

Deixis Analysis in the Song Lyrics of Cancer by My Chemical Romance

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the use of deixis in the lyrics of Cancer by My Chemical Romance through a descriptive qualitative approach. Deixis, as a key concept in pragmatics, links linguistic elements to the context of utterance, enabling expressions such as "I", "you", "now", and "this" to derive meaning from their situational use. The data were collected from the official lyrics and classified based on Levinson's (1983) typology of person, temporal, and spatial deixis. The findings show that person deixis is the most dominant, comprising 76.9% of all deixis instances, followed by temporal deixis (19.2%), while spatial deixis is nearly absent. The lyrics construct a personal narrative voice confronting death and bidding farewell to a loved one. Person deixis strengthens relational intimacy, temporal deixis emphasizes urgency and the collapse of time, and the absence of spatial deixis suggests detachment from physical reality. This study concludes that deixis functions not only as a referential device but also as a pragmatic tool for expressing emotional depth. It highlights the capacity of linguistic elements in song lyrics to construct meaning that transcends grammatical function, particularly in contexts of illness, grief, and personal loss.

Keywords: *Deixis; Person Deixis; Temporal Deixis; Song Lyrics; Pragmatics; My Chemical Romance*

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction section contains: background, a brief literature review of previous research on the topic (there must be a reference to a journal published within the last 10 years), differences from previous research, problem formulation and hypotheses (if any), and research objectives.

The article manuscript must meet the requirements as stated in the Author Guidelines available on the official website of Jejak digital: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin. The manuscript should be typed on A4 paper, consisting of 4,000-8,000 words, including references, tables, and figures. The manuscript should be typed in Times New Roman font, size 11 pt, 1,15 spaced, in MS Word format.

Language serves as the most intricate medium of human communication, extending beyond spoken and written discourse into artistic expressions such as music, poetry, and performance. Music, in particular, operates not only as entertainment but also as a vehicle for emotional and social expression (Cross, 2005). Its lyrical content often carries deep meanings that are context-dependent and shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors. This embeddedness makes song lyrics fertile ground for linguistic investigation, particularly through the lens of pragmatics.

One of the core concepts in pragmatics is deixis, a linguistic phenomenon that connects language with context. Deixis refers to words or phrases such as pronouns, demonstratives, and temporal or spatial expressions whose interpretation depends on contextual factors like the speaker, the listener, the time, and the place of utterance (Levinson, 1983). These elements act as linguistic "pointers" and are essential in understanding how meaning is dynamically constructed in discourse. Cruse (2006) further emphasizes that deixis is crucial in bridging semantic content with pragmatic interpretation.

Deixis has been widely analyzed in various forms of discourse, including political speeches (Raharjo et al., 2022), newspaper editorials (Rahmawati & Ardi, 2019), and especially song lyrics due to their emotional and narrative nature. Previous studies such as Dewi, Ayomi, and Ariyaningsih (2023) and Herdiyanti (2020) have demonstrated that song lyrics often feature dominant person deixis, which reflects the personal voice and emotional expression of the songwriter. Similarly, Rokhmah and Santoso (2022) emphasized that deixis in lyrics helps to shape narrative intimacy, inviting listeners into the speaker's personal world.

However, despite the growing body of research, there remains a gap in analyzing deixis in songs that portray themes of terminal illness, mortality, and parting—topics that present an emotionally rich linguistic environment. My Chemical Romance's song "Cancer" is a striking example, as its lyrics narrate a dying character's final moments and their farewell to a loved one. This song offers a compelling case for deixis analysis, particularly in how language constructs intimacy, time awareness, and spatial grounding in the context of death and emotional struggle.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the types and functions of deixis in the song lyrics of "Cancer" by My Chemical Romance. The research addresses the following questions:

1. What types of deixis are found in the song lyrics of "Cancer"?
2. How do those deixis forms contribute to the emotional and contextual meaning of the lyrics?

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The research methods section contains the methods used in the data collection process, presented in detail. Manuscripts with a large amount of research data stored in a publicly accessible database must

include specific information about that database and its access code.

This study applies a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the use of deixis in the song lyrics of *Cancer* by My Chemical Romance. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research aims to explore contextual meanings and interpretive patterns rather than quantifying linguistic features (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive nature of the study allows the researcher to present an in-depth account of the types and functions of deixis as they appear in the lyrics.

The primary data source consists of the official lyrics of the song *Cancer*, which were collected from verified online music databases. The data were compiled and transcribed to facilitate accurate identification and classification. Following Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), the data collection technique employed in this study was the listen-and-note method: the researcher listened to the song multiple times while taking notes on potential deictic expressions.

Data analysis was conducted through a three-step process. First, the lyrics were examined for deictic expressions, which include person deixis (e.g., “I,” “you”), temporal deixis (e.g., “now,” “today”), and spatial deixis (e.g., “here,” “there”) based on the classification proposed by Levinson (1983). Second, each deictic term was categorized into one of the three deixis types. Lastly, the researcher interpreted the contextual meaning of these expressions to understand their pragmatic function in relation to the emotional and narrative structure of the song.

This methodological framework follows prior studies in deixis analysis within song lyrics, such as those by Rokhmah and Santoso (2022) and Dewi et al. (2023), who employed similar classification-based approaches to examine how deixis contributes to personal expression and narrative construction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The deixis analysis of *Cancer* by My Chemical Romance reveals three primary types: **person deixis**, **temporal deixis**, and **spatial deixis**. Each deictic expression was categorized based on Levinson’s (1983) typology, and its context was examined line-by-line. The table below presents a detailed classification of deictic words across each stanza of the lyrics.

Table 1. Line-by-Line Classification of Deixis in “Cancer”

Line	Lyric Segment	Person Deixis	Temporal Deixis	Spatial Deixis
1	Turn away	–	–	–
2	If you could get me a drink	you, me	–	–
3	’Cause my lips are chapped and faded	my	–	–
4	Call my aunt Marie	my	–	–
5	Help her gather all my things	her, my	–	–
6	And bury me in all my favorite colors	me, my	–	–

7	My sisters and my brothers	my, my	—	—
8	I will not kiss you	I, you	—	—
9	'Cause the hardest part of this is leaving you	you	this	—
10	Now turn away	—	now	—
11	I'm awful just to see	I	—	—
12	All my hair's abandoned all my body	my, my	—	—
13	Oh, my agony	my	—	—
14	I will never marry	I	never	—
15	I'm just soggy from the chemo	I	—	—
16	Counting down the days to go	—	days	—
17	It just ain't living	I	—	—
18	I just hope you know	I, you	—	—
19	If you say goodbye today	you	today	—
20	I'd ask you to be true	I, you	—	—
21	'Cause the hardest part of this is leaving you	you	this	—

Total:

- **Person deixis:** 24
- **Temporal deixis:** 5
- **Spatial deixis:** 0

Source: Author's transcription and classification (2025)

Discussion

a) Person Deixis: Enacting the Lyrical Voice

The most frequent type is **person deixis**, with “I”, “me”, “my” forming the central core. These markers build the speaker's **narrative presence**. According to Dewi et al. (2023), person deixis in songs is often a deliberate act of emotional positioning. In *Cancer*, the speaker—most likely a cancer patient—narrates their farewell, attempting to preserve relationships (“you”) while reconciling with death.

In line 2, “*If you could get me a drink*”, deixis establishes intimacy through the use of both “you” (the caregiver/loved one) and “me” (the patient). This aligns with Levinson's (1983) theory that person deixis encodes participant roles in speech events. Here, those roles are emotionally heightened by the vulnerability implied in the request.

Lines like “*I will not kiss you*” and “*I'd ask you to be true*” show **emotional restraint**. The speaker, anticipating their own death, chooses **emotional clarity over physical closeness**. Rahmawati and Ardi (2019) explain that such deixis reflects an effort to control interpersonal distance despite intense emotional proximity.

The repeated use of “my” in phrases like “*my agony*”, “*my things*”, “*my favorite colors*”, and “*my body*” emphasizes possession—not of material things, but of memories and identity. Even in death, deixis secures a linguistic hold on personhood (Hasibuan, 2020). This supports the argument by Cross (2005) that musical texts serve not only as expressive but **existential tools**, anchoring identity.

b) Temporal Deixis: Time-Bound Grief

Temporal deixis, while less dominant, adds a layer of **chronological immediacy**. Words like “*now*”, “*today*”, and “*never*” compress time into a brief, final window. As Cruse (2006) explains, temporal deixis identifies time relative to the speaker's current moment. In *Cancer*, that moment is fleeting and terminal.

In line 10, “*Now turn away*”, “now” signals a transition. The speaker asks the listener to leave, suggesting that emotional detachment must precede physical death. Meanwhile, “*Goodbye today*” (line 19) encapsulates the immediacy of parting—not tomorrow, not later, but **today**. This temporality aligns with what Mudjahid (2023) describes as “**compressed emotion**”, typical in lyrics depicting illness or mortality.

Temporal deixis also marks a contrast between **unfulfilled life** (“**I will never marry**”) and the **countdown to death** (“**counting down the days**”), suggesting a loss of future. These deixis terms help articulate grief linguistically, reinforcing what Rokhmah and Santoso (2022) identify as deixis' power to “narrativize emotion.”

c) Spatial Deixis: The Power of Absence

Interestingly, **spatial deixis is absent**, at least in surface form. There is no mention of “here” or “there”, which Levinson (1983) would consider deictic indicators of location. However, this absence functions meaningfully: the speaker is mentally and emotionally **dislocated from space**. Their body is still present, but their voice operates beyond physical constraints.

This could be understood as **zero deixis**—where spatial reference is implied but omitted. The setting (likely a hospital or deathbed) is universally understood and thus **unspoken**. This silence, paradoxically, becomes powerful. Cruse (2006) notes that deixis can be used to **foreground what is emotionally important**, and in this case, the location is secondary to the relationship.

From a discourse-pragmatic view, the absence of spatial deixis reinforces that the song is not about **where** someone is dying, but **how** they feel while dying. The emphasis remains on person and time, making space nearly irrelevant—a radical move in deixis structure that challenges spatial norms in narrative songwriting (Janah et al., 2024).

d) Deixis as Narrative Strategy: Line-by-Line Reflection

Let us examine how deixis works across the full arc of the lyrics:

- **Lines 1–9** establish the speaker's situation and emotional plea. Person deixis (“me”, “you”) forms a plea for care, but also emotional preparation for death.
- **Lines 10–16** shift into introspection. “Now” marks a change in tone, from plea to **self-awareness**: the speaker accepts their condition (“I’m awful just to see”) and bodily decline (“my hair’s abandoned my body”).
- **Lines 17–20** re-establish the dyadic bond. “You” reappears as the object of the speaker’s final concern. Temporal deixis (“today”) anchors the farewell in a single, irreversible moment.

- **Lines 21–22**, with repetition of “*the hardest part of this is leaving you*”, bring deixis full circle: “this” encodes the current state of dying as an emotionally charged event.

This reinforces Kristina et al. (2020)’s assertion that deixis in lyrics is not only indicative but **progressive**, helping structure narrative flow and emotional layering.

e) Thematic Implications and Referential Boundaries

The deixis in *Cancer* suggests more than linguistic pattern—it constructs a **terminal discourse**. Here, deixis becomes the **grammar of dying**: “I” as a voice on the brink, “you” as emotional anchor, “now” and “today” as compressed time, and the absent “here” as symbolic spatial dissolution.

Thematically, deixis supports the idea that death, while physically isolating, is **relationally expressed**. This echoes Yule (1996), who posits that deixis operates as an intersubjective bridge. In this context, it is that bridge which allows the speaker to convey love, pain, and acceptance.

Compared to deixis in songs of heartbreak or hope, *Cancer* offers a **deictic trajectory toward closure**. It departs from circular structures or open-ended longing. It **resolves**, linguistically and emotionally, through deixis that narrows and concludes the speaker’s world.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion section must be a brief summary of the results and discussion section. Authors are strongly advised to avoid repetitive statements from the previous sections.

The analysis of deixis in the song lyrics of *Cancer* by My Chemical Romance reveals how linguistic expressions, though structurally simple, can carry deep emotional and pragmatic significance. The study identifies three major deixis types—person, temporal, and spatial—with **person deixis** emerging as the most dominant. Through repeated use of pronouns such as “I”, “my”, and “you”, the lyrics create an intensely personal narrative space, situating the speaker in a moment of intimate farewell.

Temporal deixis, such as “now”, “today”, and “never”, helps to compress time and heighten emotional urgency, reflecting the speaker’s confrontation with death and the narrowing of future possibilities. In contrast, the **notable absence of spatial deixis** demonstrates a form of deictic silence that symbolically distances the speaker from the physical world, reinforcing themes of emotional transcendence and detachment.

Beyond structural categorization, deixis in *Cancer* functions as a pragmatic device that builds narrative progression, frames existential themes, and enables the expression of vulnerability. The interplay between deixis and emotional tone exemplifies how language operates not only to refer but to embody lived experiences—especially in contexts of grief, loss, and departure.

This research contributes to a growing body of pragmatic-stylistic studies that examine deixis in non-conventional texts such as song lyrics. By focusing on a song centered on terminal illness and emotional closure, it highlights the **affective power of deixis in narrative songwriting**. Future research may explore deixis in other emotionally charged genres, such as gospel, blues, or indigenous folk songs, to further understand how deixis mediates between language and human experience.

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