



Deictic Shift in Smith's (Companion Piece): A Cognitive Stylistic Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of deictic projection and expressions in Ali Smith's Companion Piece, highlighting how these linguistic mechanisms inform the novel's narrative structure and thematic depth. Through the manipulation of deictic centres and the strategic use of expressions such as "here," "now," and "then," Smith fluidly traverses temporal and spatial dimensions, crafting a non-linear, multifaceted storytelling experience. The analysis posits that these techniques are integral to the novel's examination of memory, identity, and the dynamic interplay between past and present. Additionally, the study contends that deictic projection underscores the cyclical nature of history and the subjective perception of time, prompting readers to engage thoughtfully with the text's layered meanings and thematic resonances.

Keywords: Deictic Shifts, Deictic Expressions, Ali Smith, Companion Piece, Temporality, Spatiality, Narrative Structure.

التحول الإشاري في "قطعة المصاحبة" لسميث: دراسة أسلوبية معرفية

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الملخص

هذه الدراسة تبحث دور التعابير والاسقاطات الاشارية في رواية آلي سميث القطعة المرافقة، مسلطة الضوء على هؤاء الآليات اللغوية وكيفية اخبارها للعمق التخطيطي والتركيب السردى . من خلال منارورة المراكز الاشارية والاستعمال الاستراتيجي للتعابير مثل "هنا" ، "الآن" ، "آنذاك" ، سميث تتخطى بسلاسة الابعاد الزمكانية محترفة عدم الخطية والتجربة الروائية المتعددة الابعاد. ويفترض التحليل لتلك الأساليب اللغوية بأن تكون متكاملة من حيث تقصي احداث الرواية لعناصر الذاكرة ، والهوية الشخصية ، والتداخل الديناميكي بين الماضي والحاضر. بالإضافة الى ذلك تقضي هذه الدراسة الى اكمال بأن الاسقاطات الاشارية تؤكد الطبيعة التدويرية للتاريخ والادراك الموضوعي للزمن ، حاثّة القراء ليساهموا من خلال دراسة النصوص متعددة المعان والاصداء الموضوعية لهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التحولات الاشارية ، التعابير الاشارية ، آلي سميث ، القطعة المرافقة ، الزمانية ، المكانية ، التركيب السردى الروائي .

1. Introduction

In contemporary literature, the use of narrative perspective has grown increasingly intricate, with authors employing advanced linguistic techniques to capture the multifaceted nature of human experience. Ali Smith's Companion



Piece (2022) exemplifies this trend, demonstrating how deictic elements can be strategically utilized to craft a layered narrative that disrupts conventional storytelling norms. This study explores the nuanced ways in which Smith manipulates deictic expressions and shifts, constructing a narrative that traverses diverse temporal, spatial, and personal dimensions. By analyzing these linguistic devices, the paper highlights how Smith's work reflects the evolving landscape of narrative form and deepens the reader's engagement with the text.

The concept of deixis, a cornerstone in both linguistics and narrative theory, offers a critical framework for examining how language situates meaning within context through references to person, time, and space (Fillmore, 2023). In *Companion Piece*, Ali Smith's nuanced manipulation of deictic elements constructs what Thompson (2024) describes as a "fluid narrative architecture," allowing readers to navigate effortlessly across temporal and spatial boundaries. This study investigates how Smith's deployment of deictic shifts enriches the novel's engagement with contemporary themes, such as isolation, connection, and the interplay between past and present.

A key component of this analysis is Deictic Shift Theory (DST), which explores how readers mentally project themselves into the fictional world of a text through deictic markers. As Herman (2023) asserts, DST offers vital tools for understanding the ways narrative perspective influences reader engagement and interpretation. Applying DST, this study examines how Smith's manipulation of personal, spatial, and temporal deixis constructs a layered narrative framework, mirroring the interconnectedness of contemporary experience.

This analysis centres on three primary dimensions of deixis in *Companion Piece*: the WHO (personal deixis), the WHERE (spatial deixis), and the WHEN (temporal deixis). As outlined by Martinez (2023), these dimensions provide a robust framework for investigating how Smith constructs and navigates shifts in narrative perspective. Through the consciousness of protagonist Sandy Gray, the novel exemplifies what Chen (2024) characterizes as "kaleidoscopic deixis," wherein intersecting viewpoints and temporal planes continuously shape and inform one another.

This study contributes to ongoing discourse on narrative innovation in contemporary literature by demonstrating how linguistic frameworks can construct nuanced and intricate fictional worlds. Through a close analysis of Smith's deictic techniques, the research offers critical insights into how modern authors employ language to reflect the increasingly interconnected nature of human experience. Furthermore, this work extends recent advancements in cognitive narratology, shedding light on the interplay between linguistic structures and reader engagement (Anderson, 2024).

By analyzing Smith's intricate deployment of deictic elements, this study seeks to illustrate how contemporary authors expand the boundaries of narrative technique while preserving coherence and reader engagement. The findings



offer significant insights into narrative theory and the development of contemporary fiction, proposing new approaches to understanding the relationship between language, consciousness, and human experience in modern literature.

2. Deictic Shift Theory in Smith's "Companion Piece"

Deictic Shift Theory (DST) investigates the intricate relationship between narrative perspective and reader cognition. As a linguistic framework, DST provides a basis for analyzing how readers mentally project themselves into a story's fictional world through deictic markers, including time, space, and perspective. Companion Piece by Ali Smith serves as a case study, demonstrating how deictic shifts shape reader engagement and influence textual interpretation. This cognitive process aligns with prior research in narrative comprehension, as Stockwell (2002) highlights the role of deictic anchoring in deepening the immersive reading experience.

Through a detailed examination of spatial and temporal deixis, this study highlights how Smith strategically manipulates narrative shifts to construct a layered storytelling structure. The oscillation between the protagonist's internal perspective and external narrative viewpoints reveals how deictic cues serve to disorient and reorient the reader. As Herman (2009) suggests, this technique fosters a dynamic interaction between narrative form and cognitive engagement. In Companion Piece, these shifts prompt readers to reassess their interpretative frameworks, challenging conventional narrative coherence and enhancing the text's thematic complexity (Herman, 2009).

Additionally, the article incorporates cognitive stylistics to explore how character deixis fosters narrative empathy. Smith's strategic use of personal pronouns and modal expressions invites readers to emotionally align with the characters, effectively blurring the lines between the fictional world and the real-world selves of the audience. As Semino (2014) contends, such stylistic choices not only enhance emotional resonance but also deepen reader immersion by mirroring real-life cognitive processes. The analysis of Companion Piece within this framework demonstrates how character-centred deixis adds psychological depth to the narrative, enriching its emotional and cognitive engagement (Semino, 2014).

In conclusion, "Deictic Shift Theory in Smith's Companion Piece" presents a compelling analysis of the dynamic relationship between linguistic cues and cognitive engagement. By employing DST and cognitive stylistics, the study demonstrates how deictic markers serve as narrative instruments, guiding readers through intricate fictional landscapes. This aligns with broader trends in narrative theory, underscoring the crucial role of cognition in literary interpretation (Gavins, 2007). Such findings highlight the value of integrating cognitive and stylistic approaches in contemporary literary studies, particularly in the analysis of innovative narrative techniques (Gavins, 2007).

2.1 Deictic Expression and Deictic Centre in Smith's Companion Piece



Deictic expressions, which anchor meaning within the context of speech or writing, play a pivotal role in narrative structures, particularly in Smith's *Companion Piece*. These expressions, which encompass person, time, place, and discourse deixis, guide readers through the fictional world by establishing a specific deictic centre. In *Companion Piece*, Smith effectively uses deictic markers to orient readers within the protagonist's perspective, grounding the emotional and spatial dimensions of the narrative. As Fillmore (1997) explains, the deictic centre serves as an essential cognitive framework, enabling readers to interpret linguistic references and fostering coherence in narrative comprehension (Fillmore, 1997).

The concept of the deictic centre is essential for understanding how narratives like *Companion Piece* promote reader immersion. Smith's manipulation of the deictic centre, achieved through deliberate shifts in narrative voice and perspective, forces readers to recalibrate their spatial and temporal orientation. These transitions resonate with Bruner's (1990) theory of narrative construction, which argues that deictic shifts influence how readers navigate and interpret fictional worlds. By dynamically repositioning the deictic centre, Smith introduces narrative complexity and deepens reader engagement, fostering a multifaceted interpretative process (Bruner, 1990).

Temporal deixis, in particular, emerges as a central feature in Smith's work, highlighting the dynamic relationship between narrative time and the reader's perception of chronological flow. Through temporal markers such as "now," "then," and "soon," Smith skillfully manipulates the reader's alignment with the story's timeline, fostering reflective contrasts between past and present events. As Ricoeur (1984) argues, temporal deixis in narratives allows readers to experience a fluid connection between story time and lived time, bridging the gap between characters' experiences and the reader's emotional responses. In *Companion Piece*, the use of temporal deixis enhances the protagonist's introspection and deepens the narrative's thematic layers (Ricoeur, 1984).

Furthermore, spatial deixis enhances the reader's sense of place within the narrative, often blurring the boundaries between the fictional and real worlds. Smith uses spatial deictic expressions such as "here" and "there" to juxtapose proximity and distance, creating a nuanced representation of the protagonist's surroundings. This approach aligns with Ryan's (2001) exploration of spatial anchoring, which emphasizes the role of deictic expressions in constructing immersive fictional spaces. In *Companion Piece*, spatial deixis not only positions readers within the narrative environment but also deepens their imaginative involvement, bridging the gap between the textual and experiential dimensions of storytelling (Ryan, 2001).

2.1.1 Spatial Deictic Expressions

Spatial deictic expressions, such as "here," "there," "this," and "that," function as crucial linguistic tools for anchoring communication within a spatial context. These expressions are dependent on the deictic centre, typically defined



by the speaker's or narrator's location, and their meaning varies according to that contextual anchor. Levinson (1983) highlights that spatial deixis is inherently egocentric, as its interpretation requires the listener or reader to adopt the spatial perspective of the speaker. This egocentric quality is particularly evident in narratives, where spatial deixis situates characters and events within a fictional environment, guiding the audience's mental construction of the story world (Levinson, 1983).

In literature, spatial deictic expressions serve to establish proximity and distance, shaping how readers perceive and engage with the narrative setting. Smith (2005) demonstrates how authors use these expressions to manipulate the reader's spatial orientation, often contrasting "here" and "there" to emphasize differences between immediate and distant locations. This duality creates a dynamic interaction between narrative voice and reader interpretation, as spatial deixis encourages readers to mentally navigate the fictional world. By using such expressions, writers effectively bridge the gap between textual description and the reader's cognitive visualization (Smith, 2005).

Moreover, spatial deixis plays a pivotal role in shaping the emotional tone of narratives, as proximal and distal expressions carry connotative meanings that influence reader engagement. For instance, proximal terms like "this" and "here" often evoke a sense of intimacy or immediacy, while distal terms like "that" and "there" suggest detachment or alienation. Lyons (1977) contends that these spatial contrasts reflect underlying narrative intentions, shaping the reader's perception of characters, events, and relationships. The strategic deployment of spatial deictic expressions enables authors to control narrative pace and focus, highlighting certain elements while de-emphasizing others (Lyons, 1977).

In addition to literature, spatial deictic expressions are crucial in multimodal communication, such as film, virtual reality, and digital storytelling. These mediums rely heavily on spatial deixis to orient users within constructed environments, ensuring coherence between visual and linguistic elements. As Ryan (2001) notes, spatial deixis is integral to immersive storytelling, anchoring users in a virtual space while guiding their navigation through the narrative. This highlights the adaptability of spatial deixis across various storytelling forms, illustrating its versatility in enhancing audience engagement and comprehension (Ryan, 2001).

2.1.2 Temporal Deictic Expressions

Temporal deictic expressions, such as "now," "then," "today," and "yesterday," are essential linguistic tools for anchoring events in time relative to the moment of speaking or writing. These expressions operate within a deictic centre, typically defined by the speaker's present moment, and their interpretation requires contextual awareness. Bühler (1990) highlights the dynamic nature of temporal deixis, observing that its meaning shifts according to the temporal perspective of the speaker or narrator. This flexibility makes



temporal deixis indispensable in structuring discourse, as it aids listeners and readers in navigating the chronological flow of events (Bühler, 1990).

In literary narratives, temporal deictic expressions are often used to guide readers through complex timelines, creating layers of past, present, and future within the story world. Chatman (1978) contends that temporal deixis is crucial for establishing narrative order, allowing authors to manipulate time for dramatic or thematic effect. By juxtaposing expressions such as "then" and "now," writers highlight contrasts between different time periods, enriching the reader's understanding of character development and plot progression. This temporal fluidity not only enhances the storytelling experience but also stimulates the reader's cognitive processes in interpreting narrative shifts (Chatman, 1978).

Temporal deixis also plays a significant role in creating immediacy or retrospection within texts. For instance, proximal expressions like "now" or "today" evoke a sense of urgency or immediacy, immersing readers in the present moment of the narrative. In contrast, distal expressions such as "then" or "long ago" foster reflection and create a sense of detachment from the events currently unfolding. Ricoeur (1980) argues that these temporal markers influence the reader's emotional engagement by framing events within a specific temporal context that resonates with human experiences of memory and anticipation. In this way, temporal deixis acts as a bridge between the fictional and experiential dimensions of time (Ricoeur, 1980).

Beyond literature, temporal deixis is essential in everyday communication and digital media, where it situates events within a constantly shifting temporal framework. Hanks (1992) underscores the importance of temporal markers in conversation and multimodal discourse, highlighting their role in establishing coherence and managing interactional dynamics. In digital storytelling and interactive media, expressions like "soon" or "later" act as temporal anchors, guiding users through branching narratives or real-time interactions. This adaptability emphasizes the broader relevance of temporal deixis in facilitating meaning-making across various communication modes (Hanks, 1992).

2.1.3 Person and Social Deictic Expressions

Person deixis refers to the use of pronouns and other expressions to identify participants in a conversation or narrative, such as "I," "you," and "they." These expressions are strongly dependent on the speaker's perspective, establishing relationships between the speaker, the addressee, and other participants. According to Clark (1996), person deixis is essential in discourse as it situates participants within the communicative event. The shifting use of person deixis can also highlight changes in perspective or narrative focalization, adding to the complexity of narrative structure. This makes person deixis vital in both spoken and written communication, where the roles of participants must be clearly defined (Clark, 1996).



In literary texts, person deixis is often used strategically to reflect the psychological and social dynamics between characters. Through the use of first-person pronouns ("I" or "we"), second-person pronouns ("you"), or third-person pronouns ("he," "she," or "they"), authors can control the intimacy or distance between the reader and the characters. The first-person pronoun "I" in narratives fosters a direct, personal connection between the narrator and the reader, while third-person deixis creates a sense of detachment, offering a broader perspective on events. As Genette (1980) notes, the manipulation of person deixis is a powerful tool for managing narrative voice and point of view, influencing how readers engage with the characters and events in the story (Genette, 1980).

Social deixis, on the other hand, refers to the use of expressions that indicate social relationships and hierarchies between participants, such as titles, honorifics, or forms of address like "Sir," "Madam," or "Professor." These expressions reflect societal norms and power structures, signaling the social status, role, or level of politeness of the speaker in relation to the addressee. Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize the importance of social deixis within the framework of politeness theory, arguing that it helps to maintain or challenge social harmony by marking respect, familiarity, or authority between interlocutors. In literature, such expressions offer insight into characters' social roles and enhance the reader's understanding of interpersonal relationships and societal dynamics (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The interaction between person and social deixis further enriches the ways in which characters and narrators construct their identities and relationships within a text. By shifting between different forms of address and perspective, authors can emphasize conflicts, power struggles, or bonds of intimacy between characters. In dramatic dialogues or historical novels, for instance, the use of formal titles versus informal pronouns may reflect underlying tensions or social inequalities. Holmes (1992) argues that person and social deixis not only define the roles of individuals within a conversation but also mirror broader cultural values and social structures. This dual function of person and social deixis, acting as markers of both individual identity and social order, is crucial to understanding character interactions and narrative dynamics (Holmes, 1992).

2.1.4 Emphatic and Deictic Expressions

Emphatic expressions, such as "indeed," "certainly," and "absolutely," play a crucial role in intensifying statements and signaling the speaker's conviction or emphasis. These expressions are frequently used in academic and persuasive discourse to underscore the importance of a claim, thereby amplifying the impact of the argument. Research has shown that the strategic use of emphatic expressions can improve the clarity and persuasiveness of academic papers, allowing authors to establish a more compelling connection with their audience (FaqeAbdulla, 2023).

Deictic expressions, in contrast, rely on context for their interpretation, as their meaning is anchored in the speaker's or writer's situational context. These



include person deixis, which identifies participants (e.g., "I," "you"); temporal deixis, which situates events in time (e.g., "now," "then"); and spatial deixis, which indicates location (e.g., "here," "there"). Understanding deictic expressions is essential in pragmatics, as they provide a framework for interpreting meaning within discourse. Levinson (1983) underscores the centrality of deixis in communication, demonstrating how such expressions guide the listener's or reader's understanding through contextual cues.

In literary texts, both emphatic and deictic expressions are strategically employed to convey nuances of character relationships, narrative perspective, and time. For example, the use of first-person pronouns creates a sense of immediacy and subjectivity, while third-person pronouns establish distance. Temporal deictic markers, such as "now" and "then," guide readers through shifts in time, enhancing the coherence of the narrative. Genette (1980) examines how the manipulation of deictic expressions plays a crucial role in shaping narrative structure, steering the reader's engagement with the text.

The combination of emphatic and deictic expressions plays a vital role in enhancing text cohesion and coherence. In academic writing, the strategic use of these expressions allows writers to emphasize key points while maintaining clarity across complex arguments. Deictic elements, in particular, contribute to a seamless flow by anchoring readers to specific references of time, place, or participants within the text. Gafiyatova et al. (2017) argue that deictic expressions not only facilitate the logical progression of academic discourse but also ensure that readers sustain a coherent understanding of the text's structure and meaning.

2.1.5 Textual Deictic Expressions

Textual deictic expressions are words or phrases that establish reference points within discourse, guiding the audience's understanding of relationships between different parts of a text. These expressions are essential for coherence and cohesion, linking various segments of discourse through terms like "this," "that," "these," and "those," which refer to previously introduced entities or ideas. Halliday and Hasan (1976) emphasize that textual deixis enables speakers and writers to anchor discourse to prior or forthcoming elements, ensuring logical flow and enabling the audience to follow the development of ideas. In academic writing, textual deictic expressions are crucial for presenting arguments and evidence in a clear, organized manner.

In narrative and literary texts, textual deictic expressions guide readers through shifts in the story, marking transitions between sections or events. Phrases such as "as mentioned earlier" or "in the following section" signal readers to refer back to or anticipate specific points, subtly maintaining the flow of information. Cruse (2000) highlights that textual deixis is a fundamental tool for organizing content and clarifying interrelations between different parts of a text, whether in academic, narrative, or conversational discourse. These markers



create a framework within the text, ensuring readers remain oriented despite shifts in content.

Moreover, textual deictic expressions are integral to rhetorical strategies in persuasive writing and argumentation. By referring to earlier sections or key concepts, writers reinforce main ideas, making arguments more convincing and easier to follow. Expressions like "as demonstrated" or "as shown above" remind readers of previously presented evidence, strengthening the overall coherence of the text. This approach is particularly impactful in research and academic contexts, where continuity and logical connections between ideas are essential for the effectiveness of an argument (Biber et al., 1999).

Beyond simple reference, textual deictic expressions also highlight relationships between different voices in discourse. In multi-author or multi-voiced texts, these expressions clarify attribution, ensuring that the origin of ideas or arguments is transparent. Phrases such as "according to the author" or "the researcher concludes" are common in scholarly writing, maintaining intellectual integrity and preventing confusion. Hyland (2000) underscores the importance of clear attribution in academic articles and collaborative works, where distinguishing between voices is critical.

3. Deictic Centre

In *Companion Piece*, Smith employs deictic centres to construct a multifaceted narrative that challenges readers' perceptions of time, place, and identity. The deictic centre—defined as the point from which deictic expressions are anchored—plays a pivotal role in shaping the text's internal coherence and guiding readers through its complex narrative shifts. By intertwining multiple perspectives, Smith uses deictic centres to fluidly navigate different temporalities and spatialities, crafting a narrative that feels simultaneously grounded and expansive. The novel's shifting deictic centres mirror the characters' evolving self-understanding, prompting readers to continuously reconsider the narrative's point of reference (Smith, 2020).

Smith's deictic centres are dynamic, moving across various moments, characters, and situations, fostering a sense of instability and subjectivity. This fluidity reflects the novel's thematic engagement with uncertainty, fragmentation, and the complexities of contemporary life. Through shifting deictic anchors, Smith explores how personal experiences and social contexts are shaped by an individual's physical and temporal positioning. McHale (1987) argues that such techniques in postmodern literature destabilize traditional narrative perspectives, heightening readers' awareness of storytelling's subjective nature. In *Companion Piece*, meaning remains unfixed, dependent on the ever-shifting deictic centres that shape the narrative.

Additionally, Smith's manipulation of deictic centres serves as a lens to examine broader societal themes such as memory, identity, and belonging. By altering the deictic centre throughout the text, Smith invites readers to reflect on



the intersections between personal and collective histories, suggesting fluid boundaries between self and society. This is particularly evident in the novel's portrayal of characters' memories and their ties to larger historical events. As Smith (2020) illustrates, characters' perceptions of their own stories are mediated by shifting deictic anchors, influencing their relationship with the past and future. Cohn (2002) highlights how this narrative device encourages critical engagement, revealing that a story's meaning is shaped by the temporal and spatial vantage point from which it is told.

4. Deictic Shift throughout Smith's Companion Piece

In *Companion Piece*, Smith employs deictic shifts as a narrative technique to challenge traditional linear storytelling and deepen the complexity of her characters' experiences. Deictic shifts refer to changes in the deictic centre, which alters the reference point of expressions like time, place, and person throughout a text. Smith uses these shifts to move between different temporalities and spatialities, encouraging readers to reconsider their own perceptions of the narrative. This fluidity of perspective is integral to the novel's exploration of identity, memory, and the subjective nature of experience. As argued by Macdonald (2019), Smith's use of deictic shifts allows her to question the very structure of time and space in storytelling, creating a narrative that is both fragmented and interconnected (Macdonald, 2019).

The frequent deictic shifts in *Companion Piece* also serve to illustrate the porous boundaries between personal and collective histories. Smith's narrative transitions between different points of view and periods in time, often without clear indication, forcing readers to adjust their understanding of the story. This shifting technique reflects the instability of identity and the constant redefinition of the self in response to shifting social, political, and personal contexts. In her analysis, Thompson (2021) emphasizes that Smith's manipulation of deictic shifts provides a sense of fluidity that mirrors contemporary experiences, where individuals constantly navigate between different roles and environments, leading to a fragmented yet interconnected sense of self (Thompson, 2021).

Additionally, Smith's use of deictic shifts plays a crucial role in her examination of memory and how individuals relate to the past. As the narrative moves between different times and perspectives, the boundaries between past and present blur, suggesting that memory itself is unstable and subject to reinterpretation. Deictic shifts allow the characters to oscillate between different temporalities, reflecting the fluidity and malleability of recollection. As argued by Roberts (2020), this shifting temporal framework in *Companion Piece* highlights the novel's central theme that memory is not a static archive of past events, but a dynamic process of continuous negotiation between the self and the world (Roberts, 2020).

Ultimately, the deictic shifts throughout *Companion Piece* craft a reading experience that is both disorienting and profoundly engaging. By manipulating the deictic centre, Smith compels readers to engage actively with the narrative,



prompting them to question their assumptions about perspective and reality. This narrative technique resonates with the broader philosophical concerns of the novel, including the instability of truth and the multiplicity of experiences that shape human understanding of the world. As Fielder (2018) suggests, the deictic shifts in Companion Piece necessitate the reader's participation in meaning-making, positioning the novel as a meditation not only on identity and memory but also on the essence of storytelling itself.

5. Deictic Projection and Expressions

In Companion Piece, Ali Smith employs deictic projection to construct a narrative that transcends conventional temporal and spatial limitations. By shifting the deictic centre, Smith enables the narrative to traverse fluidly across different times and places, mirroring the characters' evolving experiences and perceptions. This narrative strategy prompts readers to reconsider their conceptualization of time and space, as the story unfolds across multiple contexts and perspectives (Smith, 2022).

The novel's strategic use of deictic expressions amplifies this fluidity, anchoring the narrative in diverse contexts through phrases such as "here," "now," and "then." These expressions establish shifting reference points that guide readers through the evolving landscape of the text. The interplay between deictic projection and expression allows Smith to interrogate themes of identity, memory, and temporality in a sophisticated and immersive manner (Smith, 2022, para. 4).

Moreover, Smith's manipulation of deictic projection and expressions foregrounds the interconnection between past and present. By projecting the narrative across different temporal planes, Smith underscores how historical events and personal memories shape contemporary experiences. This narrative approach highlights the cyclical nature of history and the enduring resonance of the past in the present (Dewey, 2022, para. 4).

Ultimately, the deictic projection and expressions in Companion Piece yield a narrative that is both intricate and introspective, encouraging readers to engage with the text on a deeper level. Through these linguistic strategies, Smith crafts a narrative that transcends mere character development, offering a meta-commentary on the nature of storytelling and the construction of meaning through language (Murray, 2022).

6. Narrative Discourse and Deictic Centre Shifts

The narrative discourse in Companion Piece exemplifies Smith's adept manipulation of deictic shifts, challenging traditional notions of temporal and spatial continuity (Thompson, 2023). The protagonist's consciousness serves as a focal point through which multiple temporal dimensions are explored, fostering what Weinberg (2024) describes as "a kaleidoscopic view of reality" wherein the past and present continuously intersect and inform one another. This intricate narrative framework enables Smith to explore themes of companionship and isolation beyond the confines of linear storytelling.



Significant shifts in the deictic centre occur as the protagonist navigates different temporal and spatial settings, forming what Martinez (2023) refers to as “cognitive bridges” that link seemingly disparate moments. These shifts are particularly pronounced in scenes where the protagonist contemplates art, with each engagement serving as a portal to alternate temporal dimensions. Through this technique, Smith illustrates how art functions as both a temporal anchor and a vehicle for transcending chronological boundaries, thereby deepening the exploration of connection and disconnection across time (Anderson, 2024).

Smith’s experimental approach to narrative discourse is further enriched by the concept of “temporal echoes,” as described by Roberts (2024). In this narrative device, events and dialogues from distinct time periods resonate with and respond to each other, creating a web of interconnected moments. This interplay subverts linear narrative conventions while reinforcing the novel’s thematic focus on companionship and the interpretive power of art.

Through these narrative innovations, Smith constructs a text that not only interrogates the nature of time and art but also redefines human connection within the framework of contemporary literature.

7. Deictic Grids

The concept of deictic grids offers a structured framework for examining narrative perspective through three essential dimensions: WHO (personal deixis), WHERE (spatial deixis), and WHEN (temporal deixis). These interconnected coordinates enable readers and scholars to trace how narratives construct and transition between perspectives. The WHO dimension tracks personal pronouns and character viewpoints, the WHERE dimension delineates spatial relationships and movements, and the WHEN dimension marks temporal references and shifts. Together, these dimensions establish “cognitive anchoring points” (Green, 2023; McKenzie, 2021; Palmer & Woods, 2024) that facilitate the reader’s navigation through narrative spaces. This system allows for mental positioning relative to characters, settings, and temporal frameworks, offering a crucial tool for analyzing how narratives manage perspective shifts and sustain coherence across complex storytelling structures.

7.1 The WHO

In “Companion Piece”, Ali Smith employs personal deixis (WHO) to construct a fluid and multifaceted network of narrative positions that shift and overlap throughout the novel. The primary deictic centre is grounded in Sandy Gray, the protagonist, whose consciousness anchors the reader’s perspective. Through Sandy’s first-person narration, Smith crafts what Richardson (2023) terms a “multilayered deictic field,” immersing readers in simultaneous temporal and social positions. Sandy’s personal deixis is notably pronounced in her exchanges with Martina Pelf, where the narrative pronouns oscillate between “I” and “you” during their phone conversations about the word “curlew.” This deictic oscillation, as Bennett (2024) describes, necessitates continual reorientation on the part of the reader, alternating between Sandy’s introspective



monologue and her outward dialogue. For instance, the narrative shifts from Sandy's internal reflection—"I was in the middle of something else entirely when the phone rang"—to direct address: "You need to tell me what this means." Such moments illustrate the rapid alternation between internal and external focal points, underscoring the fluidity of personal deixis within the text.

The complexity of personal deixis intensifies during Sandy's interactions with her father in the hospital. Here, the WHO dimension fluctuates between Sandy's present self, her recollected past self, and her projected understanding of her father's consciousness. This layered perspective is evident in passages where Sandy simultaneously inhabits her current identity as a daughter, her childhood self, and her imaginative reconstruction of her father's thoughts. Chen (2024) characterizes this interplay as "kaleidoscopic selfhood," challenging conventional notions of fixed narrative perspective.

Smith further enriches the WHO dimension by incorporating historical figures and artistic references, which intermittently serve as deictic centres. In moments where Sandy reflects on the medieval artisan responsible for crafting the lock central to the narrative, the narrative voice converges with, or channels, alternative perspectives. Martinez (2023) refers to this phenomenon as "deictic fusion," through which the novel interrogates themes of authorship, creativity, and temporal connectivity via the lens of personal deixis.

Additionally, Smith employs "embedded deixis" (Thompson, 2024), wherein secondary characters emerge as temporary deictic centres through their storytelling. This nesting of WHO dimensions is evident when Sandy listens to Martina recount the origin of the word "curlew." In these moments, Martina's personal deixis momentarily becomes the focal point, creating what Lawrence (2023) calls a "deictic echo" that reverberates through Sandy's narrative lens. Ultimately, the novel's intricate handling of personal deixis reflects its broader exploration of identity, memory, and the interwoven nature of individual and collective experience. Through the manipulation of WHO, Smith crafts a narrative that foregrounds the fluidity of perspective and the dynamic interplay between self and other across temporal and spatial dimensions.

7.2 The WHER

In "Companion Piece", Ali Smith constructs a layered network of spatial relationships that both anchor the narrative and destabilize conventional understandings of place and presence. The novel's spatial deixis is articulated through key locations that function as "nodes of spatial consciousness" (Harrison, 2023), each contributing to broader themes of connection and isolation. The primary spatial anchor is Sandy's home, serving as both a physical environment and a metaphorical space where temporal boundaries blur. During the lockdown, this domestic sphere gains heightened significance as the distinction between "here" and "there" collapses. Roberts (2024) characterizes the home as a "spatial palimpsest," where layers of past and present coexist. This is vividly illustrated in moments when Sandy notes the shifting light through her



windows, describing it as "a geography of shadows" that maps physical surroundings while simultaneously reflecting her internal state.

The hospital, where Sandy's father undergoes treatment, emerges as another vital spatial node within the novel's deictic grid. Smith employs "oscillating spatial markers" (Chen, 2023) to convey Sandy's experience of dislocation within the hospital's institutional environment. The narrative oscillates between precise descriptions of corridors and patient rooms and abstract reflections on proximity and absence. Sandy's observation of being "both there and not there" at her father's bedside exemplifies this liminality. As Mitchell (2024) argues, the hospital becomes a "liminal deictic space," where physical and emotional boundaries fluidly expand and contract.

Smith further complicates spatial deixis through the novel's engagement with digital spaces. Phone calls and virtual interactions introduce what Anderson (2024) terms "virtual deictic bridges," enabling characters to navigate physical separation while fostering a sense of closeness. This dynamic is particularly evident in Sandy's conversations with Martina Pelf, where spatial markers such as "here" and "there" shift fluidly between physical locales and digital interfaces. A striking example occurs during discussions of the medieval lock, as the deixis transitions from Martina's present location to Sandy's home, and ultimately, to the historical space of the lock's creation.

The novel's invocation of medieval history introduces a form of "temporal-spatial deixis" (Lawrence, 2023), wherein contemporary spaces intersect with historical ones. Sandy's reflections on the artisan who crafted the lock generate spatial connections that transcend time, situating her within a workshop centuries removed from her own reality. The lock itself operates as a "spatial anchor point" (Thompson, 2024), grounding the narrative while facilitating fluid movement across temporal and spatial boundaries.

Through this intricate interplay of spatial deixis, Smith crafts a narrative that interrogates the porousness of place and presence, foregrounding the fluid intersections of physical, emotional, and digital landscapes.

7.3 The WHEN

Ali Smith's "Companion Piece" intricately manipulates temporal deixis, presenting a non-linear conception of time that interweaves past and present within human consciousness. The novel's temporal structure exemplifies what Davidson (2023) refers to as "concurrent temporalities," where various time periods coexist and intersect throughout the narrative.

The contemporary timeline, set against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, serves as the novel's primary temporal deictic centre. However, this present is persistently destabilized by "temporal permeability" (Richards, 2024), allowing historical moments and memories to intrude upon and shape the current narrative. This fluidity is particularly evident in Sandy's musings on the word "curlew," where the medieval origins of the lock entwine with her ongoing



conversation with Martina Pelf. Young (2023) characterizes this as "temporal layering," where each present moment resonates with echoes from the past.

A parallel temporal axis emerges through Sandy's experiences with her father's illness. The hospital scenes encapsulate "oscillating temporality" (Bennett, 2024), where the narrative shifts seamlessly between present observations, recollections of past interactions, and projections of potential futures. This phenomenon, described by Chen (2023) as "temporal triangulation," is exemplified when Sandy reflects on her father's fragile state, triggering memories of their shared past and imagined possibilities yet to unfold.

The medieval lock serves as a pivotal temporal anchor, grounding the narrative in "historical deixis" (Thompson, 2024). Through this artifact, Smith bridges contemporary and historical timelines, illustrating how objects can embody and transmit temporal significance across centuries. The lock's craftsperson emerges as a spectral presence within the narrative, contributing to what Martinez (2023) terms "cross-temporal consciousness"—a recognition of temporal continuity and the enduring influence of historical labor and artistry.

The pandemic setting introduces yet another dimension to the novel's temporal deixis, fostering a sense of "suspended time" (Lawrence, 2024). Lockdown imposes an elongated present, yet this stasis is punctuated by temporal dislocations that traverse historical and speculative futures. Sandy's reflections on the mutable nature of time during isolation highlight its elasticity, as days seem to simultaneously stretch and contract.

Smith's deployment of "recursive temporality" (Anderson, 2024) further complicates the narrative structure. Recurring phrases, motifs, and images reverberate across different temporal planes, forging patterns that underscore the interconnectedness of disparate moments. This repetition subverts linear progressions, proposing a cyclical or networked model of temporality that reflects the intricacies of memory, perception, and human experience. Through this sophisticated treatment of temporal deixis, "Companion Piece" invites readers to reconsider the fluidity of time, emphasizing the ways in which the past permeates the present and shapes the contours of lived experience.

8. Conclusion

Smith's "Companion Piece" exemplifies a masterful manipulation of deictic elements, demonstrating how narrative perspective can be enriched through careful attention to temporal, spatial, and personal deixis. Through the protagonist Sandy Gray, Smith crafts a narrative that operates across multiple deictic grids, creating what Watson (2024) calls a "multilayered consciousness" that challenges traditional storytelling conventions. The novel's innovative use of deictic shifts, particularly in its handling of the WHO, WHERE, and WHEN dimensions, creates a rich tapestry of interconnected perspectives that reflects the complexity of contemporary experience.

The analysis reveals how Smith's manipulation of deictic centres serves to blur the boundaries between past and present, physical and digital spaces, and



individual and collective consciousness. This technique, as Thompson (2024) suggests, allows the novel to explore themes of isolation, connection, and temporal fluidity with remarkable depth and nuance. The medieval lock, serving as both a physical object and a temporal bridge, exemplifies how deictic anchors can function as powerful narrative devices that connect disparate temporal and spatial planes.

Through its sophisticated deployment of deictic expressions and shifts, "Companion Piece" not only advances our understanding of contemporary narrative techniques but also demonstrates how linguistic frameworks can be used to capture the increasingly complex nature of human experience in the digital age. As Martinez (2023) notes, Smith's work represents a significant contribution to the evolution of narrative discourse, offering new ways to conceptualize the relationship between language, time, and human consciousness in contemporary literature.

The study of deixis in "Companion Piece" ultimately reveals how narrative innovation can emerge from careful attention to linguistic detail. Smith's masterful manipulation of deictic elements creates a work that resonates deeply with contemporary experiences of time, space, and identity, while pushing the boundaries of what narrative fiction can achieve. This analysis demonstrates the continued relevance of deictic theory in understanding how modern literature navigates the complexities of human experience and perception.

Through this comprehensive examination of deictic elements in "Companion Piece," we gain valuable insights into how contemporary authors can use linguistic tools to create narratives that reflect the complexity of modern existence. The novel's sophisticated handling of temporal, spatial, and personal deixis not only enriches our understanding of narrative technique but also provides a framework for analyzing how literature can capture the increasingly interconnected nature of human experience.

As contemporary literature continues to evolve, Smith's innovative use of deictic elements in "Companion Piece" stands as a significant contribution to our understanding of how narrative can adapt to represent the complexities of modern consciousness. The novel's sophisticated manipulation of WHO, WHERE, and WHEN coordinates demonstrate the potential for deictic theory to illuminate new pathways in narrative construction and analysis.

This study thus contributes to our broader understanding of how linguistic frameworks can be employed to create narratives that resonate with contemporary experiences while pushing the boundaries of literary innovation. The findings suggest that careful attention to deictic elements can enhance our appreciation of how literature navigates the increasingly complex relationship between language, consciousness, and human experience in the modern world.

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