

Analyzing Spatial Deixis in The Film *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes spatial deixis in the animated film *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) using a pragmatic approach. The study aims to answer the research question what types and function of spatial deixis are found in the dialogues of the film *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021). The theoretical framework applied in this study draws on Levinson's (1983) and Yule's (1996) proximal-distal classification for identifying types of spatial deixis, and Fillmore's (1997) gestural-symbolic distinction for analyzing their communicative functions. This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. The data consist of verbal utterances containing spatial deictic expressions produced by the characters throughout the film, collected through repeated observation of the film and verification using the official screenplay. The data were analyzed through a four-stage procedure consisting of code development, data classification, interpretation, and drawing conclusions. The findings reveal that 20 instances of spatial deixis were identified, consisting of 11 instances of proximal spatial deixis and 9 instances of distal spatial deixis. In terms of function, 12 instances were classified as symbolic use and 8 instances as gestural use. Both functions were found to occur across both types, confirming that type and function are independent dimensions of deictic analysis. The findings demonstrate that spatial deixis in the film operates through both the speaker's immediate physical relationship to the referent and the shared situational knowledge of the communicative context, with the multimodal character of animated film playing a decisive role in enabling gestural deictic reference.

Keywords: *Spatial Deixis, Proximal Deixis, Distal Deixis, Gestural Use, Pragmatics, Animated Film*

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INTRODUCTION

In daily activities, humans employ language as a primary tool for communication, specifically to convey messages from a sender to a recipient. Consequently, language enables human development within social life. This is supported by Asmarita & Haryudin (2019), who state that humans require language to express opinions, share experiences, and engage in debate. In its application, language exhibits various variations adapted to specific situations and conditions, while still adhering to the established rules of linguistic usage. Within the context of oral communication, humans utilize utterances that encompass diverse meanings.

In every linguistic interaction, meaning is not solely determined by grammatical or lexical structures; rather, it is significantly influenced by the context in which the utterance is delivered. This context encompasses various elements, such as the speaker, the interlocutor, time, place, and even the shared knowledge possessed by the communication participants (Kecskes, 2019). An understanding of these contextual nuances is essential for unraveling the actual meaning of a message, making it a rich and continuously evolving field of study within linguistics.

In the effort to understand how context influences meaning, the study of pragmatics emerges as a fundamental branch of linguistics. One of the central concepts in pragmatics is deixis, which refers to words or phrases whose meanings depend directly on the context of the utterance, particularly the speaker, time, and location (Yule, 1996). Deixis itself is categorized into several types, including person deixis, temporal deixis, and spatial deixis. According to Yule's (1996) classification, spatial deixis specifically focuses on the localization of entities and movement within space relative to the speaker's position or other points of reference. Terms such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "come," "go," "up," "down," "front," and "back" serve as common markers of spatial deixis (Hanks, 2015).

The selection of the animated film *Raya and the Last Dragon* as the object of this research carries significant urgency compared to live-action media or other written texts. First, as a film that engages in extensive world-building of the imaginary land of Kumandra, the use of spatial deixis serves as a vital linguistic instrument. Unlike live-action films set in the real world, the animated medium demands a higher degree of spatial orientation clarity; characters must be able to guide the audience's understanding of geographical movement between the five regions (Heart, Fang, Spine, Talon, and Tail) that do not physically exist. In this context, spatial deixis functions as a cognitive bridge that constructs this imaginary space into a reality for the audience.

Consequently, this film was specifically selected due to a narrative structure heavily characterized by adventure, necessitating dynamic movement between locations by the main characters. The intensity of these geographical shifts directly implies a high frequency of spatial deixis within character speech.

Although numerous studies have investigated deixis in various contexts, including everyday conversation, literary works, political speeches, and film discourse (Fillmore, 1997; Bieswanger, 2017), most previous studies have primarily focused on identifying deictic types and determining their referents. In many cases, spatial deixis has been analyzed merely as a linguistic marker indicating location or distance, while less attention has been given to how deictic expressions function within actual communicative situations, particularly in audiovisual narratives. Consequently, the functional interpretation of spatial deixis, especially the distinction between gestural and symbolic uses, remains relatively underexplored in studies of animated films.

The animated film *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) provides a particularly suitable context for investigating both the types and functions of spatial deixis. As an adventure narrative that involves continuous movement across different regions of Kumandra, the film contains numerous spatial references that help characters navigate locations and

orient themselves within the story world. Moreover, as an animated film, it combines verbal dialogue with visual elements such as gestures, gaze direction, body movement, and spatial positioning. These multimodal features enable spatial deictic expressions to function not only through linguistic context but also through visual cues that support interpretation.

Therefore, this study does not merely identify the occurrence of spatial deictic expressions in the film. It also examines how those expressions are used in context. Specifically, the study classifies spatial deixis into proximal and distal types based on the framework proposed by Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996), and analyzes their functions as gestural and symbolic according to Fillmore's distinction. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how spatial deixis contributes to the construction of narrative space and character interaction in *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021).

The significance of this research is divided into theoretical and practical contributions. In terms of theoretical contributions, this study is expected to contribute to the development of pragmatics, particularly in the study of spatial deixis. By analyzing spatial deixis in the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), this research is expected to enrich linguistic understanding of how spatial reference is constructed in spoken discourse within audiovisual media. Practically, this research is expected to be useful for English language teachers and learners. Furthermore, this research may assist students in developing their analytical skills in pragmatics, particularly in identifying and interpreting deictic expressions in authentic language use.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the primary data consist of verbal utterances, words, phrases, and sentences rather than numerical values (Abubakar, 2021). The descriptive dimension is applied to systematically document, classify, and explain the types and functions of spatial deixis as they occur in the film's dialogue without manipulating or altering the original data. As Creswell (2014) explains, qualitative research seeks a deep understanding of phenomena from the participants' perspectives and the contexts in which those phenomena occur. In this study, the phenomena of interest are the deictic expressions used by characters in the film, and the relevant context is the spatiotemporal relationship between the speaker, the addressee, and the referent at the moment of utterance.

The descriptive approach is further justified by Ridwan (2019, p. 21), who states that descriptive qualitative research aims to describe situations or events accurately, and by Nugroho (2019, p. 4), who emphasizes that such research focuses on actual occurrences at the time of the study. This study does not seek to test hypotheses or make statistical generalizations; rather, it seeks to present a systematic and interpretive account of how spatial deixis classified according to Levinson's (1983) proximal and distal framework and analyzed in terms of Fillmore's (1997) gestural and symbolic functions operates in the specific communicative context of an animated film.

The primary subject of this study is the dialogue found in the animated film *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios. This film was selected due to its narrative structure, which involves a journey across five distinct fictional regions, resulting in frequent and varied use of spatial references. As a secondary source, the official screenplay of the film is used to verify the accuracy of dialogue and ensure reliable transcription. The specific data analyzed are all utterances containing spatial deictic expressions, such as this, these, here, come, that, those, there, and go.

Data collection was carried out through observation, documentation, and note-taking techniques. First, the researcher viewed the film in full to understand the overall story and setting. Subsequently, the film was viewed repeatedly while cross-checking with the official screenplay to identify utterances containing spatial deixis. For each identified expression, the researcher recorded the timestamp, the full utterance, and the situational context—including the speaker's position, the location being referred to, and any accompanying gestures or visual cues. This process continued until no new instances of spatial deixis were found, indicating data saturation.

Data analysis in this study was conducted in four systematic stages following the framework proposed by Febriana (2019). The process began with coding, which involved developing a specific labeling system for each datum, such as PR for proximal deixis, DX for distal deixis (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996), GS for gestural function, and SB for symbolic function (Fillmore, 1997). Following this, the second stage entailed classification, where all the coded data were organized into a structured table based on their respective types and functions, alongside supporting contextual information. Next, in the third stage of interpretation, each expression was thoroughly analyzed to explain its meaning within the situational context, thereby determining whether it was proximal or distal and identifying whether its reference relied on physical gestures or shared knowledge. Finally, the analysis concluded with the synthesis of findings in the conclusion stage to describe the overall patterns of usage and explain how spatial deixis contributes to constructing meaning within the narrative.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

This section presents the analysis of spatial deixis identified in the dialogues of *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021). The analysis is organized based on the two major types of spatial deixis proposed by Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996), namely proximal and distal spatial deixis. For each datum, the researcher describes the situational context of the utterance and analyzes both the type of spatial deixis and its communicative function according to Fillmore's (1997) distinction between gestural and symbolic use. The integrated analysis enables a more comprehensive understanding of how deictic expressions are employed by the characters to establish spatial reference and facilitate communication within the narrative.

Table 1. List of Identified Spatial Deixis Expression

No	Time Stamp	Utterances Containing Spatial Deixis	Type	Function
1	00:01:46	"But then, the Druun came."	Proximal	Symbolic
2	00:02:10	"...concentrated all her magic into a gem."	Proximal	Symbolic
3	00:05:30	"How did this world get so broken?"	Proximal	Symbolic
4	00:08:30	"...they're on their way here as we speak."	Proximal	Symbolic
5	00:11:22	"...why'd you really bring us here?"	Proximal	Symbolic
6	00:14:43	"Come with me, dep la."	Proximal	Gestural
7	00:23:28	"And now I'm here at the very last one."	Proximal	Symbolic
8	00:27:40	"Because this place didn't just boobytrap itself."	Proximal	Symbolic
9	00:34:32	"...these bug booties are kinda cute."	Proximal	Gestural
10	00:37:30	"We're going back to Fang."	Proximal	Symbolic
11	00:52:24	"Look around."	Proximal	Gestural
12	01:37:30	"Up we go."	Proximal	Gestural
13	01:40:32	"We're right behind you."	Proximal	Symbolic
14	T00:02:10	"...blasted the Druun away."	Proximal	Symbolic
15	00:18:08	"We have to go!"	Distal	Gestural
16	00:25:46	"I didn't see ya there."	Distal	Symbolic
17	00:27:53	"Wow, those cats are really fast, huh?"	Distal	Symbolic
18	00:30:33	"Okay, we need to keep going."	Distal	Symbolic
19	00:38:09	"Get out of there!"	Distal	Symbolic
20	00:44:40	"Alright, there's Dang Hai's house."	Distal	Gestural

Proximal Spatial Deixis

Proximal spatial deixis refers to linguistic expressions that indicate a referent located near the speaker or within the speaker's immediate spatial field. According to Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996), proximal forms commonly include *this*, *these*, *here*, and *come*. In the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), proximal spatial deixis is frequently used by the characters when referring to nearby objects, locations, or movements directed toward the speaker.

The communicative function of *these* in this utterance is **gestural use**, following Fillmore's (1997) distinction. Fillmore defines gestural use as the mode in which the referent of a deictic expression is recoverable only through the hearer's direct observation of the speaker's physical context at the moment of utterance, most commonly a pointing gesture, a gaze direction, or a bodily orientation. In this scene, the stage direction explicitly states that Raya looks up and sees a hallway full of bugs immediately before Sisu produces her utterance. This establishes that Sisu's gaze is actively directed upward toward the insects on the corridor wall at the moment she says "*these bug booties*." The referent of *these* is therefore identifiable through Sisu's directed gaze toward the specific group of insects she

is observing, rather than through shared situational knowledge alone. This is significant because the corridor contains multiple visual elements, and without access to the information of where Sisu is looking, the hearer could not determine with certainty which specific objects are being referred to by *these*. As Fillmore (1997) states, gestural use requires monitoring the physical speech event in order to identify the referent, and that condition is fully satisfied here. The referent is anchored to Sisu's gaze direction toward the corridor wall, making this a clear instance of gestural use in which the visual act of looking constitutes the physical context that resolves the deictic reference. This distinguishes Data (58) from other proximal *this/these* utterances in the film where the referent is recoverable through shared situational knowledge alone, as in Data (40), where both interlocutors already share awareness of their surroundings without requiring any directed physical act.

Distal Spatial Deixis

Distal spatial deixis refers to linguistic expressions that indicate a referent located away from the speaker or outside the speaker's immediate spatial field. According to Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996), distal forms commonly include *that*, *those*, *there*, and *go*. In the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), distal spatial deixis is used by the characters to refer to objects, places, or movements perceived as distant from the deictic center.

The communicative function of *those* in this utterance is symbolic use, following Fillmore's (1997) distinction. Fillmore defines symbolic use as the mode in which the referent of a deictic expression is recoverable through the interlocutors' shared knowledge of the spatio-temporal context of the utterance, without requiring the hearer to observe any accompanying physical gesture or bodily orientation. In this scene, although the stage direction states that Sisu looks back before producing her utterance, this act of looking back is not a deliberate pointing gesture or a physical act of indication directed at a specific animal among the group. Rather, it is a general turning of the body that allows Sisu to perceive the entire pursuing group as a whole. The referent of *those*, namely all the Serlots in the pursuing group, is identifiable not through monitoring a specific physical gesture but through the shared situational awareness that both Sisu and Raya have of being chased. Both characters are fully aware of the pursuit, and that shared contextual knowledge is entirely sufficient to resolve the referent without any additional physical act of indication on Sisu's part. As Fillmore (1997) states, symbolic use requires only basic knowledge of the communicative situation for the reference to be understood, and that condition is fully met here because the identity of the referents is unambiguous to all parties given their shared awareness of the pursuit taking place behind them. This distinguishes Data (61) from gestural instances such as Data (104), where Sisu explicitly points at a specific statue among several to identify a particular referent, making the gesture an indispensable component of meaning resolution.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that there are 20 instances of spatial deixis identified in the dialogue of *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), consisting of 11 expressions classified as proximal and 9 as distal, while functionally 12 instances are used symbolically and 8 are used gesturally. These results show that proximal deixis appears more frequently, confirming Levinson's (1983) view that this category represents the more basic and unmarked form of spatial reference, as speakers naturally anchor their expressions to their immediate surroundings. This also aligns with Yule's (1996) explanation that proximity does not only refer to physical distance but also reflects psychological closeness, meaning locations and objects considered important or relevant to the speaker are linguistically marked as being near. Meanwhile, the presence of distal deixis demonstrates that distance is not merely a matter of measurement but also of perception; in some cases, referents may be physically close but treated as distant due to attention or narrative context. Regarding function, the dominance of symbolic use indicates that most references are understood through shared knowledge and situational awareness between characters, whereas gestural use occurs when a specific cue such as pointing or gaze is needed to clarify meaning. Importantly, both functions appear across both types, which supports Fillmore's (1997) theory that the classification of deixis by distance and its classification by function are independent dimensions.

When compared with previous studies, these findings show similarities and differences that strengthen their significance. This study shares the same pragmatic approach as the research conducted by Asmarita and Haryudin (2019) and Puteri (2022), which also used Levinson's framework to identify types of deixis; however, it goes further by adding the analysis of communicative functions based on Fillmore's theory, providing a more complete picture of how deixis works. Unlike studies that analyze written texts such as magazine articles or song lyrics, where deixis only operates symbolically due to the absence of visual support, this research shows that in multimodal media like animated films, deixis functions through both verbal and visual elements, making reference clearer and more dynamic. The pattern found here also confirms that the use of spatial deixis in fictional dialogue follows the same principles observed in natural conversation, proving that the theoretical frameworks applied are applicable across different types of discourse.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be noted. The analysis is restricted only to spatial deixis, so it does not cover other types such as person or temporal deixis, which limits the understanding of how different deictic expressions work together. Furthermore, the data are taken from only one animated film, so the results cannot be generalized to all films or other forms of media. Although the classification follows established theories, there remains a degree of subjectivity in determining whether an expression is used gesturally or symbolically, as it depends on the researcher's observation of visual cues. In addition, this study does not explore in depth how the Southeast Asian cultural background of the story may influence the way space is expressed, leaving room for further investigation.

In terms of implications, these findings confirm that the theories of deixis proposed by Levinson, Yule, and Fillmore are valid and useful for analyzing language use in audiovisual narratives. Practically, this study provides a concrete example that can be used in language teaching, as film scenes help learners understand that the meaning of words like *here* or *there* depends on context rather than literal definition alone. For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope by including other types of deixis, comparing different genres of films, or examining works in various languages to observe whether patterns of spatial reference change according to culture and language structure. By doing so, a broader and deeper understanding of how deixis functions as a bridge between language, space, and communication can be achieved.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed spatial deixis in the animated film *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) using a pragmatic approach based on the theoretical frameworks of Levinson (1983), Yule (1996), and Fillmore (1997). The analysis addressed two research questions concerning the types and functions of spatial deixis found in the film's dialogues.

Regarding the first research question, the analysis identified 20 instances of spatial deixis classified into two types. Proximal spatial deixis was found in 11 instances, realized through forms such as *here*, *this*, *these*, *came*, *come*, *around*, *up*, and *behind*. Distal spatial deixis was found in 9 instances, realized through forms such as *there*, *that*, *those*, *go*, *going*, *away*, *downstream*, *anywhere*, and *everywhere*. Proximal deixis was more frequent than distal deixis, reflecting the film's narrative tendency to anchor spatial reference to the protagonist's immediate position. The analysis also confirmed Yule's (1996) argument that the proximal-distal distinction operates on a psychological as well as a physical basis, as demonstrated in cases where speakers used distal forms to refer to physically nearby but attentionally unnoticed referents.

Regarding the second research question, both functions identified by Fillmore (1997) were present in the data. Symbolic use was found in 12 instances and gestural use in 8 instances. Symbolic use predominated because many utterances in the film occur between co-present interlocutors sharing full situational awareness, making shared contextual knowledge sufficient to resolve the deictic reference without gesture. Gestural use appeared in scenes where a physical act of indication, such as a pointing gesture or directed gaze, was the necessary condition for identifying the referent. Importantly, both functions were distributed across both proximal and distal types, confirming Fillmore's (1997) position that gestural and symbolic are independent modes of use rather than properties inherent to a deictic type.

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