A Pragmatic Analysis of Deixis in the Film Damsel (2023)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study aims to analyze the use of deixis in the film Damsel (2023) directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, with a pragmatic approach. Damsel tells the story of Elodie, a young woman caught up in a royal conspiracy and struggling to survive and fight the threat of dragons. The main focus of this research is to explore how deixis is used to build relationships between characters, create cohesion in the narrative, and enrich the social and emotional themes present in the movie. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method to identify various types of deixis found in the dialog between characters in the film, namely deixis personalia, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social. The deixis theory used refers to Levinson (1983), which discusses how words and phrases used by characters function in their social and communication contexts. Through this pragmatic analysis, it is hoped that this research can provide new insights into the role of deixis in conveying messages in films and contribute to the understanding of communication structures in visual media.

INTRODUCTION

Deixis is a key phenomenon in linguistics that plays an important role in communication, especially in everyday interactions. Simply put, deixis refers to the use of words or expressions whose meaning depends on context, such as references to time, place, or participants in a conversation. This phenomenon is particularly important in movies, where deixis helps shape the understanding of characters, locations, and temporal sequences that occur. In Damsel (2023), deixis is used to connect the audience to the film's narrative by providing critical context that helps viewers understand the development of the plot, the characters' emotional journeys, and the relationships between characters. This research aims to explore the use of

deixis in Damsel and how it contributes to the narrative structure and audience engagement. In the pragmatic analysis of films, deixis provides deep insights into the characters, their interactions, and the narrative structure they inhabit. In the film Damsel (2023), deixis can be analyzed to reveal the relationship between the characters, their emotional states, and the themes in the film's narrative. The types of deixis that can be analyzed include five main categories: personal, temporal, spatial, social, and discourse deixis (Paundrianagari & Harida, 2024)

In Damsel, personal deixis is expected to be dominant, marking the identity of the speaker and listener in the dialog. This is in line with the findings of various studies showing that personal deixis often dominates character interactions in films (Subekti & Fauziati, 2025). (Sari & Zakrimal, 2020) in their research on the movie Avengers: Infinity War identified that personal deixis is the most dominant type of deixis, with 87 data found out of a total of 168 data. They also pointed out the importance of temporal and spatial deixis in organizing time and location in the film, as well as how these types of deixis enrich narrative understanding. This research will adapt a similar approach to analyze the film Damsel and explore the role of deixis in shaping the audience's understanding of the plot and characters. This referential dynamic not only drives the plot, but also enriches character development by establishing social roles between them.

In addition, temporal deixis in Damsel can be crucial for emphasizing the narrative timeline of the film, which helps viewers understand the sequence of events and the emotional journey of the characters at various points in the story (Karimah & Luthvia, 2023). Analysis of films such as Fantastic Beasts shows the importance of temporal deixis in conveying urgency and emotional weight, marking crucial moments in the storyline. Spatial deixis is also an important aspect in Damsel, as it places characters in specific contexts and locations that influence their actions and motivations. Analyzing spatial deixis in this film can provide insights into how setting interacts with character development, similar to findings in other film analyses (Sari & Zakrimal, 2020); (Prakoso et al., 2025). For example, the use of spatial terms can situate conflicts and relationships between characters more clearly, showing their physical and metaphorical places in the narrative journey.

In addition, discourse and social deixis are also relevant in the context of Damsel. Discourse deixis refers to the text itself, while social deixis conveys aspects of social relations and hierarchies among the characters. The dialogues in the film can be analyzed to see how they reflect power dynamics, conflicts, and affiliations between characters. The use of nuanced discourse deixis can highlight themes of identity and attachment, while social deixis can illustrate social norms and personal relationships in the context of the film. Thus, this study seeks to explore how the use of deixis in Damsel plays an important role in shaping the story, enhancing the immersive experience for the audience, and conveying the social and emotional messages contained in the film's narrative.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive analysis approach, grounded in the philosophy of postpositivism or interpretivism (Sugiyono, 2017: 9), with the aim of exploring how deixis is used in the film *Damsel* (2023),

focusing on identifying different types of deixis and their contribution to the narrative and audience experience. The data consists of dialogue transcripts from the film, manually transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy, clarity, and completeness, with all relevant dialogues included for comprehensive representation. These transcripts are analyzed to identify the use of deixis, specifically person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis, following Levinson's (1983) framework. The analysis employs a thematic categorization method in which each instance of deixis is reviewed and coded according to its context within the film, including character relationships and situational settings, and described in terms of its contribution to the narrative and character interaction. To ensure validity and reliability, the transcripts are cross-checked with the original film, the categorization of deixis is repeated through multiple readings to avoid bias, and inter-rater reliability is applied by involving a second researcher to review and resolve discrepancies through consensus, thereby ensuring that the analysis accurately reflects the film's pragmatic use of deixis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the forms of deixis found in the character dialogues of the film *Damsel*, utilizing Levinson's (1983) pragmatic approach. While Levinson categorizes deixis into five types—personal, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social—this analysis not only identifies these types but also critically evaluates their impact on character perception, narrative progression, and emotional intensity. Each excerpt is accompanied by a timestamp to indicate its temporal context within the film.

1. Personal Deixis

Personal deixis refers to the identification of participants in a communicative exchange, shaping interpersonal dynamics and signaling character development. Data 1.1 "Let's kill the beast." (00:01:11). The pronoun "let's" (let us) marks inclusivity, signaling the shared intention of the King and his soldiers. While it denotes group solidarity and collective action, it also subtly reinforces the hierarchical structure, as the King issues a command. The personal deixis in this statement does not merely express group unity but also subtly establishes the King's authority, making it an early example of how deixis can simultaneously reflect both solidarity and power dynamics. Data 1.2 "I won't fail you." (00:24:10). The pronouns "I" and "you" create a personal connection between the speaker and the listener. The loyalty expressed in this dialogue has a profound emotional effect, creating tension and anticipation. In this scene, personal deixis enhances the emotional intensity by tying the speaker's sense of responsibility and commitment directly to their interpersonal bond with the listener, heightening the stakes of their relationship.

Data 1.3 "She will know what you did." (00:38:32). Here, "she," "you," and "did" establish a personal accusation, setting up a confrontation. This example of personal deixis relies heavily on the narrative context, which positions the characters within a broader conflict. The second-person and third-person deixis serve as tools of both accusation and foreshadowing, signaling not only a narrative turning point but also a shift in character dynamics. The use of personal deixis, particularly the shifting pronouns from collective (let's) to individual commitment (I, you), mirrors the development of Elodie's character. Her transformation from a passive figure to an active agent is reflected in her increasing use of first-person pronouns, aligning her speech with

her narrative arc of empowerment.

2. Spatial Deixis

Spatial deixis refers to location or direction, both literal and metaphorical, shaping the physical and emotional landscape of the film. Data 2.1 "There it is." (00:01:05). The demonstrative "there" directs the viewer's attention to a specific location, anchoring the scene in a shared visual context between the characters and the audience. This spatial deixis not only highlights the setting but also builds tension by directing the viewer's focus to the object of pursuit—often symbolizing the enemy or a key plot point. Data 2.2. "Stay here." (00:25:48). The word "here" establishes a direct relationship between the speaker's location and the listener's required position. It also provides a safe space or a tactical advantage. The positioning of the speaker and the listener becomes critical, not just spatially but emotionally, as it implies both protection and control. The spatial deixis underscores themes of safety and authority, especially in moments of intense action.

Data 2.3 "Go back to your kingdom." (00:40:12). This example blends spatial and possessive deixis, marking territorial boundaries and emphasizing social hierarchy. The phrase implies not only spatial movement but also a return to a place of power or authority. It highlights the dynamic between control (territory) and subordination, which is central to the unfolding narrative of power struggles. Spatial deixis, therefore, is used to enhance the viewer's understanding of physical space, but it also operates metaphorically, suggesting the shifting allegiances and territorial conflicts between characters.

3. Temporal Deixis

Temporal deixis places events within the film's timeline, influencing the viewer's perception of urgency, tension, and narrative pacing. Data 3.1 "Tonight, we ride." (00:26:50). "Tonight" creates a sense of immediacy, signaling an event that is both imminent and critical. Temporal deixis here functions not only to organize the narrative timeline but also to raise the stakes—implying that the actions in the coming moments are decisive and irreversible. This example demonstrates how temporal deixis can amplify emotional intensity by creating a countdown to significant events. Data 3.2 "It's too late." (00:41:25). The phrase "too late" conveys a missed opportunity, introducing urgency and the irreversible nature of the situation. By marking the passing of a crucial moment, temporal deixis adds weight to the narrative, making the consequences of inaction feel more immediate and impactful. This phrase evokes a heightened sense of finality, marking a critical turning point in the story.

Data 3.3 "Now is your chance." (00:45:33). Temporal deixis here creates a sense of urgency, compelling the character to act in the present moment. "Now" serves as both a narrative tool to structure time and an emotional trigger, urging the viewer to align with the character's need for immediate action. The phrase heightens the dramatic tension, marking a critical juncture in the film where the character's decisions will have lasting consequences. The shifting use of temporal deixis underscores pivotal moments in the narrative, guiding the viewer through periods of tension, action, and consequence.

4. Discourse Deixis

Discourse deixis operates within the structure of the conversation, often pointing to the text or events surrounding the dialogue. Data 4.1 "This is not one of them." (00:00:29). The use of "this" refers to the film's opening narrative, signaling a metatextual

subversion of typical tropes. This is relevant to Rifiyani et al. (2023) that the deixis aims to delivering a message smoothly as a demonstrative pronoun. Discourse deixis in this case highlights the film's self-awareness, marking a departure from traditional genre conventions. The use of "this" signals the film's critique of its own narrative structure, reflecting a conscious attempt to play with audience expectations. Data 4.2 "That was the agreement." (00:27:40). The use of "that" refers to a prior agreement, reinforcing the importance of past events and shared understanding. Discourse deixis serves to tie the current dialogue to previous interactions, creating continuity within the story. This function of deixis encourages the audience to track earlier parts of the dialogue for full comprehension of the current situation. Deixis is a part of pragmatics that can change one words to different meaning in different context (Labale et al., 2024).

5. **Social Deixis**

Social deixis highlights the relationship and social hierarchy between interlocutors, directly influencing the power dynamics in the film. Data 5.1 "Yes, Your Majesty." (00:07:24). The use of the honorific "Your Majesty" exemplifies social deixis, marking a clear social hierarchy. The phrase establishes the power differential between the speaker and the addressee, signalling respect and deference. This form of social deixis is critical in reinforcing the film's themes of authority, submission, and social roles. Data 5.2 "You dare speak to me like that?" (00:33:11). The pronoun "you" here, coupled with the challenging tone, signals a breach of social norms and hierarchy. Social deixis in this context not only reflects the perceived violation of respect but also highlights the tension in character interactions. This form of deixis underscores moments of conflict and challenge, key to character development and narrative progression. It is also relevant to a finding from Vrika et al. (2022) that the deixis aims to make movement in better ways or to make something smoother in writing context.

Data 5.3 "My Queen." (00:09:45). The formal address "My Queen" is a direct marker of respect and hierarchy, situating the addressee as someone of elevated social status. Social deixis in this instance enhances the themes of loyalty, duty, and royal power, grounding the interpersonal dynamics within the broader context of political and social structures. There are two main findings of this research. First is dominant deixis. The primary type of deixis used by the main characters in *Damsel* is person deixis. This includes the frequent use of first- and second-person pronouns, which are pivotal in expressing character perspectives, relationships, and shifts in agency. The frequent use of *I* and *you* marks the development of Elodie's character from being a passive recipient to becoming an active participant in the plot. Second is impact of deixis on character and setting understanding. Deixis in *Damsel* functions pragmatically to anchor the viewer within the film's spatial, temporal, and relational context. This use of deixis not only shapes the audience's interpretation of the characters' roles and development but also enhances the overall thematic shifts within the narrative. The characters' interactions, powered by deixis, allow the audience to track emotional and social changes, enriching their engagement with the film's unfolding drama.

CONCLUSION

This research has examined the use of deixis in character dialogues in the film *Damsel* (2023), using Levinson's (1983) pragmatic framework. The analysis focused on identifying the types of deixis employed and exploring how these deictic expressions

shape the audience's understanding of characters and narrative context. The findings indicate that all five types of deixis—person, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social—are actively utilized in the film's dialogues. Among these, person deixis is the most dominant, particularly the use of first- and second-person pronouns like *I*, *you*, and *she*, which serve to emphasize character perspectives, emotional connections, and narrative agency. This type of deixis plays a key role in the film's portrayal of the characters' evolving relationships, particularly Elodie's transformation from a passive character to an active agent. Spatial and temporal deixis are used to establish the physical and chronological setting of the narrative, grounding the audience in the fantasy world while enhancing plot progression. Discourse deixis functions as a cohesive device, ensuring the fluidity and coherence of conversations, while social deixis reveals the power dynamics and formality between characters, contributing to the viewer's understanding of social hierarchies within the story.

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