



## A Pragmatic Analysis of Deixis in “The Midnight Library”

Rida-E-Fatima<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Akram<sup>2</sup>, Shameem Kouser<sup>3</sup>, Aqsa Murtaza<sup>4</sup> & Muhammad Faheem<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MPhil English Scholar in NCBAE (Al-Hamra University) Lahore, Rahim Yarkhan Campus

Email: [kfueitrida@gmail.com](mailto:kfueitrida@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, The Islamia University Bahawalpur, Rahim Yarkhan Campus

Email: [muhammadakramw@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadakramw@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>Punjab Education Department, Email: [shamem919@gmail.com](mailto:shamem919@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup>Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Rahim Yarkhan Campus,

Email: [aqsa97murtaza@gmail.com](mailto:aqsa97murtaza@gmail.com)

<sup>5</sup>Lecturer in English Department NCBAE (Al-Hamra University) Lahore, Rahim Yarkhan Campus

Email: [mfaheempanwar320@gmail.com](mailto:mfaheempanwar320@gmail.com)

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received:	December	21, 2025
Revised:	January	13, 2026
Accepted:	January	20, 2026
Available Online:	February	04, 2026

#### Keywords:

Deixis, Pragmatics, Critical Stylistics, Multiverse Fiction, and The Midnight Library

#### Corresponding Author:

Dr. Muhammad Akram

#### Email:

[muhammadakramw@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadakramw@gmail.com)



### ABSTRACT

Multiverse fiction can be difficult to follow because it frequently shifts between different lives, places, and moments in time. Readers may easily feel disoriented when a narrative moves across parallel realities. This article examines how deictic expressions help readers remain oriented in such narratives, focusing on Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020). The study analyzes three types of deixis such as personal, spatial, and temporal through close linguistic analysis within the framework of Critical Stylistics proposed by Jeffries (2010). While deixis has been widely studied in everyday language and in conventional narrative texts, its role in fiction where a single protagonist experiences multiple possible lives has received limited attention. The analysis shows that deixis in *The Midnight Library* does more than simply refer to people, places, or time. Personal pronouns, particularly I, reflect Nora's psychological movement from despair towards acceptance. Spatial deixis, especially repeated references to the library, functions as a stable point in an otherwise shifting narrative world. Temporal deixis, including recurring references to midnight and the use of countdowns, creates rhythm and continuity across realities. These findings suggest that deictic choices play an important role in helping readers navigate complex multiverse narratives. The study highlights how understandable linguistic strategies support narrative coherence and sustain reader engagement in contemporary fiction that involves multiple realities.

## **Introduction**

Nora Seed stands in a library. But this is not an ordinary library. She's between life and death and every book on the shelves shows a different version of her life. What if she had become an Olympic swimmer? What if she had married her ex-boyfriend? What if she had never quit her band? Each time she opens a book, she enters that reality. She lives it. Then the book closes, and she is back in the library, choosing again.

The reader has to keep up. One chapter places Nora in Bedford living alone with her cat. The next shows her married with children in Cambridge. After that, she is on a research ship in the Arctic. The locations change. The relationships change. Sometimes even Nora's personality shifts. Yet readers follow her journey without getting lost. How does the novel manage this? Deixis is a basic linguistic system that comprises ostensibly humble words such as *I, you, here, there, now, and then*, whose semantic meaning is entirely dependent upon contextual parameters. The referential alignment of these words is determined by who speaks and where they are and by the time frame of the utterance. The constant shifting of the context in *The Midnight Library* creates a constant change of meaning; without such deictic signals, the story would make no sense as readers would not know which version of Nora they are encountering and what ontological world is being drawn on. Despite the novel's commercial success, no one has studied how deixis works in it. The book has sold millions of copies. It has been translated into dozens of languages. Book clubs discuss it endlessly. Scholars have written about the psychology of regret in the novel. They have analyzed its philosophy of parallel worlds. They have discussed its treatment of depression and hope. Translation researchers have examined how metaphysical concepts transfer into other languages.

Although the topic of multiverse fiction is currently experiencing a revival of academic attention, the concept of a systematic investigation of the particular linguistic tools that enable the narrative to be viable is still lacking. This is a gap, as pragmatics questions how contextual variables constitute linguistic meaning (Yule, 1996; Levinson, 1983), and Critical Stylistics evaluates how linguistic choices trigger meaning in texts (Jeffries, 2010). Either of the two theoretical traditions has not been fully applied to fiction where the reality itself is subject to long-lasting flux. Context can shift unpredictably, precipitously in multiverse stories sometimes between pages, and character identity can be a resultant effect of this. Therefore, there is still no clear articulation of how readers manage to follow these sudden shifts and cohesion.

The current research attempts to address this gap in the literature by integrating the Yules (1996) typology of deixis with the Critical Stylistics paradigm of Jeffries (2010) to question the book, *The Midnight Library*, by Matt Haig. The three subsystems of deixis analyzed include personal, spatial, and temporal. The major research questions are:

1. How is deixis used pragmatically in *The Midnight Library* to reflect shifts in narrative perspective?
2. How is personal deixis used to explore Nora's shifting identity in different realities?
3. How does the writer utilize spatial deixis to highlight changes in setting and Nora's position across lives?
4. How is temporal deixis used to represent different stages of Nora's journey and emotional state?

This study has two contributions. The study also shows that pragmatic and stylistic methods can be jointly applied to narratives that continually shift between different realities. Interpretatively, it states that deictic expressions in the novel do more than referential anchoring. And they are

scaffolding that supports the overall structure and takes the reader through the emotional journey of despair and acceptance that Nora goes through.

Matt Haig is a British novelist who has gone back and forth on the subject of mental health, anxiety, and meaning searching, which appeals to adults and younger audiences. This is marked by the emotional transparency and accessibility that is inherent in his own experience of depression and gives his stories authenticity and empathetic appeal. Among the notable works are the memoir *Reasons to Stay Alive* (2015) describing his experience with depression and the novel *How to Stop Time* (2017) exploring the concept of time. Throughout his bibliography, the everyday struggles are combined with fantastic cosmologies, making the reader think of life, choice, and strength.

One of the most structurally challenging projects Haig has done is titled *The Midnight Library* (2020). Nora Seed, the main character, is tormented by regrets and she is in an unexplainable mysterious library that is located between life and death. Every book in the library signifies a life direction she could have chosen to follow; when she opens the books, she gets to feel numerous options. It is based on this experiential mechanism that she challenges issues of choice, acceptance and the inherent worth of life. The novel is subjected to constant changes in the time, space, and perspectives, thus making deixis invaluable to keep the reader in track and to connect the fragmented lives of Nora to the thematic background of the book of hope and self-realization.

The research specifically looks at the role of deictic expressions in the text, which is based on the fields of pragmatics and stylistics. Deixis plays a central role since it focuses on people, time, and space, allowing minute but critical indicators to create meaning in the story. Researching deixis therefore clarifies how perspective and identity are made through the use of language.

Pragmatics questions how context can influence the derivation of linguistic meaning, arguing that questions like speaker identity, time, and place of context. It influences meaning much more than the meaning of words in a dictionary. The deictic lexical elements, such as *I, you, here, there, now, then, tomorrow*, etc. are not the ones that have an invariant meaning, but rather the ones that obtain their semantic contribution through contextualization. Such researchers as Fillmore (1997) and Yule (1996) divide deixis into five major modalities, namely, person, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social. These types bring into view the processes through which language is connected to situational context. In literary works, deixis is not limited to the narrative tracking, but also reveals the relations between characters, and stylistic choice of the author.

Stylistics is a gap between language form and literature, which analyzes the way certain linguistic choices create influences on reader perception. Leech and Short (2007) highlight the dependency of form and function, which means that deixis could be discussed as a grammatical element and a stylistic element that adds more meaning to the narrative.

The typology provided by Yule is used as an analytic tool in this inquiry, and Jeffries Critical Stylistics can be taken as a tool to evaluate the stylistic significance of deictic expressions. The combination application of these frameworks allows a moderate investigation that combines pragmatic and stylistic observations. The ongoing ontological change depicted in *The Midnight Library* creates an excellent environment to be able to study deixis: personal deixis tracks the changes in identity of Nora, spatial deixis record her movement through different environments, and temporal deixis tracks the movements through past, present and speculative futures. Together, deictic devices have more than referential work to do; they shape the narrative and develop the broad themes of choice, possibility, and self-discovery.

The empirical interest is limited to personal, spatial, and temporal deixis. Using the classification of Yule (1996), and Critical Stylistics of Jeffries (2010) 109 passages have been isolated in nearly

all the chapters of the novel. The passages were specifically chosen because of the deictic expressions contained in them concerning the research. Chapters which contained no salient deictic information were left out in order to maintain analytical accuracy and focus.

In terms of linguistics, the paper demonstrates the functioning of deixis in narrative texts to create viewpoint, self, and audience interest. It shows the effectiveness of the combination of pragmatics and stylistics to the analysis of contemporary fiction with complex and non-linear narrative patterns. Literally, it shows how Haig creates a multiverse story using deictic markers. The results are relevant to the research in the field of pragmatics, stylistics, and narratology and can be applied to the work of a pedagogue in the field of contemporary fiction and the study of languages. In a wider sense, the study will help in an insight into the manner in which readers will negotiate a narrative built over fragmentation, and transitional realities, the phenomena that are experiencing a flow into the literature of the twenty-first century.

## **Literature Review**

Pragmatics examines the role of the contextual aspects on the meaning of language beyond the meaning of words as defined in the dictionary, focusing on how speakers use lexical objects in real communicative situations. It takes into consideration questions like: who is talking, to whom, where and when? These questions tend to have more interpretation than the literal senses of the words (Levinson, 1983). Deixis is in the middle of this field; the name is based on the Greek translation of pointing. Deictic words are those which depend on context and are changed depending on who is talking and their immediate spatial-temporal context. An example is that the pronoun *I* refers to the present speaker and *here* refers to a place in relation to the present speaker. Such terms do not have fixed meaning without context (Yule, 1996).

Yule (1996) divides deixis into five categories, namely, personal, spatial, temporal, discourse and social. Personal deixis involves the use of pronouns like *I, you and they* to indicate communicative participants. Spatial deixis includes such words as *here, there, this place*, which refer to place in relation to the speaker. Words like *now, then and yesterday* are some of the words used in temporal deixis by anchoring events in time. Discourse deixis is concerned with the text itself, and such phrase, "*as mentioned earlier*". Social deixis depicts interpersonal relations in the form of honorifics or forms of address (Yule, 1996). Of these, the person, spatial, and temporal deixis are considered as core because they provide responses to the basic questions of communication: who, where, and when (Yule, 1996).

Early applied deixis studies were concerned with face to face discussion. According to Fillmore (1997), the deictic expressions achieve meaning in the discursive context because the speakers and the hearers occupy the same space and time. So that words such as *here and now* can be pegged on a common reality. Fiction is a problem since the context of the author and that of the reader is not common. The reader is forced to make utterances in a fantasized world instead of the actual communicative context. However, deictic expressions are common in novels, and they are thicker in novels than in every-day speech. Empirical studies prove that deictic features are still important when the context is not physically present (Duchan, Bruder, and Hewitt, 1995; Panggabean and Khatimah, 2022).

In an attempt to describe the deixis in written storytelling, researchers use the concept of deictic centre. According to Duchan and colleagues (1995), the reader is supposed to project himself into the world of the narrative, creating a model of the spatial-temporal occurrence. This is the viewer location which is referred to as the deictic centre. In the phrase, "*she walked into the room,*" the readers, although the text is in the past tense, placed themselves in the room and understood the

meaning of *here and now* in respect to the centre created by the reader. The deictic expressions provide clues to readers because this centre changes, such as: “*he came to Paris later that day*”, “*he went to Paris later that day*”, etc. indicates the readers that something changes in their mental models in terms of location and time (Duchan et al., 1995).

This is based on mental simulation. Readers create spatial-temporal worlds in the story to place themselves in the spatial-temporal world (Duchan et al., 1995). The deictic centre is gradually changed in the majority of narratives. The settings are consistent over multiple pages and time moves in a predictable way, which allows the readers to have a consistent mental map and thus makes texts easier to follow.

Multiverse fiction makes this trend complicated. In these stories, the identity, setting and time of the protagonist may change at the same time and place, as well as in a short paragraph or line. Every other universe brings in new spatial points, time frames, and versions of the protagonist, forcing readers to leave behind one way of thinking and build another one. This puts heavy cognitive loads of interpretation and language is required to help the readers in making transitions. Deictic phrases, which serve as anchor points and signal shifts in the narrative universe, provide that guidance.

Although deixis is central to understanding the narrative, no one has ever taken the initiative to investigate how deixis works in the case where identity, space and time are all in flux. The majority of works on deixis in fiction presuppose continuity in the narration in spite of the changes in perspective (Semino, 1997). A few studies of discontinuous narratives examine the discontinuities of style or time but still assume continuities in those discontinuities (Herman, 2002). The multiple shifting of person, space, and time deixis in concert to maintain narrative intelligibility are challenged by multiverse fiction. Regarding with simultaneous changes across narrative dimensions, which requires a closer and systematic approach to the investigation of deixis.

This analysis can be provided with the help of pragmatic and stylistic research. Conventional stylistics catalogues include the linguistic characteristics of grammar, the diction and the discourse patterns (Leech and Short, 2007). But it frequently does not go on to describe the way in which these features can define meaning or reader response. Critical Stylistics is aimed at doing more. Jeffries (2010) connects linguistic form to the textual-conceptual functions where language shapes how reality is perceived in a text, relationships, causality and values. As an example, the group representing time, space, and society shows how language forms the narrative world with the help of verb tense, adverbial, prepositions, and deictic expressiveness. These decisions place readers in a relative position to the events making certain moments close or far (Jeffries, 2010).

By combining the pragmatic categories of Yule and the stylistic framework of Jeffries, it is possible to have a more holistic approach. Yule distinguishes the forms of deixis, whereas Jeffries explains in what way the deictic forms influence the sense of narrative and vision. The combination of deixis enables one to see it as a grammatical tool as well as a narrative technique, which is especially useful with modern fiction, in which classic narrative structures are replaced by non-linear plots, psychological realism, and multiple realities.

The available literature on the study of deixis in literary works confirms the opinion that deixis adds to the meaning beyond mere reference. Person, space, and time deixis form the fundamental structure and coherence of a narrative, as empirical evaluations of books like *The Kite Runner* reveal (Panggabean and Khatimah, 2022).

Deixis has been identified by other researchers of short stories to serve the purpose of creating emotional bonding and directing narrative attention (Rosa, 2024; Yogyakarta & Jaya, 2025). However, none of these works discusses deixis in works where reality itself is volatile, like in multiverse fiction.

Investigating deixis in *The Midnight Library* therefore fills an important gap in the literature.

These are philosophical and psychological questions, but they are expressed through language. To understand the literature, it is important to understand how that language works.

Matt Haig's work is a clear example. His books frequently deal with existential fear, mental health, and the search for purpose. *The Midnight Library* is his most structurally ambitious book.

The story of Nora Seed is presented with the storyline of her having an excessive amount of alternative life, which is shaped by different decisions. The relationships, settings, and variations of the possible selves of Nora in each chapter are new. The reader must follow these transformations maintaining an emotional attachment to a protagonist whose identity keeps on changing. It is a two-fold process of tracking and attachment but it is extensively reliant on linguistic processes, and deixis is a central part of it.

The novel has provided a perfect case study on which the role of person, spatial and temporal deixis can be studied in the context of multiverse narratives. Personal deixis sums up the changing self-concept of Nora. The use of spatial deixis indicates her travel in different worlds. Temporal deixis organizes the time of the story, going back and forth between regrets of the past, decisions of the present, and the possible futures. Together, these deictic modes create the narrative space of the novel, and define its emotional impact, thus, not only to disclose the linguistic process of the text, but also to show how the modern fiction applies the language in order to describe the psychological realism in the imaginary realms.

Recent scholars has emphasized the importance of deictic analysis in literary work. Indicatively, Sadeq et al. (2024) investigated deictic expressions in short stories and discovered that personal, spatial, and temporal deixis are useful to enable the readers to navigate perspective and setting changes. The pragmatic analysis reveals that how these markers form the basis of textual coherence by putting the readers into the realm of the story. Similarly, Aprilia et al. (2024) have examined the Andersen's *The Garden of Paradise* and came to the conclusion that there are different types of deictic that are used in particular narrative functions, especially in signaling perspectives and temporal motion. Deictic expressions are therefore used deliberately to show the reader's understanding and the overall narration of the story. Research that uses Critical Stylistics has also been attracted with growing attention in addition to pragmatic inquiries. Mustafa and Khalil (2019) used the framework created by Jeffries for young adult science fiction and showed how the use of language helped to develop thematic and ideological meaning. The works on modernist literature, such as the novels by Virginia Woolf, show that spatial and temporal deixis cope with the broken narration and connect the psychological experiences of characters with their environment (Kaharuddin et al., 2025).

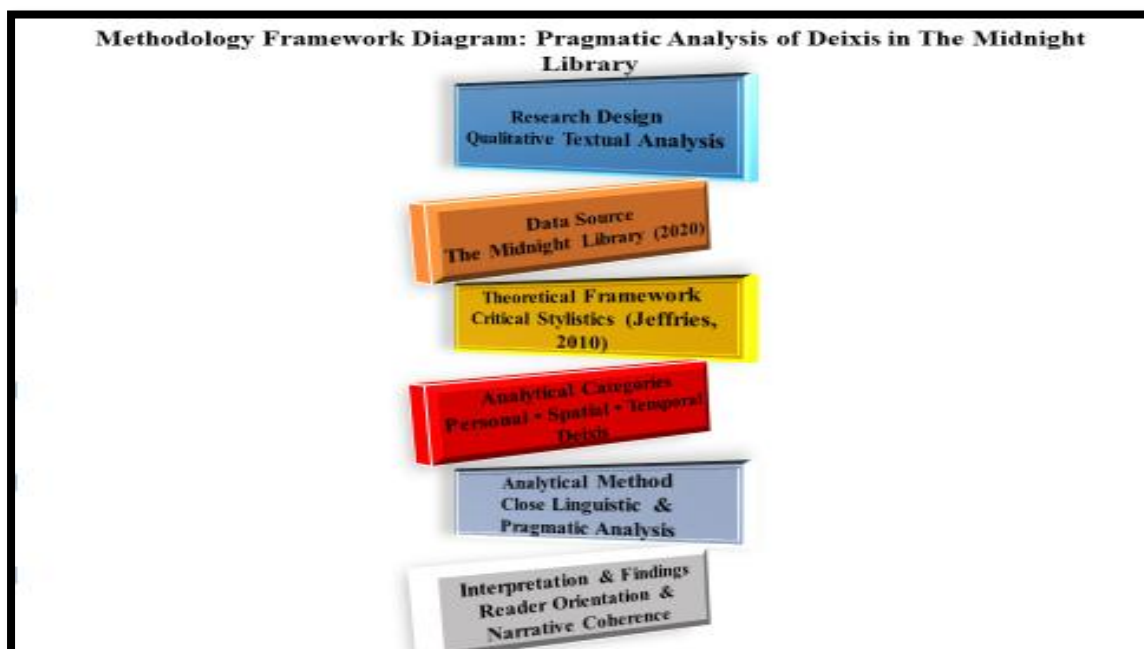
Although there is increasing interest, the majority of studies concentrates on classical texts, short stories or stories whose reference points are relatively constant. Scant academic attention has been given to contemporary multiverse fiction, in which identity, place, and time are constantly put out of place. Studies on *The Midnight Library* (Haig, 2020) do not focus much on linguistic analysis, and instead, psychological motifs, philosophical exegesis, or translation issues are discussed in most cases. Particularly, a combination of pragmatic deixis theory and Critical Stylistics has not been used exhaustively in this novel. Pragmatic studies are more likely to focus on discourse or

conversation, but stylistic analysis usually only explains patterns without necessarily explaining what effects they have on cognition or emotions. A synthesis of these approaches provides a more detailed explanation of the way in which language shapes meaning in multifaceted stories.

In this paper, the identified gap is filled through the prism of Yule (1996) conceptualization of person, spatial and temporal deixis and Jeffries (2010) conceptualization of Critical Stylistics. Through the examinations of 109 passages of *The Midnight Library*, it can be shown that the deictic expressions not only identify the characters, events, or era but they also shape the narrative viewpoint, shape the affective reactions of readers, and mediate the experience of Nora moving through her hopelessness to acceptance. Findings also serve in parallel with the study of pragmatics and stylistics because they prove the possibility of using the two methods in a synergistic way to study modern fiction. They also show how language decisions provide a scaffolding of the mind that allows the reader to cope with complex fractured narratives. In such a way, the novel by Haig can be taken as the example of how words themselves carry thematic load, investigating the questions of identity, decisions, and numerous possibilities of life.

## Methodology

The current study takes a qualitative research design that is a combination of pragmatic analysis and Critical Stylistics. This integrative approach has been used in the previous research to explain the meaning-making in the literary texts and has shown that a combination of studying linguistic structure and stylistic choice is a better way to understand the meaning-making in the literary texts. (Fathurrahman Subekti & Fauziati, 2025; Simatupang et al., 2021). The research was conducted in three major steps. To begin with, relatable texts were copied out of the text. Second, the data obtained were classified by the type of deictic. Third, the passages were analyzed thoroughly to assess the way in which deictic expressions were used in the story. It is a similar process of other studies that examine deixis in fiction (Sadeq et al., 2024; Amalia et al., 2025), but it was adapted to fit the multiverse format of *The Midnight Library*.



## **Data Collection**

Such careful and repetitive reading is typical to stylistic studies (Mustafa & Khalil, 2019), since it allows one to notice the patterns that could be missed by a single reading. The sampling measure was purposive and the researcher purposely picked specific text as opposed to the application of a random selection. A total of 109 passages were selected, selected from almost every single chapter of the novel; some chapters were not selected because there were too few important deictic expressions in them. The passages that were chosen were the ones where deixis was clearly used to influence the plot, create a sense of time or to emphasize the changes in identity of the character of Nora. This will be in line with the past studies on deixis; that is, it is important to select passages that are most relevant to the study goals (Fathurrahman Subekti & Fauziati, 2025).

Only the passages that were relevant to the objectives of the study were kept. The process was carried out in a methodical, step-by-step process to ensure order. Contextual information was needed because words like *I*, *here* and *now* have different meanings depending on who is saying it, time reference and localization (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). These words require careful attention of the contextual conditions to understand.

## **Data Classification**

After the passages were collected, they were classified according to the type of deixis they contained. Here are such pronouns like *I*, *you*, and *she*, which are referred to as person deixis. Spatial deixis entails the use of words such as *here*, *there* and *this place*, which denote location. Temporal deixis entails words related to time like *now*, *then* and *yesterday*. These types are founded on the framework by Yule (1996).

In certain passages, there were a combination of two or more deixes. At the time it did, the researcher identified the most dominant type at that point in the story. To illustrate, in the sentence, "I am here," personal and spatial deixis are used, however, the emphasis can be on place. The concept of classification took into account the role of the passage in the story (Sadeq et al., 2024).

The other important component of classification was the establishment of the deictic center which is the location of all deictic expressions (Fillmore, 1997). The deictic center is fixed in the majority of stories, but in *The Midnight Library*, it is in the constant flux since Nora switches between a varieties of lives. The researcher identified the version of Nora that is the center in each passage.

## **Data Analysis**

The analysis was done in two stages. The initial step was the recognition and the classification of deictic expressions. The researchers analysed the following substitutions with reference to personal deixis (such as: *I*, *she*, their proper names), spatial deixis (e.g., *here*, *there*; place names and prepositional phrases), and temporal deixis (e.g., *now*, *then*; verb tenses; temporal oppositions) according to the framework provided by Yule (1996).

This is a wider view that appreciates that deixis can appear in various forms of language, not necessarily as fixed words. All the deictic expressions were assigned to their category according to their grammatical and narrative role.

The second was the interpretation stage. The researcher used Critical Stylistics by Jeffries (2010) to find out what the deictic choices were performing in the story. This method is concerned with the way the language determines the interpretation of events, character attitudes and emotions among the readers. As an illustration, a change of "I am here" to "she was there" can be an indication of a change of perspective, emotional distance or transition into a new reality.

The analysis was conducted in a logical manner. To start with, the researcher identified the subject matter of each deictic word, who is *I*, where is *here*, and when is *now*. Second, the research question was why the author used that word: was it an indicator of a new reality or demonstration of closeness or distance, or keep the readers on track? This two-step methodology is in line with other stylistic studies (Mustafa and Khalil, 2019).

Particular focus was put on deictic shifts, the instances when the point of reference shifts, and the readers have to re-orient themselves. In *The Midnight Library*, these changes happen very often as Nora constantly transfers to new lives. The researcher has recorded the deictic expressions that characterized these changes and their contribution to the creation of new reality. It was centered on context and narrative role and not merely counting the words.

This approach to literary analysis was a solution to one of the most frequent problems. Pragmatic categories give definite methods of locating the deixis forms, and Critical Stylistics describes how the decisions can influence the meaning within the story. Individual analysis of complex, modern fiction cannot be fully applied using either of these methods. The combination of these helps to understand that language constructs the narrative world, directs readers, and evokes emotions.

This is a combined approach that is supported by recent research. To investigate science fiction texts, Mustafa and Khalil (2019) used both Critical Stylistics and discourse analysis. Simatupang et al. (2021) used pragmatics and stylistic interpretation on novels and demonstrated that both methods give more insight when compared to either.

This paper utilizes the hybrid method of multiverse fiction. In *The Midnight Library*, changing realities provide issues that cannot be adequately addressed using pragmatics or stylistics. The pragmatic analysis reveals the functioning of deictic reference in every reality. Critical Stylistics unveils the role of language in showing readers their way across realities. Overall, the analysis shows that modern fiction uses language to create and move across more than one world at the same time. This technique is especially applicable to psychological fiction, where the interior states are obligatory. Amalia et al. (2025) demonstrate that pragmatic analysis emphasizes the trends in the expression of psychological positions by characters. Jeffries (2010) illustrates that Critical Stylistics reveals the subjective representation of texts. As applied to *The Midnight Library*, these methods demonstrate how Haig applies deixis not only to indicate people, places, and times, but also to organize the psychological development of Nora, who starts as a desperate woman and ends as an accepting one.

The results are discussed in the following section with the help of personal, spatial, and temporal deixis. Each of them is considered in terms of its reference and the narrative work they provide. This is a good structure, which follows the research questions of the study, and makes the results easy to understand.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The discussion of 109 passages of *The Midnight Library* reveals that there are regular patterns in the functioning of deixis throughout the novel.

Such patterns indicate that deictic expressions are not restricted to the identification of persons, places or periods. On the contrary, they actively participate in the process of constructing the sense of self that Nora has, track her transitions between various lives, and participate in her emotional struggles. To make it simple, the results are explained in three categories, namely, personal deixis, spatial deixis, and temporal deixis.

### **Personal Deixis and the Changing Sense of Self**

Personal deixis is used in the form of pronouns; the most frequent ones are “I,” “she,” and “you.” These pronouns vary with Nora who switches between the variations of her life. The manner in which first-person pronouns are used is one of the most evident patterns, as they help to understand the way Nora views herself at various stages of the novel.

The use of “I” in the beginning of the story is closely related to regret and self-blame by Nora. This can be seen in the Book of Regrets entries in which she writes the same statement several times: I regret not going to stay in The Labyrinths, I regret not becoming a glaciologist. The use of “I” I twice makes her take all the disappointments on herself. In every sentence she strengthens her imagination that she has not succeeded and the pronoun is coupled with guilt instead of control of her life.

This person deixis is further used in her suicide note where she tells us, I am sorry that I ever existed. In the given sentence, the pronoun I makes her blame not only her actions but her whole being. The language demonstrates the extent of her acceptance of the fact that her life is not very valuable. The deictic decision renders her hopelessness individual and instant to the reader.

This trend evolves as the story unfolds. However, towards the end of the novel when Nora resolves to live, she writes in the blank book, I AM ALIVE. In this case, the role of I is dissimilar. It is no longer associated with apology and remorse. Rather it is an affirmation of being and decision. The difference between I am sorry that I was born and I AM ALIVE displays a change in the way that Nora perceives herself and her right to be on this planet.

It was also demonstrated in the analysis that the third-person references to Nora are more frequent when she lacks a feeling of connection with herself. She has been earlier referred to in the novel via remote metaphors, like when she is likened to a collapsing star. These sentences are out of the first person point of view and imply emotional aloofness. The use of first-person pronouns becomes more stable and regular as Nora starts to embrace herself. This is an indication of a more solid and established identity.

On the whole, person deixis is closely connected with the psychological state of Nora. Pronouns are bound to blame and distance when she is lost or hopeless. They are more categorical and certain when she gets her senses back. Here, identity in the novel is created using language and not given as a given entity.

### **Position and Spatial Deixis in the Narrative**

Spatial deixis is manifested in the use of terms like "here," "there," the library and definite names of places, like Bedford and Sao Paulo. Such sources are not merely descriptions of physical places. They also show how safe or uncomfortable Nora is in each of the realities.

The greatest spatial reference used in the novel is the library. Libraries are related to safety and possibility since its inception. As Nora goes to *the Midnight Library*, it acts as the main hub of all her alternative lives. The monotony of the phrase the library gives one a feeling of consistency in a tale where all other things are changing. It serves as a guide through which the readers are oriented.

Meanwhile, spatial deixis is also indicative of Nora being uncertain. The opposition between such words as here and there frequently indicates her belongingness. When Nora tells us that something is here that is normally meant that it is a temporary comfort or safety. Conversely, being out there

is frequently a danger or a way of being emotionally out. This trend is present in various lives and it shows the reader how Nora is feeling towards all of them.

One of them is when Nora comes back to *the Midnight Library* having refused the other life. The phrase “She was back in the Midnight Library” has a mixed meaning. This is not a new place, and the word back is all about frustration and disappointment. The spatial reference implies that the library is like a refuge and a reminder that she is yet to discover a life she would like to remain in.

Critical emotional changes are also marked with the help of spatial deixis. At the point when Nora exits the library to see Mrs. Elm in the care home, the story mentions her return to Shakespeare Road. When a particular street name is used, it is an indication that one is returning to the actual world of the library and not an abstract one. This change of place is also a change of responsibility and decision.

The other trend is evident in how Nora discusses various lives. Proximal expressions are used to describe lives she feels she belongs to e.g. this life or this place. The lives she prefers to leave are more remotely termed as the life or another life. Such decisions demonstrate the fact that spatial language is an expression of emotional intimacy or detachment.

There is also a comparison of concrete place names and space of the library which is more abstract. Certain places help one feel that alternate lives are real and tangible, whereas the library is indefinite and symbolic. This opposition helps to highlight the issue of possibility, choice, and the contrast between perceived and actual reality in the novel.

### **Temporal Deixis and Stages of Emotions**

*The Midnight Library* uses temporal deixis in the words now, then, midnight, and in such expressions as nineteen years before and one minute and twenty-seven seconds after midnight. These lines structure the flow of the events in the novel, yet, they also indicate the emotional state of Nora at various points of her process.

The book opens with a strong time setting: Nora Seed sits in the small library in the warmth, nineteen years before she made her mind up to die. This source locates the very beginning of the scene in the past, but it also draws the focus on the future choice. Since the beginning of the first line, the life of Nora is quantified against that moment. Time is brought out as an approach to a point that is fixed and this gives an impression that her desperation has been years in coming.

This structure is carried on with a sequence of countdowns, like twenty-seven hours before she decided to die and five hours before she decided to die. Every marker reduces the time gap between the attempt to commit suicide and her. These repetitive time allusions add to the narrative tension and serve as an expression of the sense that Nora has limited choices. Time seems to be catching up with her, as she loses her hope.

Midnight is a term that has a particular meaning in the novel. It is the point when Nora is between life and death. The clock in *the Midnight Library* is replaced with a frozen time, 00:00:00, indicating that there is no ordinary time any longer. This immobility reflects the mental condition of Nora. This makes her unable to take a step as she desires to leave life and does not know how to live. The paralysis of emotions is more than rest as shown in the frozen time.

When Nora starts to experiment with other lives, the temporal deixis is changed. Such words as now, are more frequently used, particularly in the situations when choice is a matter. In the case of Mrs. Elm saying, Now, time for a book, I reckon, the word now brings the focus to the present time. It brings about hope and movement but not regretting. Such present-oriented indicators

demonstrate that Nora gradually comes to realize how to become a participative follower of what is occurring as opposed to what has already failed.

The greatest time change is found at the very end of the novel when Nora recovered her life. It is narrated that this occurs at one minute and twenty seven seconds after midnight. This very time marker is in contrast to the frozen midnight of the library. Time has reclaimed, and it is going on. The accuracy of the moment indicates that life has re-developed structure and continuity. Nora has ceased to exist in two realms but instead is entirely in one timeline.

The other trend can be observed in the use of past oriented words like then and back then by Nora. These are words that are associated with regret and criticism of oneself. Such statements as I should have done, then indicate the attention that she pays to missed opportunities. Such retrogressive references become less common as the novel goes on. Rather, the markers of the present tense, like now, are more visible, and it becomes clear that the attitude to regret turns into acceptance.

Another change in use of words such as ever and always was also observed in the analysis. At the beginning of the novel, Nora thinks in absolute terms, as she thinks that nothing ever worked out in her case. The effect of this time usage is the proliferation of her failure in her whole life. Subsequently, the story tells how she changed, but in the same life. This change implies that time is not endless repetition but goes on as a process in which change can take place.

### **How Deixis Works Together**

The results indicate that person, spatial and temporal deixis tend to work to produce meaning. It is obvious in the moment when Nora writes I AM ALIVE in the blank book. The use of personal pronoun I establishes her identity. The AM form of the present tense entrenches the statement as present. This statement is framed in the symbolic space of the library by the very process of writing in the book. A combination of these elements creates a statement of acceptance and choice.

The same mixture is seen when Nora comes back to life. The personal identity, the exact time, and the movement into a new state of being are united by the sentence at one minute and twenty-seven seconds after midnight, Nora Seed marked her emergence back into life. The stability and self-identification are strengthened by the use of her full name. The reference to time indicates that linear time has been reintroduced. The transition back to life is the indicator of physical and mental change.

These trends indicate that deixis in *The Midnight Library* plays a structural and emotional role. Using shifts in pronouns, spatial, and times, readers can trace the path of Nora as she becomes lost, seeks out answers and ultimately finds peace with her situation. Deictic phrases lead the readers in the changing realities of the novel and in the emotional experience that remains concise and consistent.

### **Conclusion**

The paper investigated the functioning of deixis in *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig (2020) in terms of 109 passages picked. Using the typology of deixis by Yule (1996) and the *Critical Stylistics* by Jeffries (2010), the paper has examined the role of language in the maintenance of narrative coherence, identity construction, and emotional turn of a novel constructed on shifting realities.

The results indicate that deictic expressions are central in navigation of the readers through the novel. Instead of serving as reference markers alone, person, spatial, and temporal deixis are used

to structure the narrative and determine the way the experiences of Nora Seed can be comprehended. Every little but consistent alteration in language allows the readers to trace the changes in time, place, and self without losing emotional attachment to the character.

### **Narrative Function and Stylistic Effects.**

Deixis adds much to the narrative structure of the novel. The personal reference change, between I and she, direct address, etc., brings about a motion between the various versions of the identity of Nora. Such changes indicate how unstable the self becomes when context varies over and over again.

The flow of the story is also influenced by temporal deixis. The use of countdowns and midnight is repeated, making the feeling of progression slow and enhancing the feeling of suspension. The use of exact time references later in the novel is an indication of a renewed movement and continuity in the linear direction. By doing so, the emotional rhythm of the story is made possible by time expressions.

Spatial deixis helps to sustain such effects creating areas of stability and change. The library serves as a repetitive point of reference that serves to keep the story intact, with other spatial elements signaling the transition between the various lives. These language decisions enable the readers to stay in line with the constant change of setting.

### **Characterization and involvement with readers**

Deixis is also important in developing the character of Nora. The changes in her perception of herself are reflected by the use of personal pronouns. The first instances of the first-person reference would mostly be in the instances of regrets and self-criticism. Subsequently, there are other variations of acceptance and choice. These changes enable the readers to see her psychological growth in terms of language and not directly told.

Spatial expressions are also used in character description. The use of here, there and definite places indicate that Nora either belongs or does not in every life she goes into. As she becomes more reliant on space, the readers can understand her emotional condition and increase self-awareness.

To the audience, deictic transitions bring about an active involvement of the story. Every shift in reference makes the readers change their point of view and reconstruct the world of the story. This is done to keep the readers engaged and at the same time to ensure that there is coherence in the multiplicity of realities. With the use of deixis, the novel helps readers to move along with the character and think of the themes of choice, identity, and possibility.

### **Theoretical and Literary Implications**

Theoretically, this paper demonstrates that deixis is not confined to the identification of people, places, or time. Rather it is an active meaning-making device that influences the interpretation of a narrative. Although Yule (1996) and Levinson (2004) explain deixis as one of the means of anchoring language to the context, this paper demonstrates that deixis still may be used in situations when the context is unstable. The *Midnight Library* has Nora with changing lives, but deictic expressions continue to be used to have the interpretation. This broadens practical knowledge because it demonstrates the operation of deixis in those narratives in which the setting is dynamic instead of static. In stylistic terms, the results align with Jeffries(2010) and Semino(2011) in showing that linguistic choices in fiction are purposeful rather than accidental. Deixis in this novel forms a direct influence on themes and stylistic impacts. The personal pronouns do not merely distinguish participants or speakers. They mirror the wavering sense of identity of

Nora as she switches lives. Spatial and temporal forms also help to convey meaning by developing oppositions between belonging and displacement, movement and stillness, choice and limitation.

Literary implications are also very important. It is demonstrated that deixis is not a minor technical issue but rather a resource of thematic development. The repetition of the use of the terms the library also offers the space a symbolic weight, projecting it as a space of security and insecurity. Suspension of Nora experience is supported by such temporal expressions as midnight, now, and then. Personal deixis enables the reader to experience the changes in her identity as opposed to merely seeing them. These trends demonstrate how the literary meaning is constructed by means of the light yet consistent linguistic decisions.

Lastly, the paper presents the importance of a pragmatic and stylistic mix. Pragmatics describes the mechanism of the deictic reference, and stylistics describes the manner in which those references have a literary effect. Combined they provide a better comprehension of the role of language in forming meaning in fiction.

### **Practical Implications**

The practical relevance of the findings also exists. To linguistics students, *The Midnight Library* is a good illustration of the functioning of deixis in a complicated narrative context where the points of reference are continuously shifting. This assists in taking the study of deixis out of the normal conversation and into more interesting literary environments.

In the case of literature students, the analysis demonstrates the effects of small choices of language on themes and character development. This makes a person pay closer attention to language itself instead of paying attention to plot and symbolism. From a writer's perspective, the findings suggest that deixis can be used intentionally to shape perspective, control narrative rhythm, and create a closer relationship with characters. The knowledge of these methods can help to be more attentive and efficient in the use of language in creative writing.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

There are a number of limitations in this study. It pays attention to one novel, and in such a way, the results cannot be extended to all multiverse fiction and modern literature. The focus of the analysis is primarily on person, spatial and temporal deixis rather than social and discourse deixis, which are a bit less, focused. Just like any other interpretive research, the analysis is also an expression of the analytical bias of the researcher.

This work may be expanded in future research in many ways. A review of deixis in several novels by Matt Haig would help to determine the consistency of these trends in his works. Other multiverse narratives would be tested on whether similar deictic patterns are manifested in the genre. Additional studies might also investigate deixis in other forms of narratives or merge linguistic studies with reader-response analyses in order to learn how readers do interpret these markers in reality.

### **Closing Remarks**

This paper aimed to investigate the role of deixis in *The Midnight Library* and the ways in which the use of linguistic devices can determine the meaning of the narrative, character growth, and connection with the reader. In the analysis of 109 passages, it can be seen that deixis is not only a referential tool but one of the primary narratives and stylistic means.

Person deixis indicates how Nora changes her identity in various other possibilities of life. Spatial deixis puts her in fluctuating conditions of belonging and uncertainty. Temporal deixis defines her suspended condition and slow progress towards acceptance. All those types of deixis together lead the readers through the novel, as well as portray the emotional and psychological turmoil Nora experiences.

It is also depicted that the use of deixis adds to the rhythm of the story, emphasizes the differences between confinement and freedom, and enhances the emotional involvement. This paper fills the gap between linguistic form and literary meaning by showing how tiny linguistic indicators have a thematic meaning.

The Midnight Library eventually implies that it is not a different life but a different perspective on the same life which is needed as change. This concept is reflected in the deixis used in the novel on the language level. The identical pronouns, space and time markers assume different meanings as Nora changes her point of view. This paper has demonstrated the way these changes work linguistically, demonstrating that the identity and meaning is formed in an ongoing process of changing words that help us place ourselves in time, space and in relation to others.

## References

1. Amalia, R., SailiRahmah, L., & SatyaGumelar, W. (2025). The analysis of deixis and implicature in teacher-student interaction in English classes. *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 9(2), 296-307. <https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.447>
2. Aprilia, P., Sukmawijaya, A., & Ramadhan, M. A. (2024). Analysis of deixis in the short story "The Garden of Paradise". *International Journal of English Linguistics, Literature, and Education (IJELLE)*, 6(1), 39-50.
3. Duchan, J. F., Bruder, G. A., & Hewitt, L. E. (1995). *Deixis in narrative: A cognitive science perspective*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
4. Duchan, J. F., Bruder, G. A., & Hewitt, L. E. (1995). *Pragmatics of narrative*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
5. FathurrahmanSubekti, M. R., & Fauziati, E. (2025). The pragmatic analysis of deixis in *Hotel Transylvania* movie script 2012. *JELITA*, 6(1), 167-180. <https://doi.org/10.56185/jelita.v6i1.892>
6. Fillmore, C. J. (1997). *Lectures on deixis*. CSLI Publications. (Original work published 1971)
7. Haig, M. (2015). *Reasons to stay alive*. Canongate Books.
8. Haig, M. (2017). *How to stop time*. Canongate Books.
9. Haig, M. (2020). *The Midnight Library*. Canongate Books.
10. Herman, D. (2002). *Story logic: Problems and possibilities of narrative*. University of Nebraska Press.
11. Jeffries, L. (2010). *Critical stylistics: The power of English*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230274679>
12. Kaharuddin, Rahman, F., Abbas, A., & Hasjim, M. (2025). Deixis in *To the Lighthouse*: A syntactical context analysis. *International Journal of Science Research and Review*, 8(1), 880-888.
13. Leech, G., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson Longman. (Original work published 1981)
14. Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
15. Levinson, S. C. (2004). Deixis. In L. R. Horn & G. Ward (Eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 97-121). Blackwell Publishing.

16. Mustafa, S. R., & Khalil, E. E. (2019). Order and chaos in young adult science fiction: A critical stylistic analysis. *Arab World English Journal*, 10(3), 373-385. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no3.26>
17. Panggabean, W., & Khatimah, K. (2022). Deixis in the novel *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. *Acitya: Journal of Teaching and Education*, 4(1), 80-87. <https://doi.org/10.30650/ajte.v4i1.3194>
18. Rosa, A. A. (2024). Analysis of deixis in the short story collection *Dusk, Rain, and the Story That Never Ends*. *English Edu: Journal of English Teaching and Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.18860/jetl.v4i2.17907>
19. Sadeq, A. A. M., Hussein, H. K., Hussein, R. O., & Abdulqader, M. I. (2024). Analysing deixis in literary texts: A pragmatic perspective. *Journal of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, 26(8), 41-52.
20. Semino, E. (1997). *Language and world creation in poems and other texts*. Longman.
21. Semino, E. (2011). Deixis and fictional minds. *Style*, 45(3), 418-440.
22. Simatupang, E. C., Fadhilah, N. N., & Barokah, R. A. (2021). Pragmatic analysis of deixis in the novel *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell. *English Journal Literacy UTama*, 6(1), 2655-4585. <https://doi.org/10.33197/ej lutka.vol6.iss1.2021.2655.4585>
23. Yogyakarta, A. T., & Jaya, V. E. (2025). Analyzing place deixis and discourse deixis in Putu Wijaya's short story *Laki-Laki Sejati*. *Journal of Society Innovation and Development*. <https://doi.org/10.63924/jsid.v7i1.214>
24. Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.