

A Semantic Analysis of Person, Place, Time and Social Deixis in the English Version of Indonesian Folktale “ The Legend of Malin Kundang”

*Devi Triana¹, Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik², Yena Jorena Sembiring³

^{1,2,3}University of HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar, Indonesia

*Corresponding author email: devitrianaagara2005@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the types and functions of deixis in the English version of the Indonesian folktale, The Legend of Malin Kundang. Deixis refers to words or phrases whose meaning depends on the situational context, such as person, place, and time. While deixis has been extensively studied across various discourse types, research on Indonesian folktales remains limited. This study aims to identify the types of deixis found in The Legend of Malin Kundang and to explain how each type functions in constructing the story and conveying moral values. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, with data collected from the English version of the folktale published by TIMES Indonesia in 2020. The analysis was conducted using the deixis theory of Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996), and the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model for data analysis. The findings revealed four types of deixis: person deixis (74 occurrences, 55.22%), time deixis (22 occurrences, 16.42%), place deixis (19 occurrences, 14.18%), and social deixis (19 occurrences, 14.18%). Person deixis was the most dominant due to abundant dialogues between Malin and his mother. In terms of functions, person deixis builds characters through pronoun selection; place deixis constructs setting through spatial contrast; time deixis structures plot through temporal irony; and social deixis conveys the moral message of filial disobedience, marked by Malin's shift from respectful "Mother" to complete denial "You are not my mother." In conclusion, deixis in Malin Kundang is not merely a grammatical feature but a strategic narrative device that builds story elements and encodes moral values

Keywords: deixis; the legend of malin kundang; pragmatics; semantic analysis

INTRODUCTION

Introduction Language is a system of sounds used by humans to express ideas, feelings, and thoughts. In semantic studies, language is understood not merely as a communication tool but as a system of signs carrying meaning. Chaer (2013) defines semantics as the branch of linguistics studying meaning, encompassing lexical and grammatical meaning. Palmer (1981) states that semantics includes understanding how meaning is constructed and interpreted in various contexts of language use. Frawley (2013) adds that semantics deals not only with word meaning but also with how meaning is organized within broader linguistic structures. In daily

communication, language appears in spoken and written forms. As a sign system, language enables humans to convey factual information and express inner experiences through various works, including folktales.

One intriguing aspect of semantic study is deixis. Originating from the Greek *deiktikos* meaning "pointing" or "indicating," deixis refers to words or phrases whose meaning depends entirely on situational context: who is speaking, where conversation takes place, and when it occurs (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Levinson (1983) asserts that deixis is a universal language phenomenon demonstrating how language connects to its context of use. Words such as "here," "there," "now," and "later" are examples of deixis. From a semantic perspective, deixis shows that word meaning is not always fixed and dictionary-bound but changes depending on user, place, and time. Levinson (1983) categorizes deixis into person, place, time, social, and discourse types. Yule (1996) explains similar concepts in simpler language. Both scholars remain primary references in deixis studies. Recent research by Rahmatika & Wardana (2024) affirms that deixis, though long recognized as a key feature connecting language to context, still requires continuous examination across contemporary discourse types, as demonstrated in their analysis of an English teacher's utterances in Banda Aceh which found 265 deictic words including 184 person deixis, 39 temporal deixis, 27 spatial deixis, 11 discourse deixis, and 4 social deixis.

Deixis is very close to daily life. When a mother tells a child, "Put this here," the words "this" and "here" refer to objects and places known only to them. When a teacher says, "Now open your books," "now" means that very moment. When someone says, "I will meet you there tomorrow," the meaning of "there" and "tomorrow" becomes clear only if the context is known. Cruse (2000) explains that deixis is a phenomenon where utterance interpretation depends on understanding the speech situation, including participant identity, spatial location, and time of utterance.

Research on deixis has been extensively conducted across various discourse types. Simatupang, Fadhilah, and Barokah (2021) examined deixis in the novel *Fangirl* and found 30 data of five deixis types with person deixis appearing 6 times (20%), place deixis 4 times (13.3%), time deixis 7 times (23.3%), discourse deixis 7 times (23.3%), and social deixis 6 times (20%). Inayah, Achmad, Irnanda, & At'tahirah (2023) examined deixis in Ervan Ceh Kul's song lyrics and found person deixis dominant, contributing to the understanding of how deixis operates in musical discourse. Sari & El Fauziah (2023) analyzed person and spatial deixis in Adele's song lyrics, revealing that person deixis functions to clarify participant roles, with personal deixis most commonly found in 299 phrases including the words "I, you, me". Alfathmy & Nurjanah (2024), in a study of *Snow White and The Huntsman* screenplay, found that out of 170 deixis data, person deixis dominated with 90 occurrences (52.94%), while time deixis had the lowest frequency with 9 occurrences (5.30%). Octovianus (2023) analyzed the 2022 UK leadership debate and identified 991 deixis expressions, with person deixis most dominant and social deixis as an important marker of speaker-listener relationships; specifically, Sunak used deixis 574 times (413 person deixis) while Truss used 417 times (305 person deixis).

Despite numerous studies on deixis, few have focused on Indonesian folktales as research objects. Indonesian folktales are remarkably rich in deixis. Transmitted orally across generations, these tales contain abundant natural dialogue and narration. However, research on deixis in Indonesian folktales remains limited.

One of the most well-known Indonesian folktales is *Malin Kundang*, originating from West Sumatra. The story tells of a disobedient son cursed into stone by his mother. The story is rich in dialogue and narration: conversations between Malin and his mother, inner monologues, and narrative descriptions. All contain deixis. Person deixis appears in conversations. Place deixis distinguishes between hometown and wandering land. Time deixis

shows Malin's life journey from childhood to success and return. Most interestingly, social deixis shifts dramatically when Malin calls his mother an "old woman," reflecting disobedience. From a semantic perspective, this shift demonstrates how word choice can reflect changes in social meaning and relationships between characters.

The story of Malin Kundang has been translated into various languages, including English. *TIMES Indonesia* published an English version in 2020. This version is relatively short, approximately 600 words, yet retains the story's plot and moral message. Most importantly, this version is rich in dialogue, enabling in-depth deixis analysis. Lyons (1977) explains that utterance meaning is determined not only by words but also by the speech situation: who is speaking, to whom, where, and when. This text length is highly suitable for research—not overly long, easy to analyze, yet rich in data.

No study has specifically analyzed deixis in the Malin Kundang folktale. Studies on deixis in other Indonesian folktales also remain limited. This gap is what the present research aims to fill.

From the background outlined above, this study aims to analyze the use of person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, and social deixis in the English version of the Malin Kundang folktale. The research questions are formulated as follows: (1) What types of deixis are found in the English version of the Malin Kundang folktale? (2) How do these deixis types function in constructing the story and conveying moral values?

This study employs the deixis theory of Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996) as the primary analytical framework. These theories are well-established and serve as standard references in deixis studies worldwide. For data analysis, this research adopts the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This model is suitable for text-based qualitative research such as this.

METHOD

This study applied a descriptive qualitative method (Creswell, 2014). The data source was the English version of *The Legend of Malin Kundang* published by *TIMES Indonesia* in 2020. The data collection was technically applied through the following steps: copying the text from the *TIMES Indonesia* website; reading the text repeatedly to understand the entire story; identifying and marking words or phrases that belong to deixis based on the theories of Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996); classifying the data into four types of deixis (person, place, time, and social); and organizing the classified data into identification tables per sentence.

The collected data were analyzed by implementing the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model of analysis, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting and summarizing relevant deixis data, then presenting it in the form of identification tables per sentence and frequency tables. Data display was carried out through three table formats: a distribution table per sentence, a classification table per deixis type, and a final percentage table. Conclusion drawing was conducted by analyzing the meaning and function of each deixis based on the story's context, discovering patterns of deixis use (including shifts in social deixis as moral markers), and connecting the findings to the moral value of disobedience to parents. The theoretical framework of this study uses the deixis theory of Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996) as the main analytical tool, and the Miles and Huberman (1994) model as the technical framework for data analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

In this section, researcher presents the findings of the study and the analysis conducted, with emphasis on answering the first research problem : (1) what types of deixis are found in the English version of The Legend of Malin Kundang,

The analysis identified four types of deixis in the English version of The Legend of Malin Kundang: person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, and social deixis. The distribution of each type is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Deixis Types

Types of Deixis	Total	Percentage
Person Deixis	74	55.22%
Time Deixis	22	16.42%
Place Deixis	19	14.18%
Social Deixis	19	14.18%
TOTAL	134	100%

As shown in Table 1, person deixis constitutes the majority with 74 occurrences (55.22%), indicating that the narrative heavily depends on character interaction through dialogue. Time deixis follows with 22 occurrences (16.42%), while place deixis and social deixis each appear 19 times (14.18%). The relatively balanced distribution among the three latter types suggests their complementary roles in constructing the story's temporal, spatial, and social dimensions.

Person Deixis

Person deixis appears 74 times, predominantly realized through first-person pronouns (I, me, my), second-person pronouns (you, your), and third-person pronouns (she, he, her, his, they, their). The high frequency of person deixis is attributed to the abundant dialogues between Malin and his mother, as well as the narrative descriptions that refer to characters through pronominal forms.

Time Deixis

Time deixis appears 22 times, encoded through temporal markers such as once upon a time, one day, days, months, years, soon, now, later, immediately, and today. These markers serve to sequence the plot chronologically and establish temporal relationships between events.

Place Deixis

Place deixis appears 19 times, realized through location phrases including seaside village, Padang, West Sumatra, big cities, home, here, sand, and shore. These markers establish spatial contrast between the protagonist's origin and his destination, a opposition that becomes central to the story's conflict.

Social Deixis

Social deixis appears 19 times, expressed through kinship terms (mother, son, daughter, child), address terms (Mande, Mother, God), and social status markers (widow, noble, noblewoman). The most noteworthy finding is the systematic shift in Malin's address forms toward his mother, which encodes the story's moral trajectory.

DISCUSSION

This section elaborates in detail the roles of the four types of deixis in constructing the story and conveying its moral values, thus answering the second research problem: (2) How do these deixis types function in constructing the story and conveying moral values?

The analysis reveals that deixis functions not merely as a grammatical necessity but as a strategic narrative device that simultaneously builds story elements and encodes moral values.

Person Deixis as a Character-Building Device

Person deixis functions to construct character identities and interpersonal relationships through pronoun selection. The following excerpt from the opening of the complication stage illustrates this function ;

Sentence 7 (Malin pleading to his mother):

*"I want to take this opportunity to change **our** fate, please let **me** go."*

The first-person singular pronoun I positions Malin as the primary agent of action, while the first-person plural possessive our superficially includes his mother. However, the subsequent clause let me go reveals that the proposed change excludes her participation. This pronominal choice encodes Malin's self-centered ambition, a trait that drives the narrative forward. In contrast, Mande's response in Sentence 8 employs person deixis differently:

Sentence 8 (Mande responding to Malin):

*"I will be waiting for **you** here."*

The first-person singular I expresses commitment, while the second-person you directly addresses Malin, creating an emotional bond through pronominal alignment. The spatial deixis here reinforces her stationary devotion. Together, these forms construct Mande as a loyal, waiting mother figure. A critical shift occurs in the resolution stage, where Malin's person deixis undergoes a dramatic transformation:

Sentence 24 (Malin rejecting his mother):

*"I am not **your** son!"*

The first-person singular I now asserts identity through negation, while the second-person possessive your distances himself from the relationship. The absence of the expected kinship term mother is significant; he replaces it with the pronoun your, which refers to her without acknowledging the bond.

Sentence 26 (Malin's final denial):

"*You are not my mother.*"

In this part, the second-person pronoun *You* becomes the grammatical subject, granting Malin the authority to define the relationship. The first-person possessive *my* is now used to reject, not to claim. This pronominal reversal from *my son* (used by Mande) to *not my mother* (used by Malin) encodes the complete dissolution of the filial bond.

Place Deixis as a Setting-Building Device

Place deixis functions to establish spatial contrast between two opposing worlds: the humble village and the prosperous cities. This opposition is introduced early in the narrative:

Sentence 1 (Exposition):

"*...in a seaside village in Padang, West Sumatra...*"

The specificity of place deixis here naming the village, city, and province grounds the story in a particular geographic and cultural context. This concreteness contrasts with the vague destination that follows.

Sentence 5 (Malin's stated goal):

"*...wander to the big cities...*"

The plural *big cities* is deliberately unspecific, reflecting Malin's vague aspiration for wealth and status. The opposition between the named seaside village and the unnamed big cities encodes the tension between known origins and unknown futures. This spatial opposition becomes morally charged in the conflict scene:

Sentence 24 (Malin pushing his mother):

"*...pushed his mother to fall to the sand*"

The place deixis *sand* carries symbolic weight. It is neither the village (his origin) nor the city (his achievement), but the liminal space between land and sea, the point of departure. By pushing her onto the sand, Malin symbolically returns her to the place he left behind, encoding his rejection of his origins through spatial deixis.

Time Deixis as a Plot-Constructing Device

Time deixis functions to structure the narrative chronology and create temporal irony. The story opens with a conventional fairy-tale marker:

Sentence 1: *Once upon a time...*

This formulaic opener signals the genre as folktale, preparing the reader for a moral lesson rather than historical reportage. Temporal irony emerges through the contrast between expected and actual duration:

Sentence 8 (Mande's request):

"*Please be back soon.*"

The time deixis soon encodes an expectation of short duration. However, the narrative subsequently subverts this expectation:

Sentences 12 and 15 (Narrative passage):

"*Many years full of waiting passed...*" and "*Months later...*"

The shift from soon to many years and months later creates a temporal gap that underscores the theme of broken promises. The prolonged waiting period amplifies Mande's suffering and, consequently, the gravity of Malin's transgression. The story concludes with a time deixis that bridges past and present:

Sentence 34: "*...until today.*"

This deictic marker connects the legendary past to the reader's present, asserting the continued relevance of the moral lesson. The stone remains, and the warning endures.

Social Deixis as a Moral-Value Conveying Device

Social deixis serves as the primary linguistic mechanism for encoding the story's central moral message: the consequences of filial disobedience. The shift in Malin's address forms toward his mother traces his moral deterioration.

Sentence 7 (Early story, respectful address):

"*Mother, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for me.*"

The address term Mother encodes respect and acknowledges the kinship hierarchy. Malin, despite his ambition, still recognizes his mother's social position.

Sentence 24 (After wealth and marriage, insulting address):

"*You mad woman! I am not your son!*"

Two significant shifts occur. First, the address term Mother is replaced by the insult mad woman, a deliberate social demotion. Second, the kinship denial I am not your son explicitly rejects the filial bond. The use of mad woman encodes not merely anger but contempt, reflecting Malin's internalized shame about his humble origins.

Sentence 26 (Climax, complete denial):

"*You are not my mother.*"

This utterance reverses the proper social order. Malin now positions himself as the authority figure who defines the relationship. The denial is absolute: she is not his mother, and

by implication, he is not her son. This linguistic act of rejection is the story's moral nadir. Beyond Malin's speech, Mande's prayer employs conditional deixis to encode divine justice:

Sentence 29 (Mande's prayer):

"*If he was not my son, I will forgive his actions to me. But if he is Malin Kundang, I ask you for your righteousness!*"

The conditional structure, marked by *if... if...*, establishes a moral logic based on verification. The first condition (if he is not my son) leads to forgiveness. The second condition (if he is Malin Kundang) leads to a request for divine justice. The deictic shift from my son (claiming kinship) to Malin Kundang (using his full name, distancing herself) encodes Mande's transition from hope to righteous anger. The prayer is answered immediately, as the subsequent storm (Sentence 30: *Immediately*) demonstrates.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study found four types of deixis in the English version of *The Legend of Malin Kundang*: person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, and social deixis. Person deixis appeared 74 times (55.22%), time deixis 22 times (16.42%), place deixis 19 times (14.18%), and social deixis 19 times (14.18%). Person deixis became the most dominant type due to the abundant dialogues between characters.

Regarding the functions, person deixis built characters through pronoun selection, with Malin's shift from I want to I am not your son encoding his moral deterioration. Place deixis constructed the setting through spatial contrast between seaside village and big cities, with sand symbolizing rejection of origins. Time deixis structured the plot through temporal irony between soon and many years, reinforcing broken promises. Social deixis served as the primary moral marker, tracing Malin's address shift from respectful Mother to insulting mad woman to complete denial You are not my mother. Mande's conditional prayer further encoded divine justice.

Thus, deixis in *The Legend of Malin Kundang* is not merely a grammatical feature but a strategic narrative device that builds story elements while encoding moral values about filial disobedience.

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