

# AN ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL DEIXIS IN SHORT STORY “THE GIFT OF THE MAGI”

*Personal  
deixis,  
Short story,  
The Gift of  
the Magi*

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**Abstract-** *The purpose of this study is to characterize and analyze the deictic manifestations of personal deixis in the short novel Gift of the Magi. This study specifically looked at how personal deixis appeared and how context was interpreted. The statements and sentences in the short story served as the main source of the data. The key data used in the research was the percentages of each personal deixis that appeared in the short narrative, and their interpretation was provided afterward. The researchers used a descriptive quantitative design to conduct the study. According to the research, the short narrative had 231 personal deixes, of which 43 were first-person (18,61%), 14 were second-person (6,06%), and 174 were third-person (75,32%). In light of these findings, it was concluded that the Gift of the Magi's author narrated the tale from his point of view to help the readers comprehend the characters, conflicts, and concepts in the work objectively. Since he is familiar with the entire narrative and the thoughts, emotions, and viewpoints of every character, the author also wishes to project his own identity. As a result, the readers are greatly assisted in fully understanding the plot. To put it briefly, to fully appreciate a short story, one must be aware of the function of personal deixis.*

**Keywords:** *personal deixis, short story, the Gift of the Magi*

## INTRODUCTION

A language is a primary tool for communication, and most communication is social. Language is a system of spoken, physical (signed), or written symbols that humans use to communicate, express identity, play, and release emotions as members of a social group and culture (Tan, Farashaiyan, Sahragard, & Faryabi, 2020). Language separates humans from animals and is a beautiful tool for communicating with other creatures (Oesch, 2016). One of the components of language is pragmatics. Pragmatics explores how language is employed externally in communication. It is the study that examines how language is employed in context. Pragmatics as the application of communication tools. Pragmatics discusses how semantic knowledge interacts with our world knowledge and

uses context (Sentf, 2014). In the field of pragmatics, the language users use utterances in context, and communicate them with deeper meaning. This branch of study examines the meaning of communication and the possibilities open to speakers when speaking the target language based on social interaction (Nghì & Khuong, 2021). Pragmatics indicates that language is not always utilized if users know what they are doing.

In the study of pragmatics, deixis is one of the important elements to be learned. Deixis describes how speakers position themselves and their listeners in relation to the communication situation (O’Keeffe, Clancy, & Adolphs, 2019). Deixis activates interlocutors to refer to entities based on context, hence let the interlocutor to recognize people and things that are related to the extent they are doing according to the moment at which they are speaking. According to Levinson, deixis is divided into five categories involving personal deixis, time deixis, place deixis, social deixis, and discourse deixis (Sundari, 2021). Specifically, in relevant to the focus of this research, out of five deixis introduced, personal deixis is the one commonly used and essential for figuring out referents used in utterances.

Personal deixis is related to the person referring someone or somebody, and also something. Person deixis is used as the distinguisher between the speaker *I* and the addressee *you* to give the speaker report speech on the speaker’s self-reference (Gruyter, 2012). In relevant with it, person deixis operates three parts of basic division exemplified by the pronouns of the first person or called as first-person deixis such as *I*, the second-person or second person deixis such as *you*, and the third-person or called as third-person deixis such as *he*, *she*, and *it* (Abdullah, 2015; Yule, 1996). Specifically, the researchers have summed up the types of person deixis into Table 1 below adapted from Azar (as cited in Sari, 2015).

**Table 1. Person Deixis**

		1 <sup>st</sup> Person	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person		
				M	F	N
<b>Singular</b>	<b>Subject</b>	I	You	He	She	It
	<b>Object</b>	Me	You	Him	Her	It
	<b>Possessive Adjective</b>	My	Your	His	Her	Its
	<b>Possessive Pronoun</b>	Mine	Yours	His	Hers	Its
	<b>Reflexive Pronoun</b>	Myself	Yourself	Himself	Herself	Itself

<b>Plural</b>	<b>Subject</b>	We	You	They
	<b>Object</b>	Us	You	Them
	<b>Possessive Adjective</b>	Our	Your	Their
	<b>Possessive Pronoun</b>	Ours	Yours	Theirs
	<b>Reflexive Pronoun</b>	Ourselves	Yourselves	Themselves

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According to Turambi (2017), person deixis is a way of indicating the part that a person played in the linguistic event that occurred when the phrase was pronounced. It is essential for the communication of a language, whether orally or in writing, to make use of deixis. Person deixis refers to a relationship and serves as the foundation for determining which pronouns a speaker is familiar with. The pronouns that always find their way into the language, whether it be by utterance, written expression, or written implementation, deixis is the means by which they are expressed (Natalia & Santoso, 2020).

Understanding person deixis is important because referents may cause ambiguity, especially when it is used in written literary works that the readers must interpret the context for it does not have the direct one. For instance, in the sentence “We should go now”, readers may conclude different situations: the speaker asks for permission to leave, or the speaker wants the addressee to also leave with him (Sari, 2015). Without immediate context, as in direct conversation, it may cause ambiguity; however, it can be reduced or even eliminated when the readers understand the concept of referents and integrate it with the context provided in the discourse. Therefore, using referents provides transparent information about the addressees, making the story crystal clear (Melnik, 2017).

In relevant with the opinions above, analyzing the use of person deixis found in written literary works is always interesting. It is because most literary characters use personal deixis to give further information to the readers (Islamiyah & Qani’ah, 2021). Person deixis emphasizes the significance of characters since there are no immediate context given in the written works like short stories. Concerning this point, the writer was encouraged to analyze the use of person deixis in *The Gift of the Magi* short story by O. Henry. *The Gift of the Magi* is a classic short story published by *The New York Sunday World* on December 10, 1905 and appeared in O. Henry's 1906 collection *The Four*

Million. This short story presents simple yet meaningful story about a spouse named Jim and Della.

Setting out on Christmas Eve, the story was told that Jim and Della wanted to give a luxurious gift to each other. They sold their precious possession to buy the present. Della cut and sold her long hair while Jim sold his most treasured pocket watch. When Della got home with the gift, Jim was astonished to see Della with no hair. Della cried, explained, and gave Jim the gift. Jim was silent when he opened that the present was the watch. In return, Jim handed his gift to Della. Della screamed violently when she found out that it was a comb. It was fascinating to read how these spouses valued each other and sold their preciouses to buy something significant, although the presents were useless now. Selflessness and love are the finest gifts according to this narrative. This short story's complex tale introduced how great Jim and Della's love was and taught readers to appreciate their presence. Jim and Della showed us a love story that might be applied to everyone in their lives, and people shall be grateful for it.

Research has been conducted related to The Gift of the Magi short story (Aulia & Suyudi, 2019; Prameswari & Budiyanto, 2017; Wandansari & Yulistiyanti, 2020; Zainuddin, 2018; Zou, 2021); however, there was no study discussing the use of deixis of the short story, particularly the person deixis one. In fact, in order to understand the story better, interpreting how the author uses person deixis is essential (Fani, 2020; Miftah, 2016; Ramasari, 2020; Yule, 1996), especially if the story is in a foreign language (in this case, English), to avoid misinterpretation. This is the gap that the researchers would like to bridge.

There are similar studies about person deixis analysis conducted by Amin and Jukil (2019) Fahrnis and Utomo (2020), Fatkhunrohmah (2013), Natalia and Santoso (2020), and Pratiwi (2018) about the use of person deixis in written works. These studies present various results from different points of view and works. For instance, the one conducted by Fatkhunrohmah (2013) about person deixis analysis in the Iron Lady movie manuscript reveals there are 185 person deixis used in the manuscript containing 87 first-person deixis, 45 second-person deixis, and 53 third-person deixis which are interpreted and described coherently to give further understanding about the movie. Another example is a study by Pratiwi (2018) about using person deixis in the English translation of summarized Shahih Al-Bukhari Hadith. The study discovers that the

dominant person deixis used in the script was the third-person singular deixis He referring to Prophet Muhammad SAW to point out and elaborate on the action, provisions, approvals, and utterances of the prophet and his companions. Nevertheless, all studies shared a uniform concept that understanding the notions of person deixis in written literary works is crucial and interesting.

This study similarly focused on the person deixis in the short story "The Gift of the Magi" and the interpretations. The difference, of course, relies on the written works used as the object of the study. The researchers in this study believed that presenting the results of person deixis analysis can be favorable for readers to understand the short stories or other similar written literary works in general. Moreover, this study contributes to adding and providing knowledge about personal deixis in the field of pragmatics to help readers understand the types of personal deixis and their functions, especially in written works. Thus, this study is significant. Accordingly, two research questions posed in this study:

- a) What types of person deixis are used in "The Gift of the Magi" short story?
- b) Which type of person deixis is frequently used in "The Gift of the Magi" short story?

## **METHODS**

### **Research design**

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design. Descriptive quantitative When describing a type of research that results in descriptive data, people's spoken or written words, and observed behavior, the qualitative approach is the one that is used (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016). The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; the outcome is deeply descriptive; and the focus of qualitative research is on the process, understanding, and meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, qualitative framework was used to describe the person deixis found in The Gift of the Magi short story.

### **Data Collection**

The source of the data was The Gift of the Magi short story authored by O' Henry in 1905. The short story was one of the remarkable works of O' Henry which was then

published in book form in the O' Henry anthology *The Four Million* in April 1906. The researchers took all the utterances and sentences contained in the short story as the data. The data were analyzed through the framework of textual materials analysis suggested by Saldaña (2013). The steps of qualitative research were conducted from data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The researchers applied cataphora and anaphora technique of *endophoric* or textual items analysis technique to collect and analyze the data. According to Yule (1996), the use of anaphora and cataphora is important in analyzing textual materials for pragmatic study. He further explained that anaphora is a literary device that involves presenting real-world entities in a manner that is distorted by precedent. Therefore, an anaphora refers to a personal pronoun that was presented before. In linguistics, the term "antecedent" refers to the phrase that comes before the second utterance. A strategy known as anaphora involves keeping the first referent introduced by many entities.

e.g. "Look at that *painting*. *It* is so beautiful!"

From the utterances above, the word *painting* is the antecedent; while the pronoun *it* is an anaphor.

In contrast, cataphora is the antithesis of anaphora. According to Yule (1996), cataphora is a personal pronoun that has never been used before in the sentence

e.g. "*It* looks so beautiful! Please look at that *painting*."

The word *it* in the utterance above is the cataphor while *painting* is the antecedent.

### **Data analysis**

In analyzing the data, the researchers categorized the pronouns after being collected and analyze using anaphora and cataphora technique into first-, second-, and third-person deixis, the researchers used a table to put the pronouns into their correct type of 1<sup>st</sup> person, 2<sup>nd</sup> person, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person deixis, and either they are categorized as subject, object, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, or reflexive pronoun (see Table 2 below). Finally, the researchers used the percentage formula to find the frequent or dominant pronoun used in the short story. The percentage formula was also used to count the total of pronouns in each type of person deixis.

**Table 2. Table for Categorizing Person Deixis**

No.	Pronoun	Person deixis type			Category				
		1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	S	O	PA	PP	RP
1.									
2.									
3.									
etc..									

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are divided into two sections in accordance with the numbers of research questions. The findings are:

### RQ 1: Types of person deixis used in “The Gift of the Magi” short story

After collecting the data, the researchers found that all types of person deixis were used by O’ Henry in his short story The Gift of the Magi. There are 6 types of deixis found the short story with the total of 231 pronouns. Table 3 to Table 7 below display the analysis result.

**Table 3. 1<sup>st</sup> Person Deixis Analysis Result**

Pronoun	Types of deixis	Category	Total	Percentage %
I	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular	Subject	18	7.79
Me	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular	Object	12	5.19
My	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular	Possessive Adjective	9	3.89
We	1 <sup>st</sup> person plural	Subject	3	1.29
Us	1 <sup>st</sup> person plural	Object	1	0.43
Total			43	

From Table 3 above, it can be noticed that there are 43 1<sup>st</sup> person deixis used in The Gift of the Magi short story divided into 39 singular and 4 plural pronouns. It is indicated that singular pronoun *I*, *me*, and *my* are used for 18, 12, and 9 times with the percentage of 7.79%, 5.19%, and 3.89% respectively. Furthermore, plural pronoun *we* as subject and *us* as object are found 3 times and 1 time with the percentage of 1.29% and 0.43% respectively.

**Table 4. 2<sup>nd</sup> Person Deixis Analysis Result (Singular)**

Pronoun	Types of deixis	Category	Total	Percentage %
You	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	Subject, Object	14	17.74
Total			14	

Table 4 displays the result of 2<sup>nd</sup> person deixis analysis. There was only 1 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun found which is *you* as subject and object. The total reaches 14 times with the percentage of 17.74%.

**Table 5. 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Deixis Analysis Result (singular-feminine)**

Pronoun	Types of deixis	Category	Total	Percentage %
She	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Subject	41	17.74
Her	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Object, Possessive adjective	34	14.71
Hers	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Possessive pronoun	1	0.43
Herself	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Reflexive pronoun	1	0.43
Total			77	

Table 5 displays the analysis results of 2<sup>nd</sup> person deixis of feminine. Deixis of feminine is the pronoun that is used to refer to the female characters told in the story involving all the categories of pronoun including subject, object, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, and reflexive pronoun. The total of 3<sup>rd</sup> person that refers to the female characters are 77 pronouns. In details, pronoun *she* was found 41 times with the percentage of 17.74% as the subject, *her* was 34 times with the percentage of 14.71% as the object and possessive adjective, and pronoun *hers* and *herself* were found 1 time each with the percentage of 0.43% as possessive pronoun and reflexive pronoun.

**Table 6. 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Deixis Analysis Result (singular-masculine)**

Pronoun	Types of deixis	Category	Total	Percentage %
He	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Subject	21	9.09
Him	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Object, Possessive adjective	9	3.89
His	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Possessive pronoun	14	6.06
Himself	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Reflexive pronoun	2	0.86
Total			46	

Table 6 displays the result of 2<sup>nd</sup> person deixis analysis of masculine. Singular-masculine pronouns are those that refer to male characters in the story. The category of pronoun include subject, object, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, and reflexive pronoun with the total of 46 pronouns. In details, pronoun *he* was found 21 times with the percentage of 9.09% as subject, *him* was 9 times as object and possessive adjective with the percentage of 3.89%, *his* was found 14 times with the percentage of 6.06% as possessive pronoun, and *himself* was found 2 times with the percentage of 0.86% as reflexive pronoun.

**Table 7. 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Deixis Analysis Result (singular-neuter)**

Pronoun	Types of deixis	Category	Total	Percentage %
It	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Subject, Object	35	15.15
Itself	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	Object, Possessive adjective	1	0.43
Total			36	



Table 7 displays the analysis result of 3<sup>rd</sup> person deixis of neuter. The neuter pronoun is used to refer to situations or inanimate objects that has no specific gender. In the story, two out of four categories of pronoun were found: *it* (subject and object) and *itself* (reflexive pronoun) with the total of 36 pronouns. In detail, there are 35 pronoun *it* found with the percentage of 15.15%, and 1 pronoun *itself* with the percentage of 0.43%.

**Table 8. 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Deixis Analysis Result (plural)**

Pronoun	Types of deixis	Category	Total	Percentage %
They	3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural	Subject	9	3.89
Them	3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural	Object	4	1.73
Their	3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural	Possessive adjective	2	0.86
Total			15	

Table 8 presents the analysis result of plural form of 3<sup>rd</sup> person deixis. There found 3 plural pronouns; *they*, *them*, and *their* categorized as subject, object, and possessive adjective with the total of 15 pronouns. In detail, pronoun *they* was used 9 times, *them* was 4 times, and *their* was found 2 times with the percentage of 3.89%, 1.73%, and 0.86% respectively.

## **RQ 2: Types of person deixis frequently used in “The Gift of the Magi” short story**

From the analysis result, the type of person deixis that is frequently used in The Gift of the Magi short story is the third person deixis with the total of 174 times (75.32%) followed by first person deixis 43 times (18.61%), and second person deixis 14 times (6.06%). Among 12 pronouns of 3<sup>rd</sup> person deixis used in the story, pronoun *she* was the dominance (41 times, 17.71%) followed by pronoun *it* (35 times, 15.15%).

Specifically, on each type of deixis, pronoun *I* was used dominantly in 1<sup>st</sup> person deixis (18 times, 7.79%) followed by *me* (12 times, 5.89%) and *my* (9 times, 3.89%). Then, in 2<sup>nd</sup> person deixis, pronoun *you* was dominantly used both as the subject and object (14 times, 17.74%). There were no other pronouns found than *you*. In addition, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person deixis, between singular and plural, pronoun *she* as a subject appeared most frequently (41 times, 17.71%), followed by *it* as a subject and object (35 times, 15.15%) and *her* as object and possessive adjective (34 times, 14.71%).

The interpretation of personal deixis in The Gift of the Magi short story varies and depends on the context. In the type of first-person deixis, there is an utterance I buy hair. Mrs. Sofronie says the utterance. I considered the first-person deixis, which refers to the speaker, Mrs. Sofronie. The pronoun I has a function to indicate the subject as a singular pronoun. For context, Della offered Mrs. Sofronie to buy her hair because Della needed money to buy a gift for her husband. Then Mrs. Sofronie accepted the offer and bought Della's hair.

The utterance *I* couldn't live through Christmas without giving you a gift is another example of first-person deixis. The utterance is said by Della to Jim. The word *I* is first person deixis and refers to Della as the speaker. The function of the first-person deixis is to indicate that the subject is a singular pronoun. The context of the utterance is, Della told Jim that she desperately wanted to give him a gift on Christmas night. In the short story, the reference to the word *I* depends on who is talking and the situation. From the sentences above, *I* can refer to the pronoun Mrs. Sofronie or Della. Probably, for the native speakers, it does not cause any confusion; however, for foreign readers, it might be confusing and cause misinterpretations of the story (Melnik, 2017).

Regarding the third-person deixis, the pronoun *she* appears 41 times and is the most frequently used in the story. It is primarily referring to Della as the female character of the story. For instance, in a sentence, “she began to think more reasonably”; the pronoun *she* is used to referring to Della as the subject or agent of the utterance. Contextually, the sentence explains Della's situation when *she* had cut her hair off, and *she* started thinking about her action logically as soon as she arrived home. The author of the short story used third-person omniscience as the point of view, focusing on Della's feelings to provide beneath the character's actions and thoughts (Al-Alami, 2019).

Furthermore, the pronoun *he* also appears 21 times in the story. In an utterance, “he looked very thin and he was not smiling”; the pronoun *he* refers to Jim, with the context is the expressions of Jim's face when she arrived home and looked at Della's new hair. However, not all pronouns *he* refers to Jim. In a sentence, however, “if he was very thin and moved very quickly, he might get a good view of himself”; the pronoun *he* does not refer to the speaker or addressee in this context but to a person as the figurant in the story. The context of the utterance is that the author indicates that a person with a skinny

body and who could move quickly might be able to get a good view of himself from the looking-glass.

The story's uniqueness relies on the frequent use of *she* and *her*; in fact, the story involves Jim and Della as spouses. Logically, the pronoun *she* and *he* should have appeared the most because the story is about them. However, the pronouns that appear the most are *she* (41 times) and *her* (35 times) while *he* was only used 21 times. This phenomenon indicates that O' Henry, as the author, emphasized Della's role in the story to give a more sensitive touch to the readers so the storyline, especially the conflicts, could be accepted dramatically by the readers.

Understanding deixis, in this case, person deixis, through textual materials is also beneficial for EFL students, helping them understand the text and learn the grammar of the sentences. It is believed that the presence of deixis is fundamental to learning the meaning of the utterance and sentences and deixis creates contextual information (Fahrunisa & Utomo, 2020; Fani, 2020; Fatkhunrohmah, 2013; O'Keeffe et al., 2019; Siregar, 2020). By gaining experience through reading and analyzing the textual information, students can potentially resolve their problems in acknowledging the shifting person deixis within the story and using and identifying the correct use of the deictic expression to improve their reading and writing skill in English. As has been suggested by Rahayu (2018) that the use of textual analysis as an activity to improve students' grammatical accuracy that will lead to the improvement of students' competence in deictic expressions contextually. It means that students cannot only identify the literal deixis but also identify the meaning of the utterance and sentence based on the deixis presence.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to determine the use of person deixis in *The Gift of the Magi* short story. The researchers posed two research questions in conducting the study. The result indicated that the most frequent type of person deixis used in the story is the third-person deixis, totaling 174 pronouns (75.32%). Specifically, *she* is the dominant pronoun used 41 times (17.74%), primarily referring to Della, the story's main character. The dominant use of third-personal deixis in the short story implies that the author emphasizes on the character of Della. The interpretations of the pronouns are expected to help non-English readers understand the storyline or context of the story better. Nevertheless, this study

can still be further conducted. Other researchers are encouraged to analyze other types of deixis used in The Gift of the Magi short study, such as time or spatial deixis, to provide complete information and data about the use of deixis in the short story.

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