lyrics were saved in plain text format.

## Research Design

The research is based on qualitative and quantitative approaches. This means that the data were analyzed descriptively and statistically. The qualitative approach requires, first of all, textual data and an investigation using an explanatory analysis (Croaker, 2009). This approach provides a clear explanation of the research problems. A quantitative approach is used to measure the data in a numerical or statistical format (Earl, 2010). The data is collected and then analyzed in statistical form to explain the research problems.

## Research Tool

The researchers collected the data randomly from the most famous song lyrics website <https://www.allthelyrics.com>. Firstly, the TagAnt toolkit (64bit) is used to tag the data because it is a free Parts of Speech (POS) tagger. It helps annotate the part of speech of each word in the corpus. POS tagging is basically used to search for grammatical patterns. Later, AntConc (64bit) toolkit is used to analyze the data. It is used to count word frequency, observe the text with context and calculate the range of word occurrence. Both tools are developed by Laurence Anthony. They are used because they have all the features which are required to complete this research. They are easily available and free.

## Data Analysis

This section presented the data analysis for this research work. This paper is only about the gender-based pragmatic analysis of personal deixis in English song lyrics by male and female singers (Jason Mraz & Celine

Dion). The researcher analyzed the song lyrics of both singers collectively to count the overall occurrences of personal deixis and then separately to find who used the personal deixis more and which are frequently used personal deixis. The pronouns I, we, and their other forms are placed into first-person pronouns as it refers to the singer himself/herself. The pronouns ‘you, your, yours’ are classified into second-person pronouns because they refer to the second person or addressee. The last, the pronouns ‘he, she, it, they, and their other forms are referred to the third person who does not relate directly to any particular function in communication or speech discourse.

### Personal Deixis

After POS tagging the data in software (TagAnt), the researchers used the tagged files in AntConc and found that there are (3009 total) personal deixis occurrences in songs of both singers; the references found as the first-person deixis are I, me, my, we, our, us (1433 occurrences) as second person deixis are you, you’re (1050 occurrences) and as third-person deixis are he, she, it, they, his, him, her, them, they’re, it’s (525 occurrences). First-person pronouns are dominant in number, i.e., 1433 times (47.6%) following by second-person pronouns 1050 times (34.9%) and third-person pronouns 525 times (17.5%)

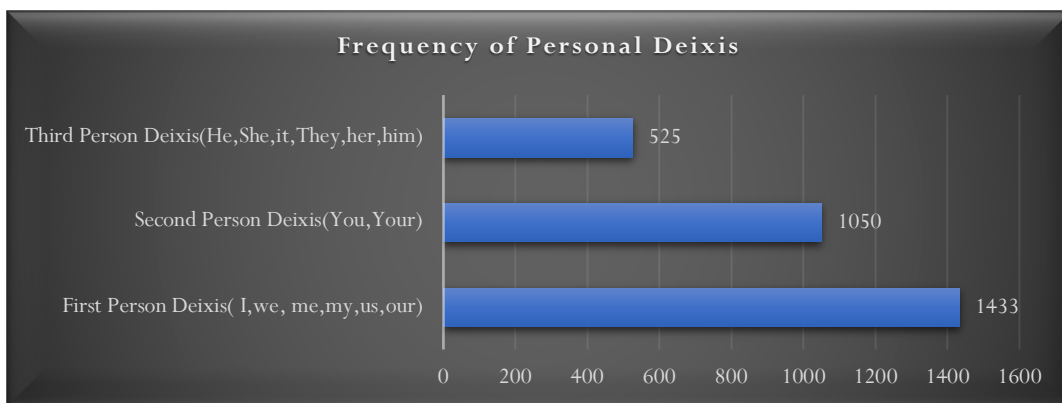


Figure 1: Frequencies of Personal Deixis

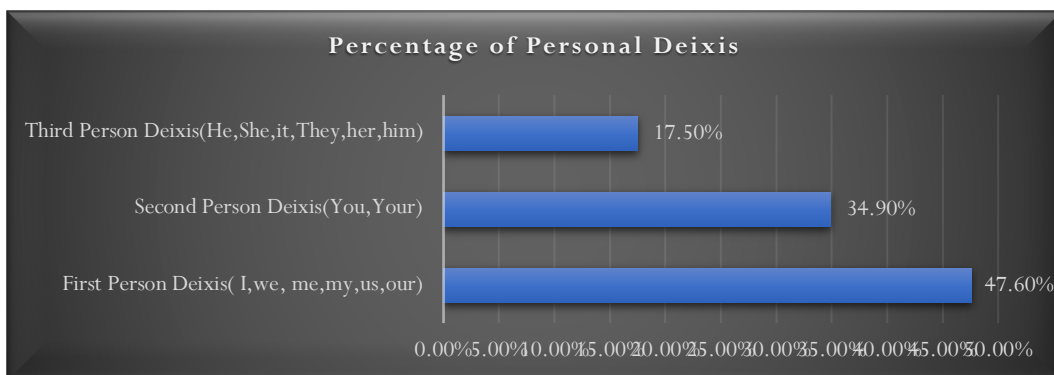


Figure 2: Percentage of Personal Deixis

The male singer, Jason Mraz, used personal deixis 1520 times in his 30 songs which are randomly extracted for research. He used pronouns, i.e. I 30 times, me 106 times, my 90 times, myself 4 times, we 69 times, us 8 times our 18 times, second-person pronouns, i.e., you 347 times, your 105 times, yours 5 times, yourself 6 times, and third-person pronouns, i.e., he 25 times, his 6 times, she 22 times, her 16 times, hers 1 time, they 28 times, them 9 times, their 2 times, it 252 times, its 9 times and itself 2 times.

The female singer, Celine Dion, used personal deixis 1489 times in her 30 songs which are randomly selected for research purposes. She used personal pronouns, i.e. I 443 times, me 140 times, my 119 times, mine I time, myself 14 times, we 23 times and us 8 times, second-person pronouns, i.e., you 500 times, your 78 times, Yours 4 times, and yourself 14 times, and third-person pronouns, i.e., he 6 times, him 17 times, his 8 times, she 5 times, her 12 times, hers 2 times, they 1 time, them 1 time, it 99 times and its 2 times.

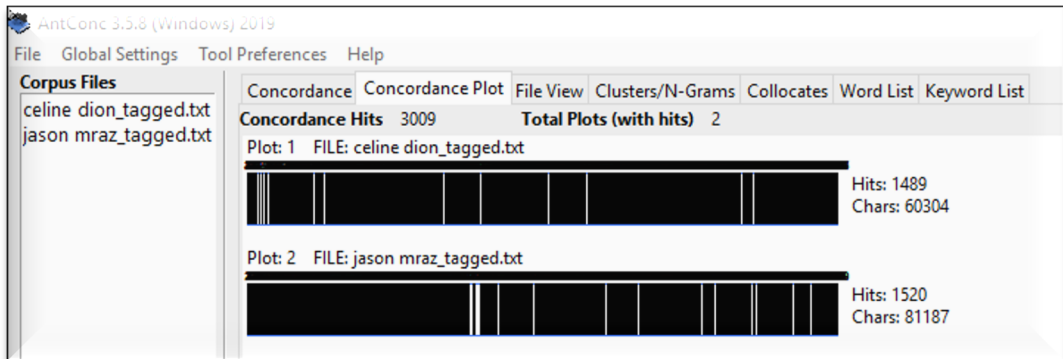


Figure 3: Concordance Plot Showing the Frequencies of Personal Deixis

### First Person Deixis

As it is found out in this research that male singer, Jason Mraz used more personal deixis in the lyrics of his songs as compared to the female singer, Celine Dion. The difference between person deixis is thirty-two, which is not very high. The total sixty songs of both singers (30 of each) were collected randomly. The most frequently used personal deixis is first-person references in the lyrics of both singers, which are 1433 in numbers. The highest first personal reference ‘I’ is used in the lyrics of both singers to express their love, heart feelings, emotions, and care for their lover. The other first-person singular references are used to indicate how they love their lover. They expressed their love and imagination and the effect of love and imagination on their life. The plural first-person references (we, our, us) are used to express their feelings, love, and emotions in reality and imagination and effects of those feelings, love, and emotions on their life when they are and when they will together. The effect in this sense of what happens to them and how they feel to be together. As their song lyrics are related to love, and usually based on their emotions and feelings, so it might be assumed that plural personal pronouns can represent themselves and their lover, or that they can be a group of people they are generally part of.

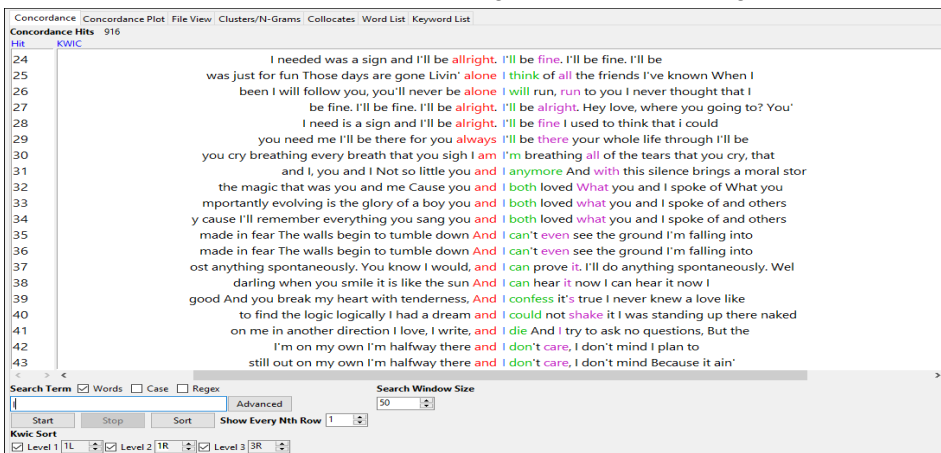


Figure 4: The Contextual use of “I” in Both Singers’ Song Lyrics

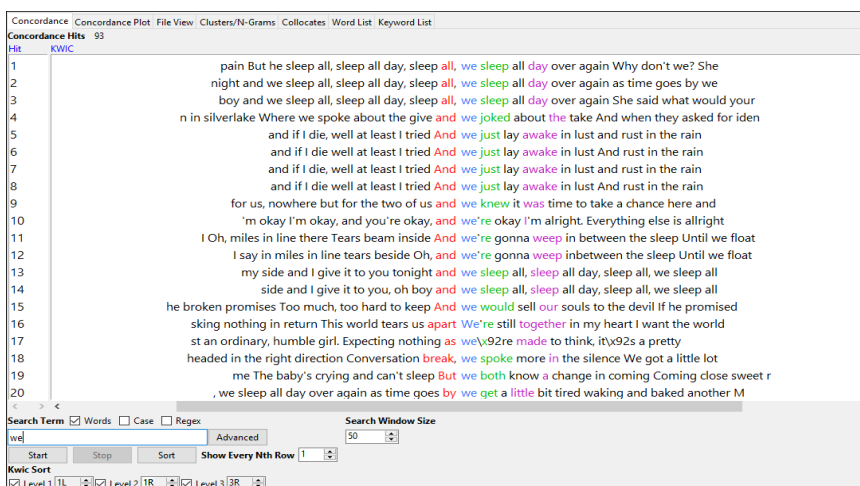


Figure 5: The Contextual use of “We” in Both Singers’ Song Lyrics

## Second Person Deixis

The second most used personal deixis is the second person pronoun which refers to addressee directly or when the addressee is in front of them. The collectively used second person deixis in the song lyrics of both singers are 1049 times. As it is found out by looking at the context in which this type of deixis is used, both singers used these deixes for the person who is in front of them, in their imagination, or their mind. They express their feelings for that person whom they love and share their plans with what they would do being together. The contextual use of second-person deictic references is shown below.

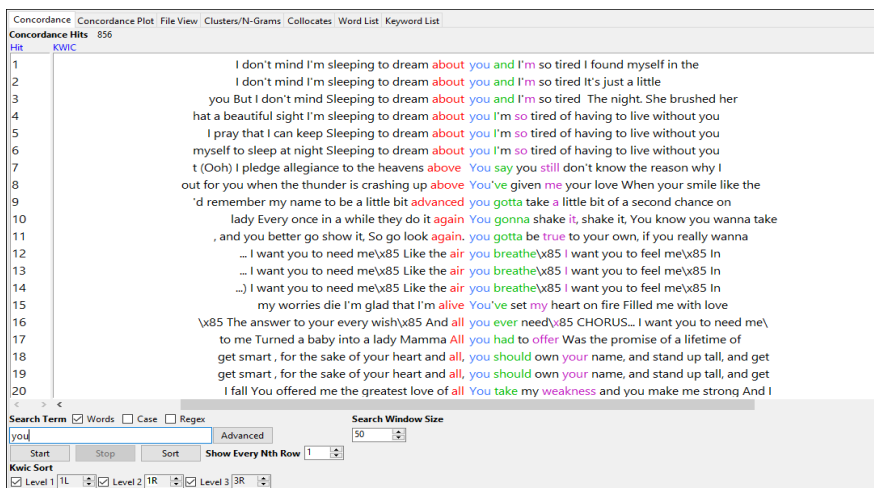


Figure 6: The Contextual use of “you” in Both Singers’ Song Lyrics

## Third Person Deixis

The third type of personal deixis is used in fewer numbers in their song lyrics. Both singers used third person deixis for the person who is not involved in the process, or that person cannot be identified easily whether he/she is addressee or speaker. They have usually implied to the person that the utterance refers to. They are the deictic reference to a referent(s) which is not speaker or addressee but another person who is not directly involved in the process. The contextual uses of third-person deictic references are shown in the images below, which show



that they used personal deictic references for another person who is in their mind or imagination. They use this type of personal deixis to express their emotions and feelings for the third person.

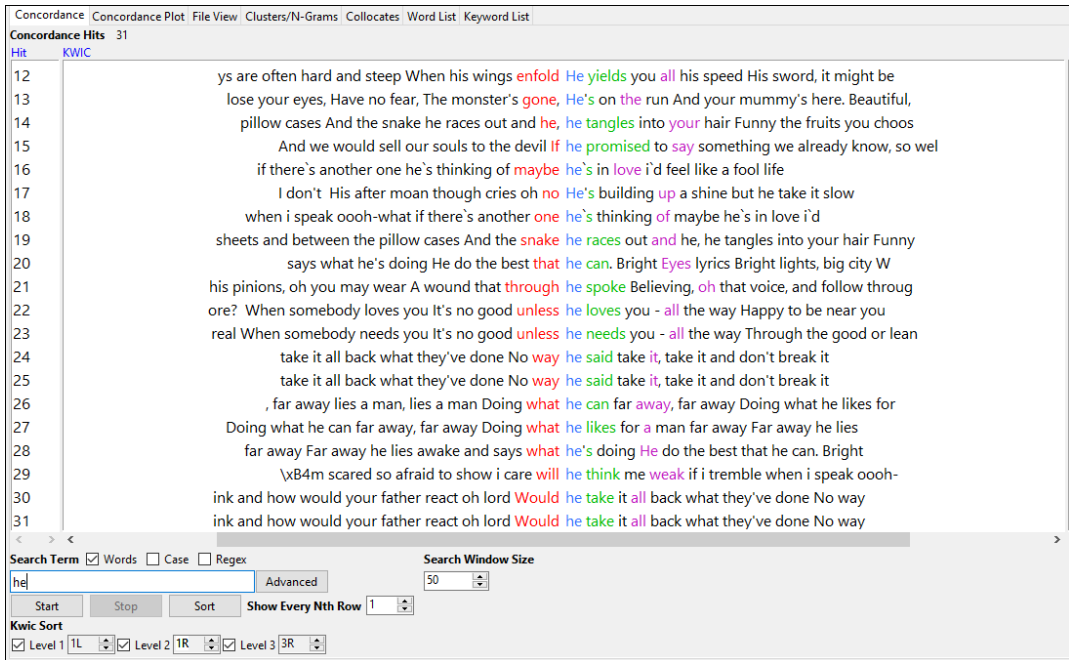


Figure 7: The Contextual use of “He” in Both Singers’ Song Lyrics

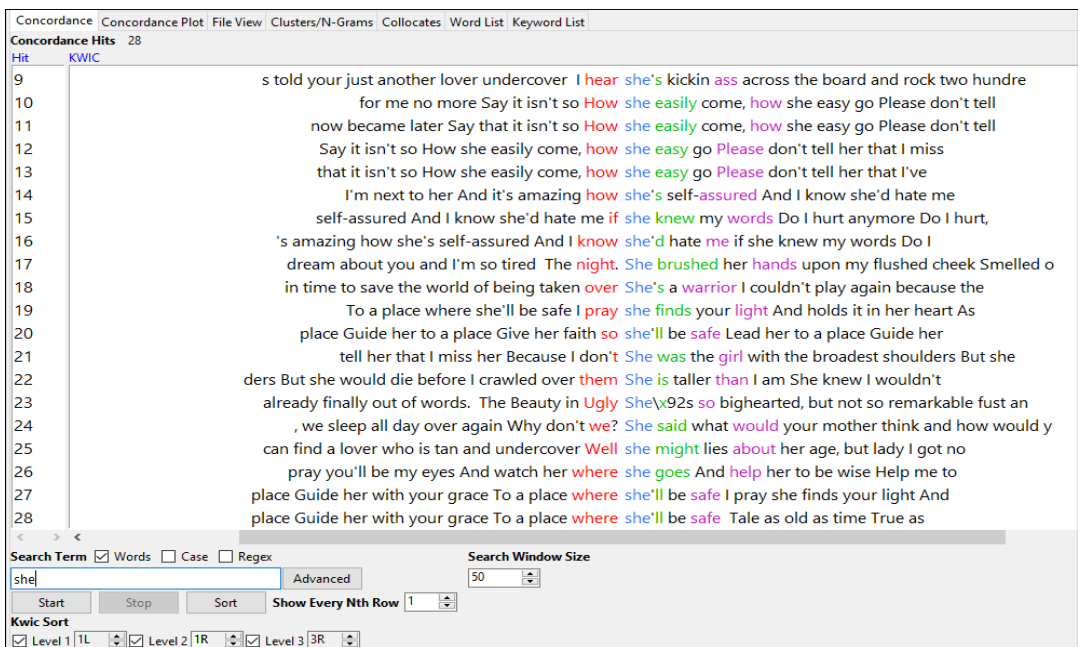


Figure 8: The Contextual use of “She” in Both Singers’ Song Lyrics

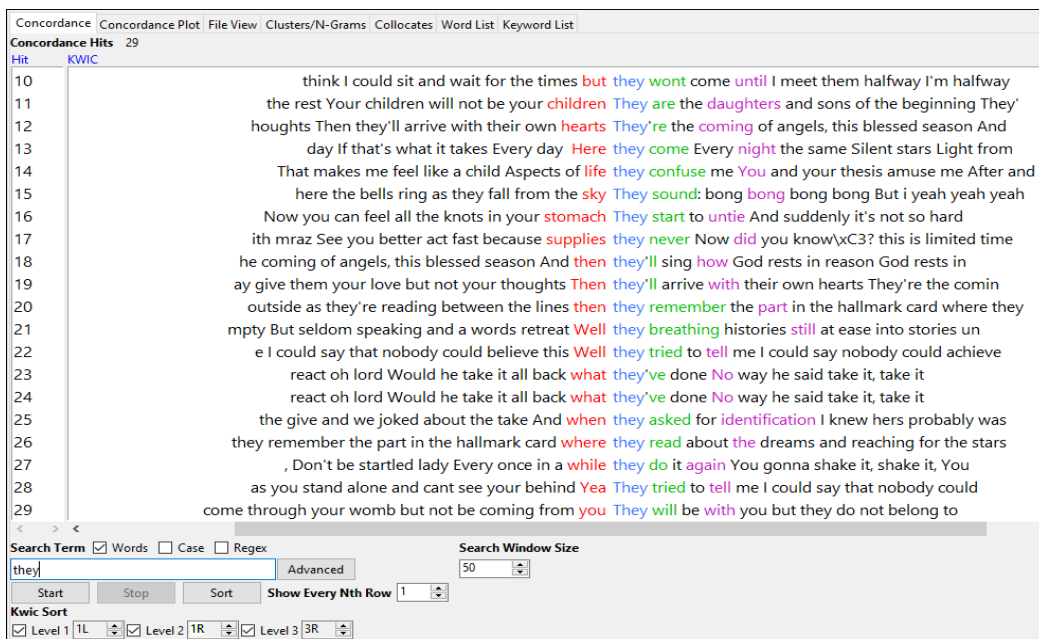


Figure 9: The Contextual use of “They” in Both Singers’ Song Lyrics

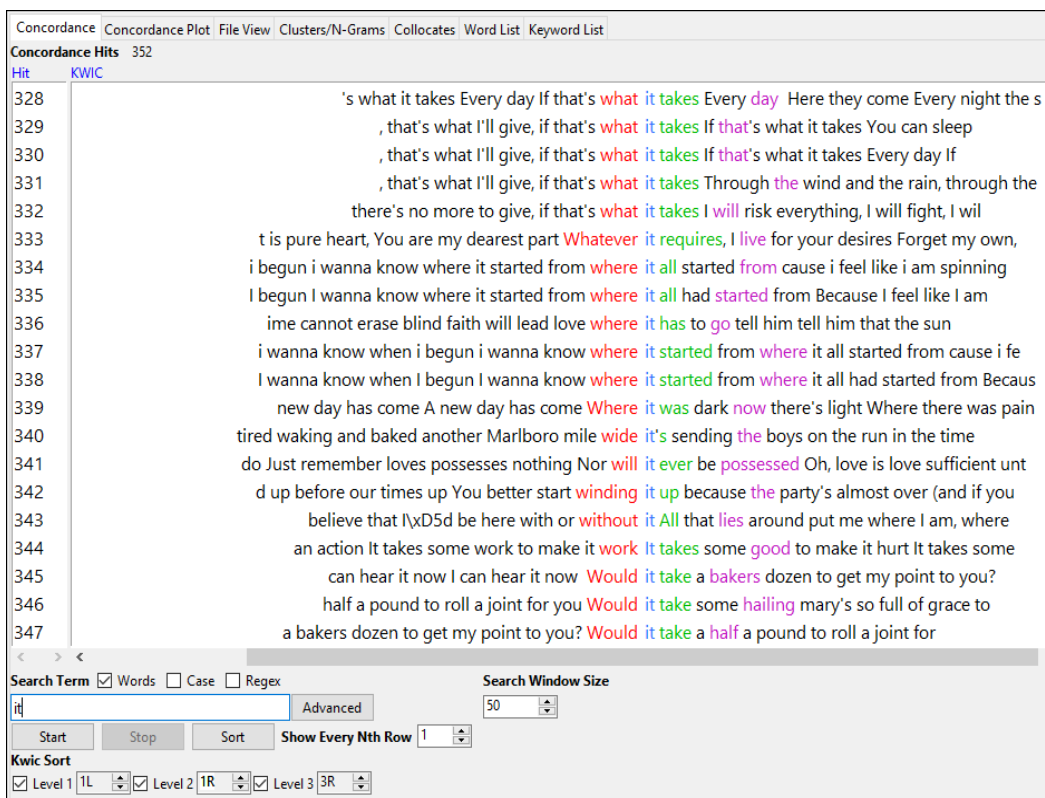


Figure 10: The Contextual use of “It” in Both Singers’ Song Lyrics conclusion

It can be concluded from the discussion produced above that English singers, both male and female, use personal deixis in their songs. The type of these personal deixes found in the corpus is first-person deixis, second person deixis, and third-person deixis. The frequency of the first-person deixis is 1433 times which constitutes 47.6% of the total number of deixis. The frequency of second-person deixis was 1050 times which 34.9% of the total number of deixis present in the corpus. The frequency of third-person deixis is 525, which makes 17.5% of the total deixis. The first-person deixis is the most frequently used person deixis in the song lyrics of both the singers. The use of the first-person deixis shows the reflection of singers through which they express their love, emotions, and feelings for their partner or lover. The second most frequently used person deixis is the second-person deixis which is used to share and express emotions, feeling, and love for the person or addressee who is in front of them in real-world or in imagination. Third-person deixis is used in less number, and this type of deictic reference is used to express emotions and feelings for the implied person or addressee.

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