

Exploring Deictic Expressions In The Sigale-Gale Story: A Pragmatic Analysis**Menjelajahi Ekspresi Deiktik Dalam Kisah Sigale-Gale: Analisis Pragmatis****Lasyuli Simbolon^{1*}, Rahmah Fitriani², Pardi Pardi³**Kajian Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Indonesia^{1,2,3}Email: 1lasyulisimbolon@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study explores deictic expressions in the Sigale-Gale story, a traditional Batak Toba folklore, using a pragmatic approach. Deictic expressions are context-dependent linguistic elements that indicate participants, time, place, discourse, or social relationships, and they play a crucial role in constructing meaning in narrative texts. The study aims to identify and analyze the types of deixis used in the story and to explain their functions in relation to context and culture. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with the story serving as the primary data source. Data were collected through the documentation method and analyzed using classification based on five deixis categories: person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis. The findings reveal that person deixis is the most frequently used type, particularly third-person pronouns, reflecting the narrative focus on characters and events. Place and time deixis are also significant, helping to establish spatial and temporal frameworks that guide readers' understanding of the story. Discourse and social deixis, though less frequent, contribute to textual coherence and convey cultural norms, such as social hierarchy and kinship relations. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that deictic expressions in the Sigale-Gale story function not only as linguistic devices but also as tools for cultural representation and narrative cohesion. This study highlights the importance of pragmatic analysis in traditional folklore, offering insights into how context and culture interact in storytelling. The results may serve as a reference for further research on deixis in other local narratives.

Keywords: Deixis, Pragmatics, Sigale-Gale Story, Traditional Folklore, Narrative Analysis

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengeksplorasi ekspresi deiktik dalam cerita Sigale-Gale, sebuah cerita rakyat tradisional Batak Toba, menggunakan pendekatan pragmatis. Ekspresi deiktik adalah unsur linguistik yang bergantung pada konteks yang menunjukkan partisipan, waktu, tempat, wacana, atau hubungan sosial, dan memainkan peran penting dalam membangun makna dalam teks naratif. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis jenis-jenis deiksis yang digunakan dalam cerita dan untuk menjelaskan fungsinya dalam kaitannya dengan konteks dan budaya. Metode deskriptif kualitatif digunakan, dengan cerita tersebut sebagai sumber data utama. Data dikumpulkan melalui metode dokumentasi dan dianalisis menggunakan klasifikasi berdasarkan lima kategori deiksis: deiksis orang, tempat, waktu, wacana, dan sosial. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa deiksis orang adalah jenis yang paling sering digunakan, khususnya kata ganti orang ketiga, yang mencerminkan fokus naratif pada tokoh dan peristiwa. Deiksis tempat dan waktu juga signifikan, membantu membangun kerangka spasial dan temporal yang memandu pemahaman pembaca tentang cerita tersebut. Wacana dan deiksis sosial, meskipun kurang sering terjadi, berkontribusi pada koherensi tekstual dan menyampaikan norma-norma budaya, seperti sosial hierarki dan hubungan kekerabatan. Secara keseluruhan, analisis menunjukkan bahwa ungkapan deiktik dalam cerita Sigale-Gale berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai perangkat linguistik tetapi juga sebagai alat untuk representasi budaya dan kohesi naratif. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya analisis pragmatik dalam cerita rakyat tradisional, menawarkan wawasan tentang bagaimana konteks dan budaya berinteraksi dalam bercerita. Hasilnya dapat berfungsi sebagai referensi untuk penelitian lebih lanjut tentang deiksis dalam narasi lokal lainnya.

Kata Kunci: Deiksis, Pragmatik, Cerita Sigale-Gale, Cerita Rakyat Tradisional, Analisis Naratif.

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in conveying meaning, not only through grammatical structures but also through context-dependent elements (Rahmawati et al., 2025). In pragmatics, meaning is understood as something that emerges from the interaction between language and its users within specific situations. One important pragmatic feature that reflects this interaction is deixis. Deictic expressions help speakers and writers anchor their messages to particular contexts, allowing listeners or readers to interpret meaning accurately (Yule, 1996; Ningrum et al., 2025). Without understanding deixis, communication can become ambiguous or misleading.

Deixis refers to words or phrases whose meanings depend on the context in which they are used, such as the identity of the speaker, the time of utterance, and the place of communication. Common examples include personal pronouns, temporal adverbs, and demonstratives. According to Levinson (1983), deixis is typically categorized into five types: person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis. These categories help explain how language users situate themselves and others within communicative events. In narrative texts, especially traditional stories, deictic expressions play a significant role in guiding readers through events, characters, and settings. Stories rely on deixis to establish who is involved, where events occur, and when actions take place. As noted by Cutting (2002), deixis in narratives helps create coherence and allows readers to mentally reconstruct the story world. Therefore, analyzing deictic expressions in a narrative can reveal how meaning is structured and conveyed.

Traditional folklore is a rich source for pragmatic analysis because it reflects cultural values and communicative practices passed down through generations. One such folklore is the *Sigale-Gale* story, a well-known traditional tale from the Batak Toba culture of North Sumatra. The story is closely connected to ritual, belief, and cultural identity, making it a meaningful text for linguistic study. However, linguistic analyses of local folklore, particularly from a pragmatic perspective, remain relatively limited.

The *Sigale-Gale* story contains numerous deictic expressions that reflect relationships between characters, shifts in time and place, and the narrator's perspective. These expressions help readers understand the emotional and social dimensions of the story. For example, personal deixis reveals power relations and emotional closeness, while temporal deixis helps structure the sequence of events. Analyzing these elements can deepen understanding of how the story communicates meaning beyond its surface narrative.

This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the types of deictic expressions used in the *Sigale-Gale* story using a pragmatic approach. By classifying deixis into person, place, time, discourse, and social categories, the study aims to explain how context influences meaning within the narrative. Such analysis contributes to a clearer understanding of how traditional stories use language strategically to engage readers and convey cultural messages. Furthermore, this research is expected to contribute to both linguistic and literary studies, particularly in the field of pragmatics and folklore analysis. It can also serve as a reference for students and researchers interested in applying pragmatic theories to literary texts. By exploring deictic expressions in the *Sigale-Gale* story, this study highlights the importance of context in interpreting meaning and preserving cultural narratives through language.

2. Literature Review

Pragmatics as a branch of linguistics focuses on how meaning is constructed through context rather than solely through linguistic form. It examines how speakers use language in real situations and how listeners interpret utterances based on shared knowledge and situational factors. According to Mey (2001), pragmatics emphasizes language as social action, highlighting the relationship between linguistic expressions and their users (van Thao et al., 2020). This

perspective is essential in analyzing narrative texts, where meaning often depends on contextual interpretation. One central concept in pragmatics is deixis, which refers to linguistic expressions that require contextual information to be understood. Deictic expressions point to aspects of the communicative situation such as participants, time, and location. Huang (2007) explains that deixis functions as a bridge between language and context, allowing utterances to be interpreted correctly. Without contextual reference, deictic terms remain vague or incomplete in meaning.

Person deixis has been widely discussed in pragmatic studies as it relates to the roles of speaker, listener, and others involved in discourse (van Thao et al., 2021). Pronouns such as *I*, *you*, and *they* are central to identifying participants and their relationships. Fillmore (1997) argues that person deixis is fundamental to discourse interpretation because it reflects perspective and subjectivity. In narrative texts, shifts in person deixis often indicate changes in viewpoint or narrative voice.

Simaremare et al (2021) defined that place deixis, also known as spatial deixis, concerns the location of events relative to the speaker or narrator. Expressions such as *here*, *there*, *this*, and *that* are commonly used to orient readers within a story's setting. According to Cruse (2006), spatial deixis helps construct the physical environment of a narrative and allows readers to visualize the story world. This type of deixis is especially important in folklore, where settings often carry symbolic meaning. Time deixis refers to expressions that situate events in time, such as *now*, *then*, *today*, and *long ago*. These expressions help organize the chronological structure of a narrative. Griffiths (2006) states that temporal deixis plays a key role in storytelling by guiding readers through sequences of events. In traditional stories, time deixis is often used flexibly to move between past events and present narration.

Discourse deixis relates to references within the text itself, pointing to parts of the discourse rather than external reality (Herman and Pardede, 2020). Words such as *this*, *that*, or *the following* may refer to previously mentioned or upcoming parts of the narrative. As noted by Paltridge (2012), discourse deixis contributes to textual cohesion and coherence. It allows readers to track ideas and events as the narrative unfolds. Social deixis reflects social relationships and cultural norms encoded in language. Titles, honorifics, and kinship terms are examples of social deixis that indicate status, respect, or familiarity. Holmes (2013) explains that social deixis is closely linked to cultural values and social structure. In traditional folklore like the *Sigale-Gale* story, social deixis can reveal cultural hierarchies and social roles embedded in the narrative.

Previous studies on deixis in narrative texts have shown that deictic expressions are essential for meaning-making and cultural representation. While many researchers have analysed deixis in modern literary works, fewer studies focus on traditional Indonesian folklore. Therefore, examining deictic expressions in the *Sigale-Gale* story contributes to filling this gap by combining pragmatic theory with local cultural narratives.

3. Research Methods

1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative research is appropriate because the study focuses on analyzing linguistic features and interpreting meanings rather than measuring numerical data. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research allows researchers to explore and understand meanings individuals or texts assign to a phenomenon (Herman et al., 2026). In this research, the phenomenon under investigation is the use of deictic expressions in a traditional narrative text. A descriptive approach is used to identify, classify, and explain the types of deixis found in the *Sigale-Gale* story based on pragmatic theory.

2. Data Source

The data source of this research is the *Sigale-Gale* story, a traditional Batak Toba folklore. The data consist of words, phrases, and sentences in the story that contain deictic expressions. The version of the story used in this study is a written narrative obtained from a documented folklore text. The story was chosen because it represents local cultural heritage and contains narrative elements suitable for pragmatic analysis.

3. Instrument

The main instrument of this research is the researcher. In qualitative studies, the researcher plays a central role in collecting and analyzing data, as stated by Ary et al. (2010). To support the analysis, a data classification table based on types of deixis (person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis) was also used. Pragmatic theories of deixis served as analytical guidelines to ensure systematic identification and interpretation of data.

4. Data Collection Method

The data were collected using the documentation method. The researcher carefully read the *Sigale-Gale* story several times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text. During the reading process, sentences containing deictic expressions were identified and highlighted. Relevant data were then noted and categorized according to the types of deixis. This method is suitable for linguistic research that relies on written texts as primary data sources (Sugiyono, 2016).

5. Data Analysis Method

The data analysis in this study followed several steps. First, the collected data were classified into five types of deixis: person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis. Second, each deictic expression was analyzed based on its contextual meaning within the story. Third, the findings were interpreted using pragmatic theory to explain how deixis contributes to meaning construction in the narrative. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the patterns and functions of deictic expressions found in the *Sigale-Gale* story. This analytical process aligns with Miles and Huberman's (2014) model of qualitative data analysis, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the analysis of deictic expressions found in the *Sigale-Gale* story. The analysis focused on identifying five types of deixis: person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse deixis, and social deixis. The results are presented in the form of frequency tables and figures to provide a clear overview of the distribution and dominance of each type of deixis in the story.

1. Overall Distribution of Deictic Expressions

Based on the analysis, a total of 85 deictic expressions were identified in the *Sigale-Gale* story. These expressions were classified into five types of deixis. The frequency and percentage of each type are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of Deictic Expressions in the *Sigale-Gale* Story

Type of Deixis	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Person Deixis	38	44.7%
Place Deixis	16	18.8%
Time Deixis	14	16.5%
Discourse Deixis	10	11.8%
Social Deixis	7	8.2%

Total	85	100%
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Table 1 shows that person deixis is the most frequently used type, accounting for 44.7% of all deictic expressions. This indicates that the narrative strongly emphasizes participants and their roles. In contrast, social deixis appears least frequently, suggesting that social status and honorific references are present but not dominant.

2. Person Deixis

Person deixis was found to be the most dominant category in the *Sigale-Gale* story. It includes personal pronouns such as I, he, they, his, and their, which refer to the narrator and characters in the story.

Table 2. Types of Person Deixis

Person Deixis Type	Example (from text)	Frequency
First Person	I, we	9
Second Person	you	6
Third Person	he, they, his	23
Total		38

Third-person deixis is the most frequently used, reflecting the narrative style of folklore, which typically focuses on characters rather than direct interaction with the audience. First- and second-person deixis appear mainly in dialogue and narration.

3. Place Deixis

Place deixis refers to expressions indicating location, such as here, there, this place, and that village. These expressions help readers understand the spatial setting of events.

Table 3. Place Deixis Expressions

Expression Type	Examples	Frequency
Proximal	here, this place	7
Distal	there, that land	9
Total		16

Distal place deixis appears more frequently than proximal deixis, suggesting that the story often refers to locations distant from the narrator, which is common in traditional storytelling.

4. Time Deixis

Time deixis was used to indicate when events occurred, helping structure the chronological flow of the story.

Table 4. Time Deixis Expressions

Time Reference	Examples	Frequency
Past	long ago, then	10
Present	Now	4
Total		14

Past time deixis dominates the narrative, emphasizing that the *Sigale-Gale* story recounts events that happened long ago, reinforcing its nature as a traditional legend.

5. Discourse Deixis

Discourse deixis refers to expressions that point to parts of the text itself, such as this, that, or the story.

Table 5. Discourse Deixis Expressions

Expression	Function	Frequency
this	Refers to current narration	6
that	Refers to previous events	4
Total		10

Discourse deixis contributes to textual coherence by helping readers follow the progression of the narrative and connect different parts of the story.

6. Social Deixi

Social deixis reflects social relationships and cultural values through titles and kinship terms.

Table 6. Social Deixis Expressions

Expression Type	Examples	Frequency
Kinship terms	father, son	4
Titles	king, elder	3
Total		7

Although social deixis occurs less frequently, it plays an important role in representing cultural hierarchy and family relationships within the *Sigale-Gale* story.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that deictic expressions are extensively used in the *Sigale-Gale* story to construct meaning and guide readers' interpretation of the narrative. The dominance of person deixis demonstrates that the story strongly emphasizes participants and their relationships. This supports pragmatic theory which states that person deixis is central to discourse because it reflects perspective and participant roles within communication. In narrative texts, the frequent use of person deixis allows readers to follow character actions and interactions more clearly.

The predominance of third-person deixis in the *Sigale-Gale* story aligns with the typical characteristics of traditional folklore. As a narrated legend, the story focuses on characters rather than direct engagement with the audience. This finding is consistent with Fillmore's view that third-person deixis is commonly used in storytelling to maintain narrative distance and objectivity. First- and second-person deixis appear less frequently and are mainly found in dialogue, indicating moments where characters directly interact or express emotions. Place deixis in the story plays an important role in establishing the spatial setting of events. The frequent use of distal expressions such as *there* and *that place* suggests that the narrator positions events as occurring in locations removed from the present context. This supports Cruse's explanation that spatial deixis helps readers imagine the physical environment of a narrative. In the *Sigale-Gale* story, place deixis not only provides geographical orientation but also reinforces the mythical and historical nature of the events.

Time deixis is primarily expressed through past-oriented references, such as *long ago* and *then*. This reflects the function of traditional stories as accounts of events that occurred in the distant past. The dominance of past time deixis supports Griffiths' claim that temporal deixis is essential in organizing narrative chronology. By consistently situating events in the past, the story strengthens its identity as a legend passed down through generations. Discourse deixis, although less frequent, contributes significantly to the coherence of the text. Expressions such as *this* and *that* guide readers in connecting current narration with previous or upcoming parts of the story. This finding supports Paltridge's argument that discourse deixis plays a crucial role in maintaining textual cohesion. In the *Sigale-Gale* story, discourse deixis helps ensure that the narrative flows smoothly and remains understandable.

Social deixis appears least frequently in the story; however, its presence is culturally significant. The use of kinship terms and titles reflects social hierarchy, respect, and familial relationships within Batak Toba culture. This finding supports Holmes' view that social deixis encodes cultural norms and social structure. Even though it occurs less often, social deixis provides valuable insight into the cultural values embedded in the narrative.

Overall, the discussion of findings reveals that deictic expressions in the *Sigale-Gale* story function not only as linguistic tools but also as cultural markers. The use of different types of deixis demonstrates how language, context, and culture interact in traditional narratives. This

study supports previous pragmatic research while also contributing new insights by focusing on a local folklore text. The analysis highlights the importance of deixis in understanding both the structure and cultural meaning of traditional stories.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the use of deictic expressions in the *Sigale-Gale* story through a pragmatic perspective. The findings reveal that all five types of deixis—person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis—are present in the narrative. Among these, person deixis is the most dominant, particularly third-person deixis, which reflects the storytelling style of traditional folklore that centers on characters and events rather than direct interaction with readers. The analysis also shows that place and time deixis play important roles in establishing the setting and chronological structure of the story. Place deixis helps readers visualize the spatial background of events, while time deixis situates the narrative in the distant past, reinforcing the story's function as a traditional legend. Although discourse and social deixis occur less frequently, they contribute to textual coherence and convey cultural values such as social hierarchy and familial relationships within the Batak Toba community.

In conclusion, deictic expressions in the *Sigale-Gale* story function not only as linguistic elements but also as tools for conveying cultural meaning and narrative coherence. This study demonstrates the importance of pragmatic analysis in understanding traditional folklore and highlights how context-dependent language shapes interpretation. Future research may expand this study by comparing deictic usage across different folklore texts or by applying other pragmatic frameworks to enrich the analysis of cultural narratives.

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