



A Deixis Analysis of the Short Story *The Fly* by Katherine Mansfield

AUTHORS INFO

Muhamad Bryan Ardi Ansyah, Rezki Mei Zaroh,
Muh. Syukur Ramadhan, Sitti Maizara, Muh. Arya
Fahrizal Bakhri, Mutmainnah
Universitas Halu Oleo

ARTICLE INFO

ISSN: 2502-6909
Vol. 11 No. 1, June 2026
URL: <https://usnsj.id/index.php/JEE/article/view/2348>

© 2026 JEE All rights reserved

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the types of deixis and their functions in the short story *The Fly* (1922) by Katherine Mansfield. The research applies a qualitative descriptive approach based on Creswell's (2013) framework, employing pragmatic theory with a focus on deixis. The data were collected through documentation and content analysis by identifying utterances containing deictic expressions in the short story. The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and verification. The findings reveal a total of 181 deictic expressions, which are classified into five types: 110 data of person deixis (60.77%), 29 data of spatial deixis (16.02%), 17 data of temporal deixis (9.39%), 14 data of discourse deixis (7.73%), and 11 data of social deixis (6.08%). Each type of deixis demonstrates distinct functions within the narrative: person deixis clarifies participant roles and interpersonal relationships, spatial deixis indicates locations, temporal deixis specifies time references, discourse deixis maintains textual coherence, and social deixis reflects social status and relationships among characters. Overall, the study shows that deixis plays an important role in constructing meaning and enhancing narrative coherence in the short story *The Fly* (1922).

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Deixis, Short Story, The Fly, Katherine Mansfield*

1. Introduction

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on how meaning is constructed and interpreted in relation to context. Within the field of stylistics, pragmatics plays an important role in examining how language is used in literary texts to convey meaning beyond literal interpretation. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener, emphasizing the role of context in understanding language use. In literary studies, this perspective allows researchers to analyze how linguistic choices contribute to character development, narrative structure, and reader interpretation. He explains that deixis concerns "pointing via language," emphasizing that speakers constantly use deictic expressions to identify participants, locations, and times relative to themselves. Because of this context dependency, deixis serves as an important bridge between semantics and pragmatics, enabling listeners or readers to interpret meaning beyond the literal words.

One of the central concepts in pragmatics that is frequently applied to literary analysis is deixis. Deixis refers to linguistic expressions whose meanings depend on contextual information such as speaker, time, place, and social relationship. Levinson (1983) explains that deixis serves as a bridge between language and context, making it a crucial element in understanding how utterances are interpreted within a particular situation. In literary works, deixis helps readers identify participants in the story, locate events in time and space, and recognize relationships between characters. According to Levinson (1983), deixis plays a significant role in literary texts because it supports narrative coherence and guides readers through the fictional world created by the author. Person deixis reveals relationships between characters, spatial deixis clarifies settings, temporal deixis situates events in time, discourse deixis connects parts of the narrative, and social deixis reflects social hierarchy and politeness. These deictic elements enable readers to interpret meaning not only from what is stated explicitly but also from how language is contextually positioned within the text. Cruse (2006) also argues that deictic meaning is dynamic because its interpretation shifts according to changes in context. Consequently, deixis has become an essential area in discourse analysis, literary studies, and communication research.

Although deixis is often discussed in everyday communication, it also plays an essential role in literary texts. Literary narratives recreate communicative situations in which readers infer contextual meanings through deictic expressions. Herman (1994) argues that narrative discourse relies heavily on deictic centers, allowing readers to shift perspectives between narrator and characters. This phenomenon, often called deictic shift, enables readers to experience fictional worlds as if they were participants within them. Stockwell (2002) further explains that deictic expressions contribute to readers' immersion in literary texts. By establishing perspectives of time, place, and character relationships, deixis helps readers construct coherent mental representations of fictional events. Therefore, the analysis of deixis is valuable for understanding characterization, point of view, and narrative structure. Moreover, Simpson (2004) states that stylistic analysis benefits from examining deixis because deictic choices reveal ideological positions, emotional distance, and interpersonal relationships among characters. Consequently, pragmatic analysis complements literary criticism by explaining how linguistic choices shape readers' interpretation.

Numerous studies have investigated deixis in literary and non-literary texts. The study by Yeibo (2012) investigates the stylistic functions of deictic expressions in the poetry of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, arguing that previous research had largely overlooked the contribution of deixis to the interpretation of the poet's works. Using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics as its analytical framework, the study analyzes person, spatial, and temporal deixis in selected poems and demonstrates that these deictic expressions are not merely grammatical elements but also important stylistic devices. Person deixis, particularly the frequent use of first-person pronouns (*I, we, me, us*), constructs autobiographical perspectives and strengthens readers' emotional engagement, while spatial deixis (*here, there*) establishes contrasts between places, cultures, and even the realms of life and death. Another study of deixis also has been conducted by Nursaadah, Bandung, and Nurhayati (2025) stated that types of deixis and the function of deixis in uncovering the meaning of the short story "Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon". This research uses stylistic theory. Stylistics examines the use of language in a literary work and the effectiveness of its use. This stylistic study can move at the pragmatic level. This type of research is qualitative research. The method used in this research is descriptive analytical method. The results of the study show that the types of deixis in the short story include first-person deixis with the word *I* as many as 13 and *I* as many as 8, the use of the second person with the word *you* as much as 37 and the second plural with the word *we* as much as 5. The third persona *he* as many as 9, *he* as much as 3. The third plural with the word *we* as many as 6 and *they* are 6. The use of the first persona deixis is dominantly used in the short story.

Among various literary genres, short stories provide a rich object for deixis analysis due to their concise and dense use of language. Because short stories rely on limited space, every linguistic choice becomes meaningful in conveying themes and emotions. One short story that demonstrates effective use of deictic expressions is *The Fly* (1922) by Katherine Mansfield. This story presents themes of grief, authority, memory, and emotional restraint through subtle narration and carefully selected linguistic forms. This study applies a

pragmatic approach by using deixis theory as the main analytical framework. Deictic expressions are classified into five types: person deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. These categories are used to analyze how meaning is constructed contextually within the narrative of *The Fly* (1922) and how deictic expressions function to support the storyline and character interaction.

Analyzing deixis in Katherine Mansfield's *The Fly* is important because deictic expressions function as contextual markers that connect linguistic forms with the characters, events, and situations represented in the narrative. As one of the most prominent figures of literary modernism, Mansfield employs subtle and economical language in which meaning is often implied rather than explicitly stated. Consequently, readers must rely on deictic expressions such as personal pronouns, temporal references, spatial markers, and forms of address to interpret the relationships among characters, identify shifts in narrative perspective, and understand the progression of events. A pragmatic analysis of deixis therefore reveals how contextual meaning is constructed, demonstrating that interpretation in literary discourse depends not only on lexical meaning but also on the interaction between language and context.

Furthermore, *The Fly* is widely recognized for its psychological depth and its exploration of grief, power, memory, and human vulnerability. These themes are conveyed through a narrative that frequently shifts between the narrator's perspective and the internal experiences of the characters. Examining the distribution and functions of person, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social deixis provide a systematic explanation of how Mansfield establishes narrative coherence, directs readers' attention, and portrays interpersonal relationships and social hierarchy. Although previous studies have predominantly examined *The Fly* from psychological, symbolic, and modernist perspectives, relatively little attention has been given to its pragmatic features. Therefore, a deictic analysis not only enriches the linguistic interpretation of the short story but also contributes to the broader field of literary pragmatics by demonstrating how contextual references shape meaning and readers' engagement with the text.

The aims of this research are to explore the deictic expressions found in the short story *The Fly* (1922) by Katherine Mansfield and to analyze their types and functions within the narrative context. Overall, the significance of this research is expected to provide deeper insight into short stories as literary works and to enrich pragmatic and stylistic studies, particularly those that employ deixis as an analytical tool.

This study is also of relevance to English Education since the examination of deixis can help students to understand the way in which meaning is built up through context in English literary texts. Because expressions of deixis such as personal pronouns, temporal expressions, spatial references, discourse markers, and forms of address require learners to take into account contextual information rather than merely interpreting the language on the basis of its literal meaning, the results of this study can offer useful linguistic material for use in English language teaching, especially in enhancing students' pragmatic awareness, their reading comprehension, and their ability to interpret contextual meaning in literary texts. In this respect, the analysis of deixis in *The Fly* can act as an example of how literary texts can be used as significant resources for combining linguistic and literary learning in English Education.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the types of deixis and their functions in Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Fly*. A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because it enables the researcher to identify, classify, and interpret linguistic phenomena within their natural context. The study was guided by Creswell's (2013) qualitative research framework and adopted a pragmatic perspective focusing on deixis.

2.2. Data Collection

The data source of this study was the short story *The Fly* (1922) by Katherine Mansfield. The data consisted of words, phrases, and sentences containing deictic expressions found throughout the narrative. Data were collected using the documentation

method and content analysis technique. The researcher carefully read the short story several times to gain a comprehensive understanding of its context and storyline. During the reading process, all utterances and narrative expressions containing deictic elements were identified, highlighted, and recorded. The identified data were then categorized according to the five types of deixis proposed by Levinson (1983), namely person deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. This systematic documentation ensured that all relevant deictic expressions were included for further analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively following the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and classified the identified deictic expressions based on their respective types while eliminating irrelevant data. Next, in the data display stage, the classified data were organized into tables and descriptive explanations to facilitate interpretation and comparison of the findings. Each deictic expression was analyzed in relation to its contextual meaning and communicative function within the narrative. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher interpreted the functions of each type of deixis and verified the consistency of the findings by repeatedly comparing the data with the theoretical framework. The frequency of each type of deixis was also calculated and presented in percentages to illustrate its distribution in the short story. This analytical procedure enabled the researcher to explain both the occurrence and the pragmatic functions of deixis in constructing meaning and maintaining narrative coherence in *The Fly*.

2.4. Data Validity

The validity of the data was ensured through repeated checking of the identified deictic expressions against the original text of *The Fly* and the theoretical framework proposed by Levinson (1983). Each identified expression was examined in its contextual use and reviewed to ensure that it was appropriately classified into one of the five types of deixis: person, spatial, temporal, discourse, or social deixis. Ambiguous or potentially overlapping expressions were reconsidered during the verification process by examining their immediate discourse context. In addition, the frequency counts were cross-checked with the classified data to ensure consistency between the coding, findings table, and discussion. This procedure was conducted to minimize misclassification and maintain the consistency and trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Findings

This research examines deictic expressions found in the short story *The Fly* by Katherine Mansfield. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the text, a total of 181 deixis data were identified and classified into five categories, namely person deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. The findings reveal that person deixis appears most frequently, with 110 occurrences (60.77%), followed by spatial deixis with 29 occurrences (16.02%), temporal deixis with 17 occurrences (9.39%), discourse deixis with 14 occurrences (7.73%), and social deixis with 11 occurrences (6.08%). These findings indicate that person deixis plays the most dominant role in representing participants and character relationships, while the other types support the construction of spatial, temporal, discourse, and social meanings within the narrative.

Types of Deixis	Number of Data	Percentage (%)
Person Deixis	110	60.77%
Spatial Deixis	29	16.02%

Temporal Deixis	17	9.39%
Discourse Deixis	14	7.73%
Social Deixis	11	6.08%
Total	181	100%

Table 1. Types of Deixis in the Short Story *The Fly*

3.2. Discussion

The data illustrate that the various types of deixis found in the short story *The Fly* by Katherine Mansfield serve distinct linguistic functions within the narrative. The use of deixis in this short story is not incidental; rather, it is employed strategically to clarify participant roles, indicate spatial orientation, specify temporal reference, maintain discourse coherence, and reflect social relationships among the characters. Each type of deixis contributes differently to the construction of meaning and the development of the storyline. To provide a focused and in-depth analysis, this discussion elaborates on ten selected data that represent the major types of deixis identified in the findings. These data are discussed in detail in Data 1 to Data 10, highlighting the specific forms and functions of deixis as they appear in the narrative context of the short story.

Data 1: Person Deixis

"I tell you what. I've got a little drop of something here that'll do you good before you go out into the cold again." (Mansfield, 1922, p. 1)

The above quotation contains first person deixis, marked by the use of the pronouns "I" and "I've." Based on the short story, this statement was delivered by the boss to Mr. Woodifield. The use of first-person deixis serves to indicate the speaker's role as the main subject in the utterance and to emphasize the speaker's personal involvement in the proposed action. By using "I," the character directly positions himself as the decision maker and controller of the situation, which also reflects his higher social status.

Data 2: Person Deixis

"My son!" groaned the boss. (Mansfield, 1922, p. 3)

In this data, the form "my" is a first person possessive deixis that indicates both a relationship of ownership and an emotional relationship between the speaker and another character. The word "my" refers to the boss as the speaker and the boy as the person being referred to. The function of personal deixis in this quotation is to show a close personal relationship, thereby deepening the description of the trauma and sadness experienced by the main character due to the loss of his child.

Data 3: Person Deixis

"Drink it down. It'll do you good." (Mansfield, 1922, p. 2)

The word "you" is a second-person deixis that directly refers to Mr. Woodifield as the interlocutor. Its use identifies the listener as an active participant in the interaction and establishes a direct relationship between the boss and Mr. Woodifield. In this context, the use of "you" also reflects the boss's authoritative position because he gives a direct instruction to his guest. Thus, the person deixis functions not only to identify the addressee

but also to emphasize the interpersonal relationship and power difference between the two characters.

Expanding on the role of person deixis within the second category, its function extends beyond simply identifying the participants in a conversation to shaping the interactive relationship between the speaker and the listener. Within the linguistic framework, the singular pronoun “*you*” plays a crucial role as a referential marker, guiding the speaker’s address toward the listener while simultaneously recognizing their active involvement in the discourse. As demonstrated in the analyzed data, the speaker’s intentional use of “*you*” establishes a direct interpersonal connection with the woman, explicitly acknowledging her presence and participation in the interaction. Moreover, this linguistic strategy not only serves an identificatory purpose but also cultivates a sense of immediacy and intimacy, reinforcing the interpersonal bond between the interlocutors. Ultimately, the use of the pronoun “*you*” functions as a central element in conversational dynamics, enabling active engagement and interaction while enriching the exchange with nuanced relational meaning.

Data 4: Person Deixis

“He wasn’t feeling as he wanted to feel.” (Mansfield, 1922, p. 3)

The function of deixis in the use of the pronoun “*he*” is crucial, as it directly refers to a specific individual within the narrative framework namely, the boss. As a form of third-person personal deixis, “*he*” positions the character as the object of the narrator’s observation rather than as an active speaker, reinforcing the third-person narrative perspective that dominates the short story. This deictic choice enables readers to perceive the character’s psychological condition through the narrator’s viewpoint, while simultaneously maintaining narrative distance. Moreover, personal deixis plays an essential role in organizing character reference, allowing the audience to clearly identify who is being discussed without unnecessary repetition of names. The use of “*he*” also signals an established contextual understanding between the narrator and the audience, suggesting a shared awareness of the character’s identity. In this way, the pronoun not only reduces ambiguity but also subtly reflects the relational dynamics embedded within the narrative, contributing to a deeper interpretation of the character’s role and emotional positioning in the story.

Data 5: Time Deixis

“Since he had retired, since his stroke, the wife and the girls kept him boxed up in the house every day of the week except Tuesday.” (Mansfield, 1922, p. 1)

The temporal expressions “*since*” and “*every day of the week except Tuesday*” establish the time frame of Mr. Woodfield’s life after retirement. The word “*since*” connects his present condition with the earlier events of his retirement and stroke, while “*every day of the week except Tuesday*” indicates a recurring routine. The expression “*every evening*” similarly reinforces the habitual pattern of the characters’ activities. These temporal expressions help readers understand the sequence and regularity of events in the narrative.

The time deixis in the phrase “*every evening*” functions in a similar way by indicating a recurring temporal pattern within the narrative. This expression refers to a specific and repeated time frame, showing that the action leaving and inviting another person to join occurs regularly at the same time each day. As with the use of “*since*” and “*every day of the week except Tuesday*,” this form of temporal deixis helps clarify the

habitual nature of the characters' activities and situates them within a consistent temporal structure. By emphasizing repetition and routine, *"every evening"* reinforces the reader's understanding of the characters' daily lives and the stability of their interactions. Consequently, this temporal marker not only provides clarity regarding when events occur but also strengthens the narrative coherence by highlighting the cyclical and patterned nature of time experienced by the characters.

Data 6: Time Deixis

"On Tuesday he was dressed and brushed and allowed to cut back to the City for the day." (Mansfield, 1922, p. 1)

The phrase *"On Tuesday"* is a temporal deixis that indicates the specific time an event occurred. This temporal deixis serves to link the character's actions to a specific day, which is Mr. Woodifield's only free time. The use of this form helps readers understand the time context clearly and structurally in the storyline.

Data 7: Spatial Deixis

"Y'are very snug in here," piped old Mr. Woodifield. (Mansfield, 1922, p. 1)

The word *"here"* is a proximal spatial deixis that refers to the boss's office, the location where Mr. Woodifield is situated during the conversation. Its use establishes the physical setting as the spatial center of the interaction and helps readers identify the immediate location of the characters. Thus, *"here"* functions to connect the utterance with the specific place in which the conversation takes place.

Within the text, the adverb *"here"* functions as a form of spatial deixis that indicates a location in close proximity to the speaker. Similar to its use in the interaction between Mr. Woodifield and the boss, this spatial deixis identifies the immediate physical setting in which the speaker is situated. In this context, *"here"* refers to the specific place occupied by the speaker, emphasizing the immediacy and relevance of that location at the moment of utterance. By employing this deictic expression, the speaker directs attention to the spatial center of the interaction, allowing readers to clearly understand where the event is taking place. Thus, the use of *"here"* not only marks physical proximity but also reinforces the spatial focus of the narrative, contributing to a clearer and more coherent understanding of the interaction within the story.

Data 8: Spatial Deixis

"It gave him a feeling of deep, solid satisfaction to be planted there in the midst of it." (Mansfield, 1922, p. 1)

The word *"there"* is included in distal spatial deixis, which refers to a place that is not directly indicated but has been understood through the previous context, namely the boss's office. This spatial deixis serves to emphasize the character's position in a certain space, while also emphasizing the character's sense of ownership and comfort in that place.

Data 9: Discourse Deixis

"That was it," he said, heaving himself out of his chair. (Mansfield, 1922, p. 2)

The phrase *"That was it"* is a form of discourse deixis because it refers to an idea or memory that has just appeared in the previous discourse, not to a specific physical object. This discourse deixis is anaphoric, because it refers back to a topic that has been discussed

previously, namely Mr. Woodifield's memory of his boss's child's grave. Its function is to mark a shift in the focus of the discourse from light conversation to an emotional topic

Data 10: Social Deixis

"said old Mr. Woodifield" (Mansfield, 1922, p. 1)

The use of the title "Mr." in Woodifield's name is a form of social deixis that indicates a formal social relationship and respect. This social deixis serves to indicate the social status and age of the character, while also reflecting the norms of politeness in British middle-class society at that time.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined the use of deictic expressions in the short story *The Fly* by Katherine Mansfield through a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of pragmatics. By applying deixis theory, the research successfully identified and classified deictic expressions into five categories: person deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. The findings demonstrate that deixis plays a crucial role in shaping meaning and guiding readers' interpretation of the narrative context.

The analysis reveals that person deixis is the most frequently used type, indicating its dominant function in representing participant roles and interpersonal relationships between characters. Spatial and temporal deixis contribute to clarifying the setting and time reference of events, allowing readers to situate the narrative within a clear physical and temporal framework. Discourse deixis functions to maintain coherence by linking ideas and events across the narrative, while social deixis reflects social status, formality, and power relations among characters. Together, these types of deixis support the development of the story's themes, particularly those related to grief, authority, and emotional restraint.

The discussion of selected data further shows that deictic expressions are not used randomly but are strategically employed by the author to enhance narrative depth and emotional impact. Through deixis, Mansfield effectively connects language with context, enabling readers to engage more deeply with the psychological and social dimensions of the story.

In conclusion, this research confirms that deixis is an essential pragmatic element in literary texts, especially in short stories where linguistic economy is crucial. The study contributes to pragmatic and stylistic studies by demonstrating how deictic analysis can reveal contextual meaning and narrative function in literary works. Overall, the findings are expected to provide deeper insight into the analysis of short stories and to serve as a reference for future studies employing pragmatics and deixis in literary analysis.

References

- Aprilia, P., & Simatupang, E. C. (2024). *Analysis on deixis in the short story The Garden of Paradise: A pragmatics study*. International Journal of English Linguistics, Literature, and Education, 6(1), 39–50.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cruse, D. A. (2006). *A glossary of semantics and pragmatics*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Herman, D. (1994). *Deictic shift theory and the poetics of narrative*. In J. F. Duchan, G. A. Bruder, & L. E. Hewitt (Eds.), *Deixis in narrative: A cognitive science perspective* (pp. 89–113). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mansfield, K. (1922). *The fly*. In *The garden party and other stories*. Constable & Company Ltd.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Nursaadah, N., Bandung, B., & Nurhayati, N. (2025). *The use of personal deixis in expressing the meaning of the short story "Di Tubuh Tarra dalam Rahim Pohon" by Faisal Oddang: A stylistic overview*. Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa dan Sastra, 11(4).
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
- Stockwell, P. (2002). *Cognitive poetics: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Yeibo, E. (2012). *Deictics and stylistic function in J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's poetry*. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2(1), 107–117. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v2n1p107>
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.