The Role of Social Deixis in Expressing Respect and Authority:
A Study Of "Coco"

Nazwa Sahara Azhar[1], Noor Assyifa[2], Nazwa Amalia Putri Nasution[3],
Kevindo Silalahi[4]
[1,2,3,4]Universitas Sumatera Utara - Indonesia
Email: [1]nazwasahara@students.usu.ac.id , [2]noorassyifa@students.usu.ac.id ,
[3]nazwaamalia049@students.usu.ac.id,[4]kevindosilalahi@students.usu.ac.id

Abstract	
	Social deixis is a key part of pragmatics that shows how language expresses respect, authority, and social ties in different cultures. Although deixis has been studied a lot, there is still not much research on how social deixis can show both authority and emotional bonds in stories with strong cultural and family themes, such as the animated film Coco. This study examines how social deixis is used in Coco (2017), focusing on how it reflects respect, authority, and emotional closeness between characters in Mexican culture. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study reviews and analyzes all film dialogues with social deixis, sorting them into relational and absolute types based on Levinson's theory. The findings show that relational social deixis, especially kinship terms and informal address, is most common, highlighting the importance of family ties and solidarity. Absolute deixis, though less common, points to respect and power differences. The study concludes that social deixis in Coco helps build cultural identity and share moral values, showing how film language connects cultural and emotional understanding. Future research could compare how social deixis appears in different cultures and media to deepen our understanding of language, culture, and communication.
	Abstrak Deiksis sosial merupakan bagian penting dari pragmatik yang menunjukkan bagaimana bahasa mengekspresikan rasa hormat, otoritas, dan ikatan sosial dalam berbagai budaya. Meskipun deiksis telah banyak diteliti, masih sedikit penelitian yang membahas bagaimana deiksis sosial dapat menggambarkan baik otoritas maupun ikatan emosional dalam cerita dengan tema budaya dan keluarga yang kuat, seperti film animasi Coco. Studi ini menganalisis penggunaan deiksis sosial dalam Coco (2017), dengan fokus pada bagaimana deiksis tersebut

mencerminkan rasa hormat, otoritas, dan kedekatan emosional antara karakter dalam budaya Meksiko. Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini meninjau dan menganalisis semua dialog film yang mengandung deixis sosial, mengelompokkannya menjadi jenis relasional dan absolut berdasarkan teori Levinson. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa deixis sosial relasional, terutama istilah kekerabatan dan sapaan informal, paling umum, menyoroti pentingnya ikatan keluarga dan solidaritas. Deiksis absolut, meskipun kurang umum, menunjuk pada perbedaan hormat dan kekuasaan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa deiksis sosial dalam Coco membantu membangun identitas budaya dan berbagi nilai moral, menunjukkan bagaimana bahasa film menghubungkan pemahaman budaya dan emosional. Penelitian masa depan dapat membandingkan bagaimana deiksis sosial muncul dalam budaya dan media yang berbeda untuk memperdalam pemahaman kita tentang bahasa, budaya, dan komunikasi.

INTRODUCTION

Language is more than just a way to communicate, it reflects who we are, how we relate to others, and what values we hold as a society. The words we choose and the way we speak often show our feelings, respect, or attitude toward others. One linguistic aspect that connects language and social life is deixis. (Fillmore, 1971) explains deixis as "verbal pointing," referring to expressions whose meanings depend on context, such as who is speaking, to whom, when, and where (Levinson, 1983). Among its types, social deixis is especially meaningful because it reveals how people express respect, authority, and familiarity through language.

In the world of pragmatics, deixis stands out as a key concept because it shows how language reflects social interaction. Speakers use specific titles or pronouns to show respect or equality depending on cultural norms. In film, deixis becomes even more interesting since dialogue not only sounds natural but also reflects social relationships, authority, and emotions. Through social deixis, filmmakers can represent hierarchy, intimacy, and cultural values that shape the audience's understanding of characters and their connections.

Previous studies have analyzed deixis in various film genres. (Mukhtaruddin et al., 2024) found that in *Avengers*, deixis built group identity and teamwork. (Putra et al., 2020) discovered that relational deixis dominated in *The Madness of King George*, while (Fauzan et al., 2025) found that titles like "Don" in *The Godfather* conveyed power and authority. Other studies, such as (Chandra & Oktiva, 2022) and (Heriyadi & Diana, 2020), showed that deixis reflects emotional closeness and class differences. However, few have explored how social deixis expresses both authority and emotional connection within cultural and familial contexts.

From these studies, it is clear that deixis has been explored in many genres such as historical, fantasy, crime, action, and drama. Taken together, the findings of (Mukhtaruddin et al., 2024), (Fauzan et al., 2025), (Chandra & Oktiva, 2022), and (Heriyadi & Diana, 2020) show that deixis plays an important role in expressing different social meanings, including power relations, social hierarchy, and emotional closeness, depending on the context of the film. However, there is still a gap in research when it comes to how social deixis can express both authority and emotional connection at the same time, especially in stories that are built around culture and family. Many previous studies focused only on either power or personal relationships, not both. This leaves room for further exploration in more culturally rich and emotionally layered films.

This study focuses on the animated film Coco (2017), which provides a special case for understanding social deixis. The film, inspired by Mexican culture and the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) tradition, tells a story about family, respect for ancestors, and the search for personal identity. What makes Coco unique is how it combines traditional values like respect for elders and family loyalty with universal emotions such as love, ambition, and belonging. Through its dialogue, the film shows how language can express both authority and affection within a family. The way characters speak to one another using formal address terms, soft requests, or affectionate nicknames illustrates how Mexican culture values both respect and closeness.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how social deixis in Coco (2017) expresses respect, authority, and emotional closeness among characters. It also seeks to explain how these linguistic features reflect Mexican cultural values while resonating with universal human relationships. By doing so, this research contributes both theoretically and practically: it enriches the understanding of social deixis as a pragmatic tool for expressing social structure, and it demonstrates how cinematic language can bridge cultural and emotional understanding among audiences. Ultimately, this study aspires to highlight that language, even in animated storytelling, is a powerful medium for constructing and negotiating respect, authority, and intimacy within human interaction.

Pragmatics and Deixis

Pragmatics studies the relationship between language and context, which is essential for understanding how meaning is created (Levinson, 1983). It examines how speakers use language not only to convey information but also to achieve social goals, such as showing respect, maintaining relationships, or asserting power (Yule, 1996). Deixis is a central concept in pragmatics because it refers to context-dependent expressions whose meaning cannot be fully understood without considering the situation of utterance. (Levinson, 1983) defines deixis as linguistic elements that point to aspects of the communicative context, including the speaker, the addressee, time, place, and social relations. Similarly, (Yule, 1996) emphasizes that deixis helps explain how meaning shifts depending on who is speaking and in what context. In addition, (Huang, 2014) states that social deixis is crucial for understanding how language reflects social hierarchy and interpersonal relations. (Brown & Gilman, 1960) further argue that linguistic choices, including forms of address, are closely related to politeness strategies and the management of social relationships.

(Yule, 1996) explains that deixis can only be interpreted in relation to the speaker's perspective, emphasizing that the meaning of expressions such as "here" or "now" depends on the immediate situation. (Levinson, 1983) classifies deixis into five types:

1. Person deixis (refers to participants: I, you, they),
2. Place deixis (refers to location: here, there),
3. Time deixis (refers to temporal points: now, yesterday),
4. Discourse deixis (refers to parts of discourse: this, that referring to a text),
5. Social deixis (refers to social relationships: Sir, Madam).

(Fillmore, 1971) explains deixis as "verbal pointing" and divides it into person, place, time, and discourse deixis. While Fillmore does not always explicitly separate "social deixis" as a distinct category, he acknowledges that forms of address and politeness markers are deeply tied to deictic reference in social interaction.

Social Deixis

Social deixis is one of the most significant categories in deixis because it encodes the social distinctions and relationships between participants in a speech event. It reflects how language marks respect, politeness, authority, and solidarity in human interaction. Scholars such as (Levinson, 1983) and (Fillmore, 1971) have offered influential frameworks for understanding social deixis.

(Levinson, 1983) provides one of the most detailed classifications of social deixis. He divides it into two main categories:

1. Relational social deixis refers to expressions that signal the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee or referent, often based on kinship, familiarity, or solidarity (Levinson, 1983). For example, Miguel calling his grandmother "*Abuelita*", which reflects both kinship and respect for an elder family member.

2. Absolute social deixis refers to expressions that indicate a person's social rank, title, or position, regardless of the direct relationship between speaker and addressee (Levinson, 1983). Example: Characters addressing *Ernesto de la Cruz* as "*Señor Ernesto de la Cruz*", which shows honorific respect for his high status as a famous musician.

(Levinson, 1983) argues that social deixis plays a central role in how speakers encode and negotiate power relations, politeness, and social hierarchy in communication.

(Fillmore, 1971), on the other hand, does not explicitly separate social deixis as an independent category but incorporates it into his broader theory of deixis as "verbal pointing." In his framework, deixis primarily consists of person, place, time, and discourse deixis, yet he acknowledges that social deixis emerges as an extension of person deixis. According to (Fillmore, 1971), forms of address, honorifics, and politeness markers are part of how speakers select and use personal reference to reflect social roles and cultural norms. For instance, whether a speaker uses a first name, a kinship term, or a professional title depends on the social context and the relative positions of the interlocutors.

By comparing these perspectives, it is clear that while Fillmore views social deixis as inherently linked to person deixis and the act of reference, Levinson refines it into a separate category with two distinct dimensions: relational and absolute. Both approaches highlight that social deixis is deeply cultural, as it encodes norms of politeness, authority, and respect that vary across societies.

Social Deixis in Film Studies

Film dialogue is a valuable source of data for studying deixis because it reflects how language is used in real-life interaction while also serving narrative and artistic functions. Through film scripts, viewers are exposed to various forms of deixis that reveal relationships among characters, highlight differences in power or authority, and express cultural values. In particular, social deixis plays an important role in showing how respect, politeness, and hierarchy are represented in cinematic discourse.

Previous research illustrates how films use social deixis to construct character identity and social dynamics. (Mukhtaruddin et al., 2024), for instance, found that deixis in Avengers demonstrates group identity and solidarity through personal and honorific references. (Putra et al., 2020) showed in The Madness of King George that relational deixis dominates, reflecting the rigid social hierarchy of the monarchy. Similarly, (Fauzan et al., 2025) note that in The Godfather, titles such as "Don" encode both respect and authority, making absolute deixis central to the depiction of mafia hierarchy.

These studies reveal that social deixis in films is not merely a matter of politeness but also a tool for constructing social worlds. Through address forms, honorifics, and kinship terms, films encode power relations, cultural values, and emotional intimacy. This makes the study of social deixis in film both linguistically significant and culturally rich. In the case of Coco, social deixis can shed light on how respect for elders, family authority, and intergenerational bonds are linguistically expressed in a narrative deeply rooted in Mexican culture.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method, which focuses on describing and interpreting linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur in context (Miles et al., 2014). This approach is considered suitable for analyzing social deixis, because it aims to uncover how language encodes social relationships, politeness, and hierarchy without relying on numerical measurement. The descriptive design allows the researcher to explain how deixis functions in representing respect and authority in the animated film Coco (2017) (Creswell, 2014; Sudaryanto, 1993).

Data Source

The primary data source of this research is the animated film Coco (2017), produced by Pixar Animation Studios and directed by Lee Unkrich. The film was chosen because it portrays a strong cultural emphasis on family, respect for elders, and generational hierarchy, which are the elements that closely align with the concept of social deixis. The data consist of all utterances and dialogues containing expressions of address, kinship terms, titles, and honorifics spoken by the characters throughout the film.

Data Collection

The researchers employed a documentation technique to collect data. The process involved:

1. Watching the film repeatedly to gain a full understanding of the context and character relationships.
2. Transcribing all dialogues containing potential social deixis expressions.

3. Selecting and classifying the utterances that explicitly indicate social status, kinship, or respect (for example, terms like Abuelita, Señor, or Papa Héctor).

4. The frequencies were obtained by identifying and counting each occurrence of address terms in the film dialogues. Every use of a form of address was counted as one instance and then tabulated to represent its distribution.

This step ensured that only relevant data reflecting social deixis were included in the analysis.

Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is the utterance or clause that contains an expression of social deixis. For example, when Miguel calls his grandmother "Abuelita" or when other characters refer to "Señor Ernesto de la Cruz," these clauses serve as the analytical units, as they represent a clear linguistic marker of social relationship or authority.

Data Analysis Technique

The researchers analyzed the data using (Levinson, 1983) theory of social deixis, which divides deixis into two main categories:

1. Relational social deixis, refers to linguistic expressions that show the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee or referent, such as kinship or familiarity.

2. Absolute social deixis, refers to expressions that indicate a person's social rank or title, independent of the relationship between speaker and listener.

Each identified utterance was categorized under one of these two types. The researchers then interpreted the meaning and function of each deixis in its conversational context to determine whether it expressed respect, authority, or emotional closeness.

Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research covers the entire film Coco (2017). However, the analysis is limited to the study of social deixis, specifically the forms of address and reference that express social relationships or hierarchy. This study applies (Levinson, 1983) basic classification of Social Deixis (Relational and Absolute Deixis). However, the scope of analysis is extended to include Affect/Power Deixis,

such as non-reciprocal address terms and age-related address forms, as these expressions play a crucial pragmatic role in encoding social hierarchy and power imbalance among the characters in the film. Other types of deixis, such as person, time, place, or discourse deixis, are excluded from the analysis.

Reliability of Data

To ensure the reliability of the data, this study employed several systematic procedures in the process of data identification and analysis. First, all social deixis expressions were identified and classified based on (Levinson, 1983) theoretical framework of social deixis, particularly the distinction between relational and absolute social deixis. This theoretical grounding provides a consistent and widely accepted reference for categorization in pragmatic studies.

Second, analyst triangulation was applied by involving peer discussion among the researchers. Each identified utterance containing social deixis was independently examined and then jointly discussed to reach agreement on its classification and interpretation. This process helped reduce subjectivity and ensured consistency in coding the data.

In addition, repeated viewing of the film and rechecking of the dialogue transcripts were conducted to ensure accuracy and stability of the data. Ambiguous cases were reviewed by referring back to the contextual situation in the film to maintain consistent interpretation. Through these procedures, the study ensures that the findings are reliable and can be replicated by other researchers using the same theoretical framework and data source.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research on the film Coco (2017), the researcher found 19 different deictic expressions with 100 occurrences. Following (Levinson, 1983) classification, the deixis were categorized into Relational Deixis and Absolute Deixis. Relational social deixis refers to forms that mark the relationship between speaker and addressee or referent, such as kinship and familial titles. Absolute social deixis, on the other hand, denotes expressions that encode inherent social status or authority, often realized through titles or honorifics independent of the

speaker-hearer relationship. The discussion is written to interpret and describe the importance of research findings of the issues being researched, and to explain any new understanding or insights of the problem after the author has taken the findings into consideration. It should connect to the introduction by way of the research questions or hypotheses you posed and the literature you reviewed, but it does not simply repeat or rearrange the introduction.

Building on Levinson's framework, later linguists developed more specific subcategories of relational deixis known as power deixis and affect deixis. These terms are influenced by (Brown & Gilman, 1960) theory of power and solidarity, which explains how language reflects hierarchical authority and emotional closeness between interlocutors. Power deixis marks differences in social status or authority, such as between a superior and subordinate, whereas affect deixis conveys emotional attitudes or degrees of intimacy, politeness, or respect (Yule, 1996). The deictic expressions found in the film Coco (2017) consist of 8 relational deixis, subdivided into 2 kinship (1 Power Deixis and 1 Affect Deixis) and 3 absolute deixis.

The kinship relational deixis found in the film Coco are the most common terms of address and serve to affirm the bond of the Rivera family, both the living and the deceased. In the context of Mexican culture, these forms of address demonstrate strong solidarity. The status/title deixis found in the film Coco are terms of address used to refer to individuals based on their social status, profession, or fame, and they indicate social distance between the speaker and the addressee. The distribution of the identified deixis is presented in the table below:

Table 1: Relational Deixis in Film "*Coco*"

Deictic Expressions	Count	Character Using	Character Referred to/ Addressed
Mam*á*	23	Miguel, Abuelita Elena and the entire family	Coco, Imelda
Abuelita	6	Miguel and the younger Rivera family members	Elena
Tio	3	Miguel and other family members	Berto, Oscar, Felipe
Tia	8	Miguel and other family members	Victoria, Rosita, Chelo
Papa	7	Miguel and other family members	Julio, Hector, Ernesto
Cousin	2	Hector's family in the land of the death and himself	Hector

Amigo (Affect)	12	Hector, Immigration Officer and other characters in the land of the death	The characters in the land of the living
Chamaco/Muchacho (Power)	16	Hector	Miguel

Table 2: Absolute Deixis in Film "*Coco*"

Deictic Expressions	Count	Character Using	Character Referred to/ Addressed
de la Cruz	11	Miguel, Hector, and non-family characters	Ernesto
Senor	9	Miguel, Security in the land of the death	Ernesto, El Santo
Senora	3	Immigration Officer and the characters in the land of the death	Imelda, Rosita, and Frida

Before discussing the distribution of social deixis, it is important to clarify how the tabulated data were interpreted. The deictic expressions listed in the tables represent the linguistic forms of address as they appear in the film dialogues (e.g., *mamá, tío, tía, señor*), while the column *Character Referred to/Addressed* specifies the actual social referent of each expression within the narrative context. A single address form may refer to different characters depending on the interactional situation. The frequency count indicates the total number of occurrences of each address term identified in the film, with each use counted as one instance and subsequently tabulated to reveal its distribution and pragmatic salience.

The data reveals that Relational Social Deixis predominates the dialogue in Coco, accounting for 8 distinct deictic expressions with a total of 77 occurrences. This indicates that the majority of social deixis expressions are rooted in familial and interpersonal relations. Specific examples, such as "*Abuelita," "Mamá Coco," "Tío Berto," "Papá Héctor,"* and *"Tía Victoria,"* demonstrate a constant linguistic emphasis on kinship and emotional bonds among family members, thereby reinforcing the central narrative theme of family connection.

Power Deixis, seen mainly in the use of "*Chamaco" or "Muchacho"* with a total of 16 occurrences, is very common and constantly shows that the adults use language to assert their age-based power and authority over the main character, Miguel. Similarly, Affect Deixis, like the term "*Amigo*" with a total of 12 occurrences, acts as a clever language tool to create a false sense of friendship or intimacy often used for manipulation. Together, these non-family terms, which

showed up 28 times in total, are important because they reveal the social challenges and unequal power relationships that Miguel faces outside of his strong family bonds.

In contrast, Absolute Social Deixis is represented by 3 different deictic expressions with a combined total of 23 occurrences. Examples, including "*Señor", "de la Cruz*" and "*Señora*," reflect the linguistic acknowledgement of social rank and the conveyance of formal respect, particularly towards individuals possessing authority or elevated social status. While these expressions are less frequent, they are crucial in establishing formality and articulating the social hierarchy within the film's interactions.

Overall, the predominance of relational deixis underscores the significance of kinship and interpersonal respect as core cultural values embedded within the characters' language. Furthermore, the findings illustrate how social deixis operates as a powerful linguistic tool for conveying both emotional attachment and cultural identity throughout the narrative context of Coco.

The results of this study show that social deixis in *Coco* is used to express respect, closeness, and authority in the family and society. Most of the deictic expressions found are relational deixis, especially kinship terms like *Mamá Coco*, *Abuelita*, *Papá Héctor*, and *Tía Victoria*. This shows that the film gives strong importance to family relationships and how people in Mexican culture show love and respect to each other through language.

According to (Levinson, 1983), social deixis helps people show their relationship through language. The results of this study support that idea. They also agree with (Brown & Gilman, 1960) theory of power and solidarity, which explains how language can show both closeness and difference in status. The high number of kinship terms (77 occurrences) shows that most relationships in the film are based on solidarity and affection, not distance or authority.

However, the film also includes some examples of power deixis, such as *Chamaco* or *Muchacho* (16 times). These words are usually spoken by adults to Miguel to show age or authority. They show how people with more power, such as elders, sometimes use language to control or guide younger people. This means that

respect in Coco is not only about being polite, but it is also about recognizing someone's role and position in the family.

The use of absolute deixis such as *Señor, de la Cruz* or *Señora* shows formal respect toward people with high status or authority. Although these words appear less often (23 times), they are important because they mark social distance and honor. For example, when Miguel calls the musician *Señor de la Cruz*, he shows respect for his fame. But later, when he just says *Ernesto*, the meaning changes; it shows that Miguel no longer respects him. This change proves that deixis can also show changes in power and emotion.

In general, these findings prove that social deixis is not only about grammar but also about culture. The way characters use words to address others reflects Mexican values of family respect, hierarchy, and togetherness. The film uses these forms to teach that language is part of culture and that showing respect through words is an important moral value.

In a wider view, Coco uses language to connect family, emotion, and culture. The way characters talk to each other shows how language keeps traditions alive and teaches respect between generations. The study also suggests that animated films can be good materials for studying pragmatics and sociolinguistics, because they show real examples of how people express politeness, power, and love through speech.

In conclusion, social deixis in Coco plays a big role in representing respect and authority. The language of the characters mirrors the cultural identity of Mexican society, where family, respect for elders, and moral values are central parts of life.

CONCLUSION

This study shows how social deixis can serve as a tool to discuss respect, authority, and emotional closeness between characters in the film Coco (2017). The results found by the researcher show that relational deixis is most commonly found in the film Coco (2017). This means that the film is very strong in expressing family relationships and solidarity, which depicts the culture of Mexican society. The

presence of power and affect deixis plays an important role in showing how language shapes authority and emotional distance, especially in interactions between outsiders who are not part of the family.

The results of this study show that deixis functions not only as a part of grammar but also as a reflection of cultural norms and social values. Understanding how deixis works in analyzing a film such as Coco can help viewers and linguists see how language can encode identity, respect, and social relationships. For future research, it would be very useful to analyze how social deixis can be used to analyze other films with different cultural backgrounds or genres so that we can compare how respect, hierarchy, authority, and emotional bonds are portrayed across societies. Research like this can deepen our understanding of how language can reflect and construct social reality.

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APPENDICES

Figure A1.
Mamá Coco (00:03:18).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure A2.
Abuelita (00:07:53).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure A3.
Ernesto de la Cruz (00:04:58).
(Type: Absolute Deixis)

Figure A4.
Tío Berto (00:08:45).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure A5.
Tía Victoria (00:15:25).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure A6.
Papà Julio (00:15:27).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure A7.
Señor de la Cruz (00:21:04).
(Type: Absolute Deixis)
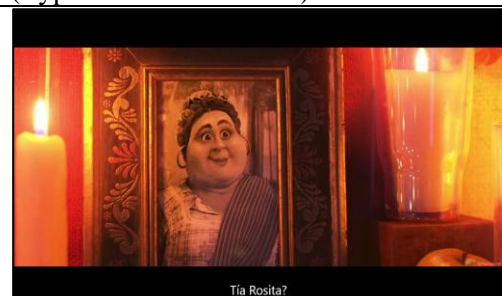
Figure A8.
Tía Rosita (00:23:43).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure B1.
Mamá Imelda (00:23:58).
(Type: Relational Deixis)
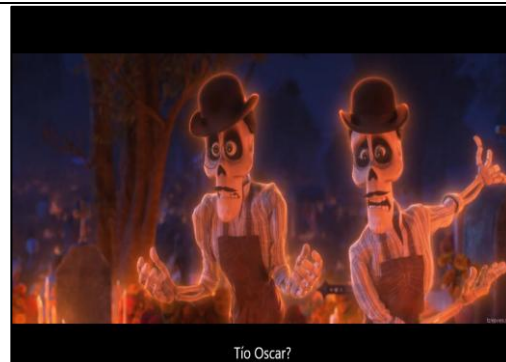
Figure B2.
Tío Oscar (00:24:09).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure B3.
Tío Felipe (00:24:10).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure B4.
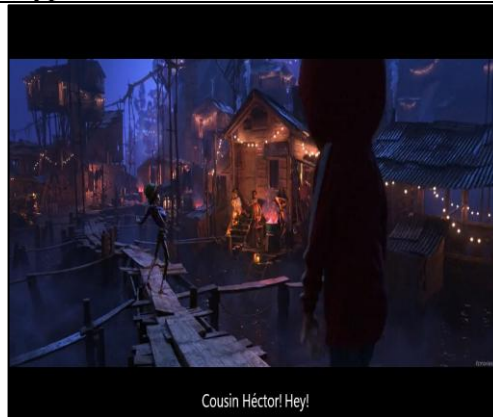*Tía Chelo* (00:42:53).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

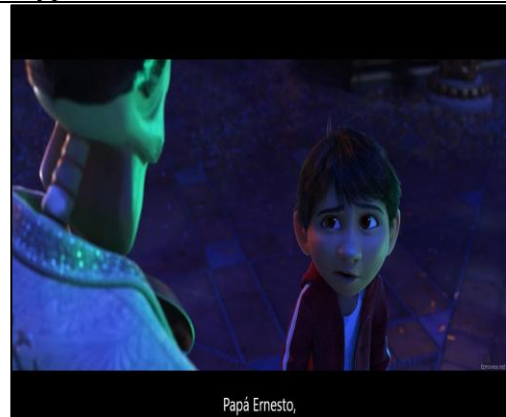Figure B5.
Cousin Héctor (00:42:29).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure B6.
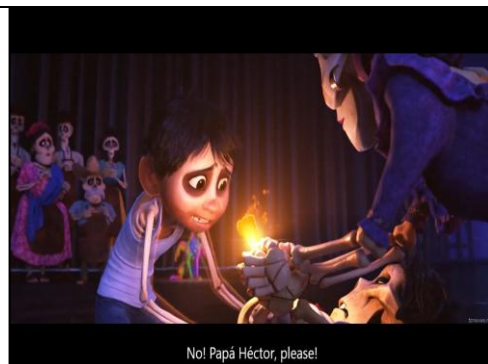*Papá Ernesto* (01:08:31).
(Type: Absolute Deixis)

Figure C1.
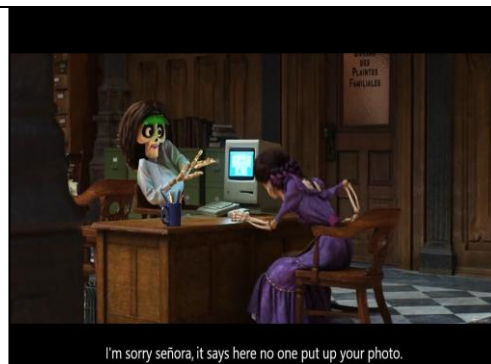*Papá Héctor* (01:28:09).
(Type: Relational Deixis)

Figure C2.
Señora (01:28:27).
(Type: Absolute Deixis)

Figure C3.
Amigo (00:33:04).
(Type: Relational - Affect Deixis)

Figure C4.
Chamaco (00:34:36).
(Type: Relational - Power Deixis)

Figure C5.
Señor (00:57:13).
(Type: Absolute Deixis)