



Original Research Article

The Deixis Representation in Orwell's "Burmese Days"

Article History:

Name of Author:

Asst. Lect. Inas Haider Kadhim (M.A.)¹,
Prof. Iman Mingher Obied, PhD.²

Affiliation: ¹ Babylon University, English Department, College of Education for Human Sciences, Iraq.

Department of Nursing Technology, Technical Institute of Babylon, Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University(ATU), Iraq.

²Babylon University, English Department, College of Education for Human Sciences, Iraq.

Received: 18-11-2025

Revised: 28-11-2025

Accepted: 10-01-2026

Published: 12-01-2026

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Abstract: The primary basis for deixis lies at the interpersonal level rather than the ideational level. The argument concerns the fundamental function of deictic expressions: referring to objects in the real world. This task is achieved through expressions related to individuals, time, location, and social entities. This paper investigates how time, place, personal, and society deixis are linguistically constructed. It is associated with the representation of the four types of deixis as a tool, as stated by Jeffries (2010) in the Critical Stylistic branch. Drawing on "Burmese Days" as a data source to show the ideology of the colonial society and the British author, the author identifies "Burma" as an exotic place and "Burmese people" as animals and servants. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques are employed in the analysis. This paper aims to answer the following question: 1. How is time linguistically represented in the timeless East? 2- What are the spatial expressions that are used to describe the colonial settings? 3- What are the personal pronouns that ideologically show the distinction between superiority/inferiority? 4- How do the social titles show the social dominance and control?

Keywords: Time representation, spatial deixis, personal pronouns, social titles.

INTRODUCTION

Lyons (1977) stated that "Deictic expressions are oriented toward the speaker as the central reference point."

Then, Levinson in (1983) affirmed that "Deixis concerns how languages encode features of the context of utterance."

While Yule (1996) showed that "Deixis is concerned with the interpretation of linguistic expressions that rely on the situation in which they are used."

Nowadays, Burke (2014, p. 417) asserted that deixis is

fundamental in shaping a text. Cognitive features of texts that do not create a fictitious world are often overlooked, even though the same processes are necessary for comprehension. The concept of text worlds can explain why texts can have a significant impact on readers, both emotionally and ideologically. Texts can help readers accept certain viewpoints as common sense. This section explores how textual practices shape time and space in the text world, as well as the social parameters that shape human behavior.

Jeffries (2010:146) stated that deictic expressions in English are categorized into the following groups:

A-Place (spatial) indicates spatial positioning and includes adverbs of place (here, there), adverbial structures (near the house, in the front), and demonstratives (this, that, these, those).

b- Time (temporal): denotes the temporal position and encompasses verb tenses, time adverbs (now, then), adverbials (tomorrow, soon, later), and demonstratives (this, that, these, those).

c- Person (personal): denotes individuals in utterances and encompasses personal pronouns.

d- Social: refers to the application of address forms, including first names, formal names, nicknames, and honourific titles such as Lord, Mrs., and Dr.

She also emphasized (p. 148) that deixis focuses attention on the particular time, place, and social context of the ongoing interaction. The deictic system categorises the context of interaction into dimensions such as place and time, based on their proximity to the speaker.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses Critical Stylistics as a framework for the analysis. By a special use of the tool, the representation of time, place, personal, and social deixis is possible. These linguistic choices reveal the text's hidden ideological meaning. Extracts from "Burmese Days" are selected; they illustrate the four types of deixis. These extracts have textual evidence to establish the colonial society. These diexis are analyzed at the lexico-grammatical level because they focus on tenses, pronouns, adverbs, place names, or social forms. Ideologically, they represent the encoded distinction between the East and the West. Methodologically, the theoretical framework is described first. Then diexis is used as an analytical tool. Finally, there is a section specifically devoted to discussing the results, bridging theoretical and analytical frameworks and qualitative and quantitative analyses.

2- Data Analysis

2.1 Qualitative Analysis

Extract 1 chapter 1 p. 4

"The editor will get six months' imprisonment for this," he said finally.¹

'He does not mind. He says that the only timewhen his creditors leave him alone is when he is in prison.'²

'And you say that your little apprentice clerk Hla Pe wrote this article all by himself? That is a very clever boy—a most promising boy! Never tell me again that these Government High Schools are a waste of time.³ Hla Pe shall certainly have his clerkship.' 'You think then, sir, that this article will be enough?'⁴

Analysis

It is a dialogue between U PO KIYN (the corrupt magistrate in Burmese) and Ko Ba Sein (his subordinate clerk). It shows the colonial attitude

towards the Orient. Sentence 1 illustrates the harsh penal system in Burma, where defaming an article results in a six-month imprisonment for an individual; prison is used as a cruel place for punishment. Linguistically, this punishment is presented and conveyed through Orwell's characters of the society; the first sentence begins with a so, referring to a person's job, "the editor". Then he remarks on their names, like "Hla Pe," and his nickname "little clerk," and Orwell states the social title "sir," which ideologically emphasizes superiority. Orwell uses personal pronouns to refer to Hla Pe or Ko Ba Sein. "Hla Pe" is a muted agent because he only writes the article, while another agent also says it. In sentences 1 to 4, the personal pronoun "he" is repeated four times because the writer is absent; "his" appears twice; and "him" and "himself" are used once each. Besides, there is a direct conversation (face-to-face) between the two characters, represented by "you" (used twice), and he uses the possessive pronoun "your". He also presents time with "time" twice and with "when" once. In sentence 3, there is spatial deixis "High School" to indicate the uselessness of high schools in education in Burma.

Extract 2, Chapter 3, p. 21

"The doctor, very pleased, nipped his thumb and forefinger together. 'The weakness of your argument, my dear friend,' he said, beaming at his own irony, 'the weakness appears to be, that you are not thieves.'¹ This argument, vaguely political in nature, occurred whenever the two men met.²

It was a topsy-turvy affair, for the Englishman was bitterly anti-English and the Indian fanatically loyal.³

Dr Veraswami had a passionate admiration for the English, which a thousand snubs from Englishmen had not shaken.⁴

He would maintain with positive eagerness that he, as an Indian, belonged to an inferior and degenerate race."⁵

Analysis

It is an argument between the Indian doctor "Dr. Veraswami" and his friend, the Englishman Flory. They speak about colonialism and imperialism, and each one has their own opinion.

In the first sentence, Orwell establishes the character's social state by mentioning "the doctor. Also, the fourth sentence starts with "Dr. Veraswami." This indicates that the doctor has a voice and can argue. In the same sentence, Orwell mentions "Englishman" twice to refer to the doctor's friend. Also, he states "Englishmen" twice to refer to their identity. Socially, there is "English," which is the race of Flory, and it is repeated twice. While, in the last sentence, he mentions his race which is regarded as social category such as "Indian" to illustrate his colonial racism,

specifically regarding the term "race," which is modified as "inferior" and "degenerate."

Sentence 3 begins with the personal pronoun "it" to refer to the argument. He uses common social nouns like "Englishman" and "Indian" to show contrast between superiority and inferiority. The East can't define itself alone without contrasting itself with Europe's superiority. Ideologically, this extract shows racism and inversion in political arguments about imperialism.

The doctor uses personal pronouns to describe his appearance, "his thumb" and "his own irony". He mentions "you" and "your" to describe Englishmen. He also uses the subject pronoun "he" three times to refer to the doctor and his direct speech, and he uses the possessive pronoun "my" to refer to his dearest friend.

Extract 3 Chapter 7 p.49

"The drawing-room was a cool, light-coloured room with lime-washed walls a yard thick; it was large, but seemed smaller than it was, because of a litter of occasional tables and Benares brassware ornaments. 1 It smelt of chintz and dying flowers. Mrs Lackersteen was upstairs, sleeping. 2

Outside, the servants lay silent in their quarters, their heads tethered to their wooden pillows by the death-like sleep of midday.3

Mr Lackersteen, in his small wooden office down the road, was probably sleeping too. "4

Analysis

This extract is part of the narration in which the narrator describes Mr. Lackersteen's house, reflecting the setting in Burma. The house represents life in colonial society. It represents the timelessness, decay, oldness, and lifelessness of Burmese life.

In sentence 1, the narrator uses representations of place, time, and society heavily in this extract. He mentions "drawing room" at the beginning of the first sentence the he uses the pronoun "it" to refer to the "drawing room" that it seems large, this description is contracted by the syntactic contrast "but", the description differs and becomes negative by the description of the "room" by "seemed small than it was" the second pronoun "it" refers to the "room" in the previous days. So the narrator uses irony here with "large" and "small." which refers to local culture and local decoration. Thus, even their outer appearance is good, but their inner decoration is a mess, which ensures their empty life.

In sentence 2, the narrator begins with the pronoun "it," which refers to the room and its smell. This description suggests decay by describing the "flowers" as "dying." The narrator uses the social title "Mrs. Lackersteen's," then he mentions her location by

"upstairs." The narrator assigns social titles such as "Mr." and "Mrs." to the European characters.

In sentence 3, there is a description of the "outside" of the house. The servants' location is "outside, indicating their lack of an active role. Silence pervades both inside and outside. The use of the possessive pronoun "their" before "heads" and "wooden pillows" refers to the "servants" who indicate the poor treatment they receive from the European characters. They sleep during the day, "midday", but no one does anything in the hot afternoon.

In the last sentence, the narrator describes the social title of "Mr. Lackersteen." He also states the pronoun "his", referring to his office, which is located "down the road." Ideologically, Europeans are defined by their social titles, whereas Burmese servants are portrayed as passive. The use of the local decoration indicates the decay of the colonized culture.

Extract 4, Chapter 11, p.70

"Flory and Elizabeth walked down the bazaar road. It was morning, but the air was so hot that to walk in it was like wading through a torrid sea.1

Strings of Burmans passed, coming from the bazaar, on scraping sandals, and knots of girls who hurried by four and five abreast, with short, quick steps, chattering, their burnished hair gleaming.2

By the roadside, just before you got to the jail, the fragments of a stone pagoda were littered, cracked, and overthrown by the strong roots of a peepul tree." 3

Analysis

This extract is a part of the narration; Orwell describes the bazaar in Burma. The extract depicts Burma through the perspectives of colonial British characters such as Flory and Elizabeth. Burma is portrayed as a fixed, exotic, undeveloped, and timeless place, despite the high degree of rainfall.

Orwell presents his first sentence with the names of the characters "Flory and Elizabeth" as they "walk." He moves to their location, which is "down" the "bazaar. Then, he mentions the time of their walking in the bazaar as "morning" which is twice repeated in the same sentence. The use of pronoun "it" refers to the weather that indicates that their walking in the bazaar is just like someone who walks in a hot sea.

In sentence 2, he uses "who" to refer to the "girls" in the bazaar. We all know that girls like going to bazaars, but Burma's bazaar is lifeless, which is why the number of girls is small, "four or five. Finally, he describes the "thair" with "basshed"; he uses images in this description. This highlights the contrast between the girls' vibrant description and the place's deteriorating depiction. The girls are passing in quick steps. In sentences 1 and 2, **bazaar** is used as spatial

deixis, while in sentence 4, jail is used to represent the cruelty of Burma.

Sentence 3, the author tries to show the age of the decay place by describing the location of the tree with "By the roadside, just before the jail" Also, the religious place, "pagoda," is defined by "were littered" and "cracked," which symbolize the decay of the spiritual place by the coming of the colonial government. The pagoda is decayed by the strong roots that are "overthrown" from all sides of the tree. All the descriptions in this extract of Burma, the bazaar, and the pagoda are negative and lifeless, indicating the decay of the region.

2.2 Quantitative Analysis

Extract no.	Personal	Space	Time	Society
1	10	2	3	4
2	9			8
3	6	4	1	3
4	5	6	1	5
Total	30	12	5	20
67	44.7%	18%	7.3%	30%

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Through a quantitative analysis, personal pronouns are highly used by the British author, it near 45% from the types of other deixis, these pronouns are either subjective or objective to show the binary contrast between colonizers and colonized to indicate who is in group and who is out also to state the ideology of superiority through the pronouns "we, us, our,...." and inferiority through the pronoun "they, them, their, you..."

Secondly, social deixis has the second-highest percentage (30%). It shows through the names of their

characters and their social status (e.g., Dr., Mr., ...) or through their jobs (the editor) to show social power and hierarchy.

Thirdly, the spatial deixis accounts for the third-largest percentage (18%). All the places mentioned are in Burma, but they are portrayed negatively, like "jail, bazaar,....." Local areas are depicted as threatening and marginalizing.

Lastly, the lowest percentage goes to temporal deixis (7.3%). It presents a synchronic view instead of a historical process. Time makes no difference in the novel.

CONCLUSION

Personal pronouns show the highest percentage, while temporal deixis takes the lowest percentage. Social deixes state social power and status. The British author shows the binary opposition through personal pronouns. Spatial deixes are shown through local places in Burma.

References

1. Burke, M.(2014). *The routledge handbook of stylistics*. Routledge.
2. Jeffries, L. (2010). *Critical stylistics: The power of English*. Basingstoke.
3. Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics* (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press.
5. Orwell, G. (1934). *Burmese days*. Victor Gollancz.
6. Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.