

DEICTIC FIELD “TIME OF ACTION” IN THE  
SEMANTICS OF THE PASHTO LANGUAGE, THE  
“TIME” FIELD: BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEMElianora Zamaleyeva,<sup>id</sup>

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**Abstract:** The article examines the semantic modeling of the category of time in language through the lens of deictic field theory, with a focus on Pashto adverbs. It outlines four major approaches to modeling semantic fields - phenomenological, lexical-semantic, functional-grammatical, and functional-semantic - highlighting their application to the temporal domain. Special attention is given to the concept of deixis, understood as the reference of linguistic units to participants, time, and space of the speech act, and its role in structuring temporal meaning. Based on an analysis of thirteen non-derivative Pashto temporal adverbs, the study identifies the deictic field “time of action” as a system organized by three oppositions: speech vs. narrative modes, moment of speech vs. moment of another action, and coincidence vs. precedence vs. sequence. The research demonstrates that Pashto temporal adverbs acquire their semantics in the communicative act, functioning as correlates between the moment of speech and narrated events, and are thus integral to expressing temporal relations in discourse.

**Keywords:** Semantic field, time, deixis, deictic field, Pashto adverbs, temporal localization, speech mode, narrative mode

## 1. Introduction

Time in language is understood, according to the BES, as a specific linguistic reflection of objective time, serving for the temporal localization of an event or state in a sentence. This localization is deictic, i.e., directly or indirectly related to the real or imagined ‘here and now’. It indicates simultaneity, precedence, or succession of an event relative to the moment of speech or another reference point.

Modeling semantic fields in modern linguistics uses various approaches - phenomenological, lexical-semantic, functional-grammatical, and functional-semantic - applied to the semantic domains of both “time” and “space” (Гак, 2000; Лалаева, 2007; Акимова, Мочалова, 2019; Фан Шу Чанг, 2023; Polat, 2024). Despite interpretative differences, common principles include:

- the basis in lexical analysis,
- the aim to reveal systemic relations between words,
- and the recognition of core-periphery structures within fields.

The concept of deixis, as defined in the GED, covers indications of participants, objects, time, and space in speech. It includes role deixis (“I”, “you”), object deixis (“this”, “that”), and temporal-spatial deixis (“here”, “now”). In this framework, Pashto adverbs are analyzed as deictic units indicating time, place, and evaluation of actions, allowing us to describe their semantics in terms of deictic fields (DFs).

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This paper focuses on the deictic field “time of action” in Pashto, describing its semantic organization based on authentic language data.

According to the BES, time in language is "a specific linguistic reflection of objective time, serving for the temporal (time) localization of an event or state referred to in a sentence. This localization is deictic, i.e., directly or indirectly related to the real or imagined ‘here and now’. It consists in indicating, by means of contrasting temporal forms, the simultaneity, precedence, or succession of an event to the moment of speech or, in the case of so-called temporal orientation, to some other point of reference. In some other languages, tense forms can be combined with more detailed indications of time using lexical and syntactic means: circumstances of time, corresponding conjunctions, etc. In a number of languages, there are special tenses that provide a complex two- (and further three-stage) orientation, i.e., oriented toward an event in relation to someone or something as a reference point, which is in turn localized relative to the moment of speech (Яковлева, 1994)

Modeling semantic fields in modern linguistics is based on various approaches, in particular phenomenological, lexical-semantic, functional-grammatical, and functional-semantic, which are common to the semantic fields of “time” and “space.”

Modeling of the semantic field of time is discussed in (Гак, 2000; Лалаева, 2007; Акимова Мочалова, 2019; Фан Шу Чанг, 2023; Polat, 2024).

Despite all the differences in interpretations of the semantic field, the following points are common: the fields are based on lexical analysis; field modeling of vocabulary is aimed at identifying systemic connections between words. The differences concern approaches to field construction.

The phenomenological approach, based on the basic concepts of time as a phenomenon of consciousness that is embodied in language, is reflected in (Гак, 2000). Considering the semantic field of “time,” V.G. Gak understands it as a space of time. Within the field, he contrasts the near and far peripheries. The near periphery, interpreted by the author as the internal structure of the field, consists of temporal words and grammatical forms, while the far periphery, defined by the author as the external structure, is determined by the interrelationships between the concept of time and other related concepts.

The lexical-semantic approach was proposed by (Лалаева, 2007). It is based on the analysis of a set of words united by semantic connections based on a single concept or similarity of their lexical meanings. Modeling the semantic field of “time,” D.I. Lalaeva does this within the framework of a semantic-logical criterion,

which is based on the principle of identification, manifested in the fact that within microfields, the author distinguishes between core, near-core, and peripheral elements, as well as near and far peripheries.

The semantic field, understood as a grouping of grammatical “structural” and combined linguistic units that are interconnected and operate on the basis of their common semantic functions, represents a functional-grammatical approach. In the field space, this commonality is based on a specific semantic category (in this case, time), in which combinations of central and peripheral elements arise with zones that partially overlap with other fields, in which the boundaries between the center and the periphery are blurred (Акимова, Мочалова, 2019; Polat, 2024; Бондарко, 2021) The semantic field “time” is examined by the authors in structural and semantic terms and is based on lexicographic data. Paradigmatic relations between units of the field are taken into account. The same understanding of the semantic field “time” is given in (Polat, 2024). The author contrasts the temporal thesaurus in Russian with the semantic field of “time,” explaining that the thesaurus includes both the immediate vocabulary of time and the related vocabulary of other fields containing the temporal seme. At the same time, the semantic field “time” includes the mesofields: “existence of time,” “fixing of time,” and “position in time”.

An example of a functional-semantic approach that involves combining semantic connections within the general concept of “time” is (Фан Шу Чанг, 2023). In constructing the semantic field of “time,” the author compared different ways of expressing time in Russian and Chinese, based not only on individual lexemes, but also on phraseological units.

In (Пальцева, 2016), the concept of “field” was applied to the study of parts of speech, which represent lexical-grammatical classes of words. The author notes that parts of speech have all the characteristics of a field structure, since they belong to the same grammatical class of words, have a single categorical meaning, and perform the same functions in language.

In his opinion, within each part of speech, there is a core and a periphery. The core includes words that most accurately convey its categorical semantics and, accordingly, unambiguously perform their syntactic function in a sentence. It is particularly noted that different parts of speech can partially overlap, forming zones of gradual transitions and thus demonstrating one of the laws of the linguistic field.

## 2. Methodology

The study uses thirteen original non-derivative temporal adverbs from Pashto as the research sample for DF “time of action”.

Unit of analysis: a statement where the meaning of the adverb is fully realized.

Analytical parameters:

Mode – speech vs. narrative.

Reference point – moment of speech vs. moment of another action.

Temporal relation – coincidence, precedence, succession.

Data were extracted from authentic Pashto sentences, each annotated with verb tense, adverb used, and translation. Semantic relations were examined through the interaction of verbal tense and adverbial meaning. Particular attention was given to cases of two-stage temporal correlation, where both speech and narrative modes are involved.

### 3. Result

Three core oppositions were identified in the DF “time of action”:

Speech vs. narrative modes

Speech mode: time relations are determined relative to the moment of speech, expressed by present, past, or future verb forms.

Narrative mode: time relations are determined relative to another event within the discourse.

Moment of speech vs. moment of another action

Adverbs can establish correlation not only with the speech moment but also with another referenced action.

Example: سوا [os] “now” marks present action in speech mode but also implies contrast with prior activities.

Coincidence / precedence / succession

Coincidence: سوا [os] (now) with present tense verbs;

Precedence: شپ [peš] (earlier), څخه [də məxa] (in advance),  
متسورو [wrusta] (afterwards);

Succession: متسورو [wrusta] (later), یسار [rāsi] (from now on).

Additional findings:

Constant time adverbs (لت [təl], هېښمه [hamiša], ډنوتپ [patunda]) occur with all tenses.

Habitual adverb ډیرا [irra] (usually) combines only with present and past tenses, not with future tense.

#### 3.1. The concept of deixis in modern science

In the second half of the 20th century, as a result of considering language as a semiotic system, a new type of field modeling of the semantics of a number of linguistic units was formed – deictic fields.

According to the Great Encyclopedic Dictionary (hereinafter referred to as GED), deictic refers to an indication understood



as the meaning or function of a linguistic unit expressed by lexical and grammatical means. Deictic serves to actualize the components of the denotative content of a statement. The sphere of deixis includes: indication of the participants in the speech act (role deixis) – the speaker and the addressee are expressed by various types of pronouns (1st and 2nd person “I”, “you”, ‘my’, “your”); indication of the subject of speech (3rd person pronouns); indication of the degree of remoteness of the object of the utterance, expressed by demonstrative pronouns and particles (“this” - “that”, “here” - ‘there’), indication of the temporal and spatial localization of the communicated fact, expressed by pronominal adverbs (“here,” “now”) as one of the ways of reference is opposed to nomination: this opposition is neutralized in role deictics. (Ярцева, 1990)

In this regard, (Сербрянская, 2005) states: “Deixis is an explicit and implicit reference in the semantics of a linguistic unit to the person, place, and time of an event from the perspective of an observer who is subjectively distant or close in space and time in relation to the event being described.”

A large number of works are devoted to the problem of deixis. The ideas expressed in them boil down to the following points.

Researchers note that deixis is used to refer to words that do not correspond directly to their referents, but in the process of communication, i.e., not in language, but in speech, through speech acts.

Thus, it is said that in the usual case, words refer in our consciousness to some reality—actual or virtual—regardless of the process of communication. For example, the word “table” serves to designate any member of an open class of identifiable objects that are associated on the basis of certain characteristics. This kind of classification is represented in the language we use, regardless of whether the communication process takes place, i.e., in abstraction from speech activity. Consequently, words denoting objects are opposed to deictic ones.

Meanwhile, deictic words, as scholars emphasize, “are directly related to the act of communication and only indirectly—through speech acts—related to the reality (actual or virtual) that is the subject of communication. These words do not have completely independent content that is entirely abstracted from the act of communication” (Успенский, 2011).

Thus, the understanding of the phenomenon of deixis lies in the fact that a word correlates with its referent through an explicit or implicit reference to a speech act. This is the general definition of deixis, based on the dialogical nature of speech. At the same time, as researchers note, reference to a speech act is understood as the orientation of speech toward the actual or presumed speaker.

The question of the opposition between the actual and presumed speaker, which is expressed by the distinction between the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd persons (I, you, and he (she, it)), is discussed in particular.

I refers to the actual speaker in the actual discourse (I am the one who is speaking). You, on the other hand, refers to the presumed speaker in the actual discourse (you are the one who could become the speaker in the dialogue). He, she, and it are those who are currently outside the communication situation, not participating in the dialogue, but in principle—under certain conditions—could become participants.

B.A. Uspensky writes: “Since communication is carried out by the speaker, deictic expressions usually (most often) refer to the speaker. However, in some cases, they may refer to other possible participants in the communication (who act as potential speakers)” (2011).

An analysis of the semantics of Pashto adverbs has shown that these words, as noted above, do not have an independent meaning; their semantics are determined in the act of communication. This allows them to be classified as deictic units indicating the relationship between two situations within a statement: the moment of speech and the event being discussed, according to the coordinates “I-here-now.” (БЕНВЕНИСТ, 1974). In this regard, we can talk about adverbs as deictic units that indicate time, place, and evaluation of an action, and attempt to describe their semantics in terms of the deictic field. Analysis of linguistic material gives grounds to distinguish the deictic fields of “time of action,” “space of action,” and “evaluation of action.”

### **3.2. Deictic field “time of action”**

Thirteen original non-derivative adverbs are used to examine the deictic field (hereinafter referred to as DF) “time of action.”

As is well known, the time of action is determined by its location on the time axis. Researchers note the need to consider the location of the time of action from the point of view of modes: speech and narrative. Each of these modes includes three time planes: coincidence, precedence, and succession. In accordance with this, the unit of analysis is a statement in which the meaning of the adverb is fully realized.

In the speech mode, the coincidence, precedence, and succession of the time of action are determined relative to the moment of speech and are expressed by the present, past, and future tenses of the verb: **هغ یت نو تن هو پ**: [hağa pohantun ta ji] (He is going to the university.) **هغ یت نو تن هو پ**: [hağa pohantun ta rawān wu] (He was going to the university.) **هغ یت نو تن هو پ**: [hağa bə pohantun ta lār ši] (He will go to

the university.)

The use of temporal adverbs in combination with verbs in these cases complicates the temporal correlation of the utterance, i.e., along with the correlation with the moment of speech (expressed by verbal forms), there is a reference to the time of another action. Thus, there is a two-stage temporal correlation of the action: relative to the speech and, at the same time, narrative modes, compare: *os hağa pohantun ta ĵi* [os hağa pohantun ta ĵi] (He is going to university now). *parun ze pohantun ta larəm* [parun ze pohantun ta larəm] (He went to university yesterday.), *sabā bæ hağa pohantun ta ĵi* [sabā bæ hağa pohantun ta ĵi] (He will go to university tomorrow).

In this regard, the modeling of the deictic field “time of action” will be carried out on the basis of three oppositions: speech/narrative modes; moment of speech/moment of another action with further subdivision into coincidence/precedence/sequence. At the same time, the deictic field “time of action” will represent a system of correlating and contrasting semantic features that organize the space of time of action. (Гак, 2000).

As noted above, coincidence with the moment of speech is conveyed by verb forms of the present actual action. The use of adverbs *os* [os] (сейчас): *os hağa pə pohantun ta ĵi* [os hağa pə pohantun ta ĵi] (He is going to university now.) indicates the period of time during which the action takes place: it began before the moment of speech and will continue after it (in grammatical tradition, this triad corresponds to the concepts of past, present and future tense.) Consequently, the moment of speech and the moment of action do not coincide because the former—the present tense verb form *ĵi* [ĵi] (идёт) –indicates a coincidence with the moment of speech, which is a point on the time axis. The adverb *ās* [ās] (now) indicates a correlation with another action, compare: *os hağa pə pohantun ta ĵi* [os hağa pə pohantun ta ĵi] (He is going to university now.), 'earlier he was busy with something else'.

The double temporal correlation of the time of action also occurs in the indication of precedence. In this case, it can correlate, on the one hand, with the moment of speech, i.e., precede it, which is expressed by the past tense forms of the verb: *hağa pohantun ta rawān wu* [hağa pohantun ta rawān wu] (He was going to university). Use of adverbs *peš* [peš] (прежде), *peš* [peš] (earlier), *də mæxa* [də mæxa] (in advance); *peš* [peš] (ahead of time), as well as *rāsi* [rāsi] (from this time), (over time) *rustay* [rustay] (subsequently), *wrusta* [wrusta] (then, after) shows that time is determined relative to another action, which becomes the reference point for the current state of affairs. In this case, the focus of attention can be directed either to the preceding action or to the one that followed it. For the first possibility, see: *peš* [peš] (earlier).

هپ [hağa peş pə pohantun ke zda kre kawelay] (He used to study at university.); هغه [hağa peş pə pohantun ke zda kra kawəla] (He used to study at university.); هغه [hağa peş darsi kətabuna wāhistəl] (He bought textbooks in advance.); هغه [hağa də məxa darsi kitābuna məxa lə məxke wāhistəl] (He bought the textbooks in advance). For a change of focus to the current action, see: هغه [wrusta bə hağa zda kawunkay wi] (After that, he became a student.); هغه [hağa rustay zda kowunkay šu] (He later became a student.); هغه [wrusta hağa zda kowunkay šu] (Then he became a student.); هغه [rāsi hağa zda kowunkay šu] (From that time on, he became a student).

The sequence can also be determined relative to the moment of speech and expressed by future tense forms of the verb: هغه [hağa pə pohantun ke wlār] (He will go to university). The use of adverbs [rā si] (from this time), [rāsi] (in time), [rustay] (subsequently), [wrusta] (later, afterwards) in combination with future tense forms of the verb indicates a plan for future action as a result of what preceded it, compare: هغه [hağa rāsi zda kawunkay šu] (From this time on, he will be a student.); هغه [hağa wrusta bə zda kawunkay wi] (Later, he will be a student.); هغه [hağa wrusta bə zda kowunkay ši] (Then he will become a student.); هغه [hağa wrusta šə zda kowunkay payil kṛa] (After that, he will be a student.).

Semantics of adverbs [təl] (always), [hamiša] (always); [patunda] (constantly); [irra] (usually) translates the actual time of the action into a constant one. At the same time, the adverbs [təl]; [hamiša], [patunda] (constantly) can be combined with all verb tenses, compare: هغه [hağa hamiša pohantun ta rā təla] (She constantly came to the university.) / هغه [hağa təl pohantun ta ji] (She constantly comes to the university.) / هغه [hağa təl pohantun ta tələl] (She will constantly come to the university.); هغه [duy təl pə pohantun ke pə yaw cə boxt wu] (They were always busy with something at the university.); هغه [duy təl pə pohantun ke pə yaw cə boxt ši] (They are always busy with something at university.) / هغه [duy təl pə pohantun ke pə yaw bə boxt kər] (They will always be busy with something at university). The adverb [irra] (обычно) (usually) does not



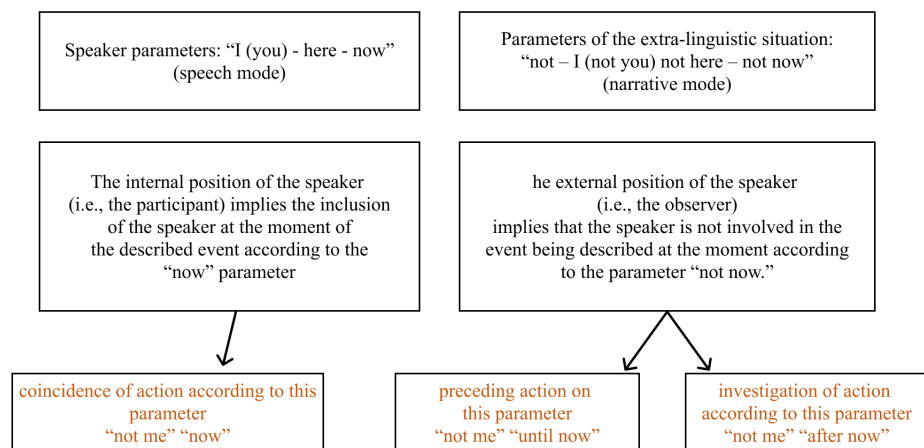
combine with future tense forms, compare:  $\text{مېرړا ږوم وړوخ همړغ}$  [munj irra pə kāntin ke ġarma xuru] (We usually eat lunch in the cafeteria.) /  $\text{مېرړا ږوم یش ږلړوخ}$  [munj irra pə kāntin ke xwarilay ši] (We usually ate lunch in the cafeteria.), but compare: incorrectness \* (We will usually eat lunch in the cafeteria).

Thus, three oppositions are distinguished in the DP “time of action”: speech/narrative modes; moment of speech/moment of another action with further subdivision into coincidence/precedence/sequence.

In the speech mode, coincidence, precedence, and succession of action time are determined relative to the moment of speech and are expressed by the present, past, and future tenses of the verb.

In the narrative mode, precedence and succession of action time are determined relative to another action and are expressed by the present, past, and future tenses of the verb. Let us illustrate this in Figure 1.

#### Deictic field “time of action”



#### 4. Discussion

The analysis shows that the DF “time of action” in Pashto is a structured semantic system with clear oppositions organizing its internal space. Adverbs not only localize events in time but also create multi-level temporal correlations—first with the moment of speech, then with other actions in the narrative.

A significant feature is the blurring between speech and narrative modes: temporal adverbs often operate simultaneously in both planes, indicating the relativity of time description in Pashto discourse.

The restriction of certain adverbs (e.g.,  $\text{مېرړا}$  [irra]) to specific

tense combinations suggests that habitual aspect in Pashto is semantically tied to actuality and retrospective reference rather than projection into the future.

These findings confirm that temporal adverbs in Pashto are inherently deictic, and their semantics cannot be fully described without considering reference points, mode, and temporal relation type. The field approach thus proves effective for modeling their structure.

### 5. Conclusion

The deictic nature of the adverb pashto is justified by the fact that the adverb has no independent meaning, but acquires it within the context of the utterance, indicating the participants in the speech act and correlating the communicated information with the moment of speech. This allows us to model its semantics in terms of the deictic field, in particular the deictic field of 'time of action', the deictic field of 'space of action', and the deictic field of 'evaluation of action'.

Within each of these deictic fields, variants of this correlation are identified, determined by the inclusion/non-inclusion of the described action in the speech situation, originating from the internal and external position of the speaker.

When modelling the deictic field of 'time of action', the most important principles are: 1) contrasting speech and narrative modes; 2) identifying three temporal planes within these modes: coincidence, precedence and succession; 3) taking into account the speaker's position, which can be internal or external.

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ДЕЙКТИЧЕСКОЕ ПОЛЕ “ВРЕМЯ ДЕЙСТВИЯ” В СЕМАНТИКЕ  
ЯЗЫКА ПУШТУ, ПОЛЕ “ВРЕМЯ”: ПРЕДЫСТОРИЯ ПРОБЛЕМЫ

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается семантическое моделирование категории времени в языке через призму теории дейктических полей с акцентом на наречия пашто. Выделяются четыре основных подхода к моделированию семантических полей – феноменологический, лексико-семантический, функционально-грамматический и функционально-семантический – и анализируется их применение к временной сфере. Особое внимание уделяется понятию дейксиса, понимаемого как соотносённость языковых единиц с участниками, временем и пространством речевого акта, и его роли в структурировании временного значения. На основе анализа тринадцати производных временных наречий пашто определяется дейктическое поле «время действия» как система, организованная тремя оппозициями: речевой / нарративный режим, момент речи / момент другого действия и совпадение / предшествование / следование. Показано, что временные наречия пашто реализуют своё значение в акте коммуникации, выступая коррелятами между моментом речи и описываемыми событиями и являясь важным средством выражения временных отношений в дискурсе.

**Ключевые слова:** Семантическое поле, время, дейксис, дейктическое поле, наречия пашто, временная локализация, речевой режим, нарративный режим.

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PUSHTU RAVISHLARI SEMANTIKASIDA “HARAKAT  
VAQTI” DEYKTIK MAYDONI “VAQT” DEYKTIK MAYDONI  
MASALASINING O’RGANILISH TARIXI

**Annotatsiya:** Maqolada tilda vaqt kategoriyasini semantik modellashtirish masalasi deyklik maydonlar nazariyasi prizmasidan, asosan, pushtu tilidagi ravishlar misolida ko‘rib chiqiladi. Semantik maydonlarni modellashtirishning to‘rtta asosiy yondashuvi – fenomenologik, leksik-semantik, funksional-grammatik va funksional-semantik – hamda ularning vaqt sohasiga tatbiqi



tahlil qilinadi. Deyksis tushunchasiga, ya'ni til birliklarining nutq aktidagi ishtirokchilar, vaqt va makonga bog'liqligiga, hamda uning vaqt ma'nosini shakllantirishdagi roliga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Pushtu tilidagi o'n uchta hosila bo'lmagan vaqt ravishlari tahliliga asoslanib, "harakat vaqti" deytik maydoni uchta qarama-qarshilik asosida tashkil topgan tizim sifatida aniqlanadi: nutq / narrativ rejim, nutq lahzasi / boshqa harakat lahzasi va mos kelish / oldin kelish / keyin kelish. Tadqiqotda pushtu tilidagi vaqt ravishlari o'z semantikasini kommunikativ jarayonda namoyon etishi, nutq lahzasi va tasvirlanayotgan voqealar o'rtasidagi bog'lovchi sifatida xizmat qilishi hamda nutqda vaqt munosabatlarini ifodalashning muhim vositasi ekanligi ko'rsatilgan.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Semantik maydon, vaqt, deyksis, deytik maydon, pushtu ravishlari, vaqt lokalizatsiyasi, nutq rejimi, narrativ rejim.

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