

An Analysis of Deixis Through the Characters in The Film *Elemental: Forces of Nature*

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Abstract

This study explains the use of deixis in the animated film *Elemental: Forces of Nature* (2023), directed by Peter Sohn and produced by Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios. *Elemental* is an American romantic comedy-drama animated film released in 2023. Using Fillmore (1997) theory, which divides deixis into five types, namely person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. The purpose of this study is to systematically identify and classify deixis based on Fillmore's (1997) framework, analyse the frequency of occurrence to determine which type is most dominant, and analyse how these deixis expressions function pragmatically to support the film's theme, character interactions, and narrative cohesion. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, with data in the form of character dialogue in the film. The results of the study show that the researcher found 437 data from all the types of deixis. Person deixis is the most dominant type with 287 data. Then the second is place deixis with 63 data, followed by time deixis with 41 data, discourse deixis with 28 data, and finally social deixis with 18 data. In this film, deixis plays an important role in shaping interactions, driving the story's flow, and strengthening cultural representation. Deixis helps establish location and social identity through spatial deixis, controls the timing and urgency of events through temporal deixis, maintains coherence in conversation through discourse deixis, and reflects social relationships and politeness between characters through social deixis. Overall, the use of deixis in the film is crucial for creating meaningful communication, advancing the plot, and reinforcing cultural expressions. These findings contribute not only to pragmatic studies but also aid language learning, especially in improving pragmatic competence by understanding how language is used in popular media contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Deixis is a field of study in linguistics and one of the important aspects that shows the close relationship between language and context. According to Levinson (1983), deixis essentially relates to how language encodes or grammaticalizes the features of the context of speech or speech events, and this is related to how speech is interpreted based on an analysis of the context of that speech. In this sense, deixis refers to words or expressions whose meaning cannot be understood without considering the speech situation, such as who is speaking, where the conversation is taking place, and when the utterance occurs. In this sense, deixis is key to understanding how language functions in everyday life. The basic concept of deixis was first discussed in depth by Fillmore (1997, p. 61) in 'Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis.' He classified deixis into five main categories: person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. These categories were further developed by pragmatics experts such as (Levinson, 1983) and (Yule, 1996) who emphasised that deixis reflects a close relationship between linguistic form and situational context. In other words, deixis enables the speaker to put their utterances accurately into the context of place, time, and social relationships.

Research on deixis has been conducted in various contexts, including everyday conversations, speech, songs, and even movies. Movies are an interesting source of data because they reflect natural conversations full of deixis, even though the dialogue is written in a script. The film used in this analysis is *Elemental: Forces of Nature* (2023), an animated film produced by Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios in 2023. Directed by Peter Sohn and produced by Denise Ream, the film was written by John Hoberg, Kat Likkell, Brenda Hsueh, and Sohn. The film tells the story of a city called 'Element City,' which is inhabited by various elements, including fire, water, earth, and air. The story begins when Bernie and Cinder, a fire element couple, migrate from the fire village to Element City to live together and open a general store. The couple is blessed with a daughter named Ember Lumen. Bernie always tells Ember that once she is ready, he will give her the general store. Ember works hard to one day make her father proud and take over the store. One day during the Red Dot Sale, many customers came to the store. The store was very crowded, and Ember tried to control her emotions and chose to calm herself in the basement, but instead of calming down, Ember exploded and melted the pipes under the store. This incident led Ember to meet a water inspector named Wade Ripple, who was inspecting the pipes in the city and was drawn to the store run by Ember's father. As a

result of this accident, Ember and Wade fell in love and showed the world that two elements with different characters could fall in love and strive to find common ground to live together. Despite their significant differences, they were able to unite and complement each other. In the end, the supermarket owned by Ember's father was officially handed over to Ember, as she had learned to manage or control her emotions. Ember's father also officially retired from the supermarket.

Some previous studies show that there have been many who discuss deixis analysis in film scripts with various focuses. (Oktazsya Marjelina Lorenza et al., 2024) analysed the film *Beauty and The Beast* using Cruse's theory and found that personal deixis, social deixis, and spatial deixis appeared most dominantly in the dialogue. Similar research was conducted by (Rusmana & Syahrizal, 2024) on *Little Woman* movie, which showed that personal deixis dominated almost all data with a percentage of 78%. (Budiarta & Gaho, 2021) in their research on *Zootopia* movie also found that person deixis was used more frequently than other types of deixis. In addition, Mawadah (2022) analysed the film *Pride and Prejudice* and identified three main types, namely personal deixis, spatial deixis, and temporal deixis, where personal deixis remained the most dominant. In contrast to these studies, (Intan, 2021) emphasised her study on social deixis in the film *Finding Dory* and found that this deixis serves to show differences in social status, maintain politeness, and ensure effective communication between characters. Based on these various studies, it can be seen that person deixis generally appears most frequently in film conversations, while social deixis also plays an important role in describing social relationships and the context of communication in the storyline.

There has been a lot of research on deixis in films, but there is no study that specifically examines the animated film *Elemental* (2023). This is despite the fact that the film raises issues of culture, social differences, and interactions between identities through metaphors of natural elements. This research gap opens up opportunities to analyse more deeply how deixis is used in film dialogue as a reflection of cross-cultural communication. Thus, this research not only contributes to pragmatic studies but also provides insights into cultural representation in popular media. The analysis of deixis in *Elemental* can also provide practical benefits in English language learning. Deixis is an important element in pragmatic competence; language learners often understand vocabulary or grammar formally but have difficulty using deixis appropriately in real contexts. Through films, learners can see how deixis is used naturally in interactions, thereby improving their

communicative skills. The research questions form the basis of this study are, what types of deixis appear in the dialogue of the film *Elemental* (2023)? and what is the function of deixis in shaping interactions between characters?. Meanwhile, the purpose of this study is to systematically identify and classify deixis based on Fillmore's (1997) framework, analyze the frequency of occurrence to determine which type is most dominant, and analyze how these deixis expressions function pragmatically to support the film's theme, character interactions, and narrative cohesion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deixis is a field of study in pragmatics that deals with how language refers to elements outside of speech, such as people, places, times, and situational contexts. According to Fillmore (1997), deixis comes from the Greek word 'deiktikos', which means 'to refer', and consists of five main types, namely person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. Based on Levinson (1983), deixis is a direct relation between language and context that determines the meaning of utterances based on who is speaking, to whom, when, and where the conversation takes place. Thus, understanding deixis is very important for accurately interpreting the meaning in conversations. Several previous studies have examined deixis in various films, such as Budiarta & Gaho (2021) in the film *Zootopia* and Rusmana & Syahrizal (2024) in the film *Little Woman*, which show that person deixis is most dominant because it marks the relationship between the speaker, listener, and referent in dialogue. Other studies conducted by Mawadah (2022) on the story *Pride and Prejudice* and Oktazsya Marjelina Lorenza et al., (2024) on the film *Beauty and the Beast* show the importance of place and time deixis in forming the spatial and temporal setting that reinforces the meaning of the story. On the other hand, Intan (2021) emphasises the role of social deixis in *Finding Dory* as a marker of social status, politeness, and relationships between characters. Although these studies successfully show the patterns of each type of deixis, most are still descriptive and have not explored their pragmatic functions and cultural dimensions more deeply. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analysing the five types of deixis in the film *Elemental: Forces of Nature* (2023) pragmatically and culturally, in order to reveal how deixis functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as a means of forming social relationships, driving the plot, and representing the cultural values of each character.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method to study deixis in the animated movie *Elemental: Forces of Nature* (2023). A qualitative approach is suitable because the data consists of words, expressions, and spoken phrases rather than numbers. According to Ugwu, Chinyere, N; Eze Val (2023), qualitative research involves data in the form of words instead of numerical. This method helps understand how characters use deixis to express meaning, create references, and maintain coherence in the film's dialogue. The researcher herself is the main tool for collecting, identifying, classifying, and analyzing the data. The research focuses on the film *Elemental: Forces of Nature* (2023) (Sohn, 2023), directed by Peter Sohn and produced by Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios. The data comes from verbal parts specifically, the dialogues spoken by the characters. These dialogues were gathered by watching the film on Disney+, highlighting from the script that I took from <https://deadline.com> (Studio, 2023), and then checking and adjusting the subtitles to make sure they were correct. The data collection process had three steps: first, watching the film multiple times to understand the characters and their dialogue, second, transcribing and highlighting dialogues that contain deixis, and third, selecting relevant parts that show different types of deixis. Only dialogues with deixis expressions were used as data. For data analysis, this study uses Fillmore (1997) theory, which divides deixis into five types: person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. The analysis includes: identifying deixis in the dialogues, classifying them into Fillmore's types of deixis, counting how often each type appears to find which one is most common, and analyse how these expressions function in the way the characters interact and how they are integrated into the film's storyline. The results will be shown in tables that summarize the types and frequency of deixis used by different characters and scenes. These findings will then be explained through descriptive analysis, giving clear examples of how deixis helps in the characters' interactions, reflects cultural aspects, and supports the film's overall story development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this article the researcher used descriptive qualitative methods in collecting the data. The researcher collected the data was by analyzing the script from *Elemental: Forces of Nature* (2023). In this analysis, the researcher will analyze the words included in the deixis and the researcher will make a table to show the results by the frequency. The

research will include dialog data and the type of deixis in data. The data taken is from the movie *Elemental: Forces of Nature* (2023) and the analysis will be explained further in below:

The Table of Type Deixis and The Frequency:

No.	Type of Deixis	Frequency
1	Person Deixis	287
2	Place Deixis	63
3	Time Deixis	41
4	Discourse Deixis	28
5	Social Deixis	18
Total		437

From the table above, the researcher found a total of 437 data from all types of deixis. The most dominant type was person deixis with 287 data, followed by place deixis with 63 data, time deixis with 41 data, discourse deixis with 28 data, and finally social deixis with 18 data.

Person Deixis

The researcher found a total of 287 data contained in person deixis, but the researcher will explain in more detail by taking three examples from person deixis. The following is a more detailed explanation along with the function of deixis itself.

Deixis: “Your” (second person deixis)

Immigration officers here are checking new arrivals at the entry point. The officers are asking passengers for their identification for official record-keeping purposes and to ensure that their data matches their travel documents.

Wood Immigration Official: “**Your** names?”

Bernie: “Útrí dàr ì Bùrdì”

Cinder: “Fâsh ì Sîddèr”

Wood Immigration Official: “Great! And how do we spell that?” How ‘bout we just go with Bernie and Cinder!”

The word “your” in the dialogue above indicate to person deixis which is second person. The word ‘your’ serves to indicate a direct connection between the speaker and the listener. By using this word, the speaker emphasises that the information (identity) requested is personal and only applies to the listener.

Deixis: “He” (third person deixis)

Bernie is telling someone else about someone's plan. He imitates the third person enthusiastically as he draws up his plan.

Bernie: “Ha ha! **He** gesture excitedly, laying out his plan”

The word 'he' in the dialogue above refers to a person deixis which is third person. The word 'he' in the dialogue serves to identify a person who is not directly present in the conversation, but rather as the subject of the story. Thus, this deixis maintains referential coherence so that the listener understands who is being discussed.

Deixis: "I'm" (first person deixis)

Bernie falls out of frame into the basement and gets into a situation that worries others.

Bernie: "Ah!! **I'm** ok!"

The word 'I'm' in the dialogue above refers to a person deixis which is first person. This deixis serves to show the speaker's direct personal involvement. The word 'I'm' refers to the speaker himself, with the function of conveying factual information to the listener that he is fine.

Place Deixis

The researcher found a total of 63 data contained in person deixis, but the researcher will explain in more detail by taking three examples from place deixis. The following is a more detailed explanation along with the function of deixis itself.

Deixis: "Element City"

The newcomers have just arrived in their destination city. Immigration officers officially welcome them by saying, "Welcome to Element City."

Wood Immigration Official: "Welcome to **Element City!**"

The word 'Element City' in the dialogue above refers to a place deixis. The word 'Element City' serves to emphasize the location of the interaction, namely, the new city that is the main setting where newcomers are entering.

Deixis: "Here"

Bernie is showing his pride in the shop he owns. Bernie emphasises that everything around him, the food, the culture, and the products, are all authentic.

Bernie: "Everything **here** authentic"

The word 'here' in the dialogue above refers to a place deixis. The word 'here' describes the closeness of the speaker to the location being referred to. The speaker associates himself with the place, emphasising his identity and conveying to the listener that authenticity can only be found in that location.

Deixis: "This part of town"

Clod is persuading someone to go with him to the festival.

Clod: “Come on! Go to the festival with me! You never leave **this part of town**”

The word ‘this part of town’ in the dialogue above refers to a place deixis. The phrase ‘this part of town’ emphasises that the person he is talking to rarely or never leaves the area where they live. Its function here is to add social pressure to the conversation. Clod's invitation becomes more persuasive because it highlights the person's habit of limiting themselves to one location.

Time Deixis

The researcher found a total of 41 data contained in time deixis, but the researcher will explain in more detail by taking three examples from time deixis. The following is a more detailed explanation along with the function of deixis itself.

Deixis: “Now”

Bernie is talking to his counterperson after a competition or challenge has ended.

Bernie: “**Now** that you have beaten my time there is only one thing you haven’t done. tomorrow I sleep in. And I want you to run shop for Red Dot sale.”

The word ‘now’ indicates time deixis because it is used to mark the moment of the conversation. It provides information about what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen next. The function of deixis is to focus on the current situation as the basis for determining the next action.

Deixis: “tomorrow”

Bernie explains his plans for the next day. He wants to rest, so he gives Ember the responsibility of looking after the shop during the Red Dot Sale.

Bernie: “**Now** that you have beaten my time there is only one thing you haven’t done. tomorrow I sleep in. And I want you to run shop for Red Dot sale.”

The word ‘now’ in the dialogue above refers to a time deixis. The word ‘tomorrow’ here serves to shift the focus of the interaction to the future. By mentioning a specific time, Bernie assigns roles and responsibilities to his daughter Ember.

Deixis: “tomorrow”

Ember reminds Wade that the deadline given by Gale is the next day. They must quickly complete the task given by Gale.

Ember: “Wade, Gale’s deadline is **tomorrow**. We need more sandbags”

The word 'tomorrow' used in the dialogue is a time deixis. This is because the word indicates a deadline given by someone. It serves to coordinate actions by linking the conversation to a very important and imminent point in time.

Discourse Deixis

The researcher found a total of 28 data contained in discourse deixis, but the researcher will explain in more detail by taking three examples from discourse deixis. The following is a more detailed explanation along with the function of deixis itself.

Deixis: "it"

Cinder is asserting something in an emotional debate or conversation.

Cinder: "She's not in love with him."
Soap Opera Woman: "...I;m not in love with you!"
Cinder: "Ha! Knew **it!**"

The word 'it' in the dialogue above refers to a discourse deixis. The word 'it' in the dialogue refers to the sentence that was just mentioned. In this way, Cinder emphasises the truth of her statement without having to repeat the details.

Deixis: "it"

Ember is showing that Wade likes something that has been mentioned before, namely food from the fire land.

Ember: "You see? He likes **it.**"

The word 'it' in the dialogue above refers to a discourse deixis. The word 'it' in the dialogue helps to maintain the conversation by linking the object of discussion that has appeared previously. The function of this deixis is to clarify the attitude or reaction of another character (he) towards something, while ensuring that the interlocutor understands the connection between the statement and the topic being discussed.

Deixis: "this"

Wade is responding to a plan, idea, or action that is being taken at that moment.

Wade: "I don't think **this** is going to work."

The word 'this' in the dialogue above refers to a discourse deixis. The word 'this' in the dialogue is used to refer to the discourse or event that is the common focus. The function of this deixis is to express Wade's opinion about the success of the plan. In doing so, this deixis directs the interlocutor to see the same problem at the moment of interaction.

Social Deixis

The researcher found a total of 18 data contained in social deixis, but the researcher will explain in more detail by taking three examples from social deixis. The following is a more detailed explanation along with the function of deixis itself.

Deixis: “sir”

Ember is interacting with Wade in a situation where Ember must immediately remove Wade from the shop because he is a water elemental, and water elementals are forbidden from entering the realm of fire.

Ember: “Alright, **sir**. You gotta go

The word ‘sir’ in the dialogue above refers to a social deixis. The use of the word ‘sir’ in the dialogue serves to mark the social relationship between the speaker and the listener. Although Ember is giving an order, the word ‘sir’ maintains politeness and balances the power in the conversation.

Deixis: “Ashfa”

Ember calls or mentions Ashfa's name to the customer in her shop.

Ember: “**Ashfa**, customer”

The word ‘Ashfa’ in the dialogue above refers to a social deixis. The word ‘Ashfa’ here serves to clarify the identity of the person being addressed while also indicating closeness or recognition as a customer. The deixis is not just a customer but someone who is already known.

Deixis: “ma’am”

Bernie is responding to a woman in a formal situation.

Bernie: “Yes, **ma’am**”

The word ‘Ma’am’ in the dialogue above refers to a social deixis. The word ‘Ma’am’ in the dialogue indicates respect and recognition of the social status of the interlocutor. This deixis serves to reinforce politeness in responding to someone, so that the interaction feels polite and respectful of the interlocutor.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that deixis plays an important role in shaping interactions between characters in the film *Elemental*. Personal deixis was found to be the most dominant type of deixis, reflecting how characters constantly position themselves, their interlocutors, and other people in the storyline. For example, Bernie's use of ‘I’ affirms his direct involvement in the situation, while the immigration officer's use of ‘you’

highlights his role in questioning passengers. This dominance is consistent with previous studies (Budiarta & Gaho, 2021; Rusmana & Syahrizal, 2024), which also revealed that personal deixis is most frequently used in film dialogue because it directly encodes the roles of the speaker, listener, and reference. This type of deixis reveals that person deixis is most frequently used in film dialogue because it directly encodes the roles of the speaker, listener, and referent. In addition to person deixis, place deixis also contributes significantly to establishing the setting of a film's narrative. Utterances such as 'here,' 'this part of town,' and 'Element City' allow characters to associate their identities and emotions with specific locations. This shows that place deixis does more than simply indicate location; it also reinforces the cultural and social themes embedded in the film.

Time deixis also emerges as an important type of deixis in structuring the plot and urgency of actions. Words such as 'now' and 'tomorrow' create a framework that connects past, present, and future actions. In Bernie's dialogue, 'now' marks a point of transition. Meanwhile, 'tomorrow' sets out plans and responsibilities for Ember. Similarly, Ember's warning that Gale's deadline is tomorrow highlights the urgency and encourages immediate action. These examples show how time deixis functions not only to place events temporally, but also to drive the plot and set the tempo of interactions between characters. Finally, there is discourse deixis and social deixis, which show how characters manage coherence and politeness in communication. Discourse deixis, such as 'it' and 'this', helps maintain coherence or continuity by referring back to ideas that have already been mentioned or situations that are currently unfolding. Meanwhile, social deixis, such as 'sir', 'ma'am', and names such as 'Ashfa', reflect the characters' awareness of social relationships and politeness in speech. These forms of deixis can help negotiate power dynamics, maintain respect, and personalise interactions.

This study has similarities with previous studies such as deixis analysis in the films *Beauty and the Beast* (Lorenza et al., 2024), *Zootopia* (Budiarto & Gaho, 2021), *Little Women* (Rusman & Syahrizal, 2024), and *Pride and Prejudice* (Mawadah, 2022), where all focus on identifying types of deixis (such as person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis) in film dialogue and its function in the narrative context, using pragmatics theories such as Yule, Levinson, Fillmore or Cruse to analyse deixis expressions in audiovisual media (films). The strength of this research lies in the use of Fillmore's (1997) more comprehensive theory with five categories of deixis, which allows for a more in-depth pragmatic analysis of film themes, character interactions, and narrative cohesion, as well

as its implementation in the new and less analysed film *Elemental* (2023), thus providing new insights into cultural representation, social identity, and cross-element communication in a modern context. However, this study also has shortcomings in that it emphasises pragmatic and cultural aspects rather than purely linguistic analysis, so it may be less specific in describing deixis variations in detail. There is also a lack of comparison of scene distribution or a specific focus on one type of deixis, as seen in the research by Lorenza et al., as well as an analysis that may be less in-depth in terms of the social aspects of deixis compared to Intan (2021). Overall, deixis in this film not only connects language to context but also plays an important pragmatic role in forming relationships, driving the plot, and reinforcing cultural representation. Deixis here also functions as a substitute word in a conversation. This analysis helps readers understand the meaning and use of deixis in film dialogue.

CONCLUSION(S)

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that this study shows five types of deixis according to Fillmore (1997), namely person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis that appear in the dialogue of the film *Elemental* (2023). From the five types, person deixis is the most dominant with the highest amount of data, because the film's dialogue emphasises interactions between characters that always involve the speaker, the speaker's counterpart, and other referents. Place deixis helps to establish the setting of the story as well as strengthen the cultural and social identity of the characters, while time deixis serves to regulate the flow of the story and the urgency of the action. Discourse deixis maintains the coherence of the conversation by connecting ideas that are being or have been mentioned, while social deixis plays a role in maintaining politeness, marking social status, and personalising interactions. Thus, the use of deixis in this film not only functions as a linguistic marker but also has a pragmatic function in shaping the relationships between characters, driving the plot, and strengthening the cultural representation presented in the film. This analysis is expected to contribute to pragmatic studies, particularly regarding deixis, while also providing practical benefits for English learners in understanding how deixis is used in real-life communication contexts.

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