
The role of spatial and temporal deixis in enhancing narrative understanding in *Die Sommer*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how spatial and temporal deixis shape readers' understanding of Ronya Othmann's *Die Sommer* (2020), a novel alternating between German and Kurdish settings and perspectives. A qualitative analysis of deictic expressions identifies forms of spatial deixis (e.g., specific place names; vertical references like "sits on the floor" vs. "starry sky above"; and dynamic movements) and temporal deixis (e.g., historical years, seasonal markers, tense shifts, and temporal adverbs). Results show spatial deixis anchors Leyla's story in intercultural spaces, guiding reader orientation and evoking her bicultural identity amid historical conflict. Temporal deixis places events in the general political and historical context, linking personal biography to collective memory. This study presents deixis as a narrative device that enables deeper reader involvement in a transcultural storyworld. By integrating Bühler's and Ehlich's deixis theories with narrative analysis, it contributes to understanding narrative structure, complex intercultural dynamics, and multiple cultural perspectives in contemporary transcultural literature and narratives.

Keywords: Narrative structure, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, transcultural literature

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, deixis studies have increasingly emphasized how deictic elements contribute to shaping identity, space, and time in literary texts (Hutter & Serova, 2023). These theoretical underpinnings have direct relevance to narratives such as Ronya Othmann's *Die Sommer* (2020), which shifts between German and Kurdish contexts across different temporal levels. Building on this, Bühler's seminal concept of deixis as a language pointer (*sprachliche Zeigwörter*) defines deictic expressions by their reference to the speaker, time, or place of an utterance. These expressions depend on the communicative context and rely upon the origo (the origo-center) as the main reference point. Purwo (1984) elaborated on this idea by creating three different dimensions for exophoric (external) deixis: person, spatial, and temporal. Each dimension relies on observable elements in the discourse context.

Ehlich (2011) further differentiated deixis from anaphora as distinct referential types. He observed that deictic procedures orient listeners during discourse (*beim sprachlichen Handeln*), whereas anaphora focuses attention within the text itself. In *Deixis und narrativer Diskurs*, Ehlich said that deictic expressions not only function as language markers but also as a means for creating layered meanings critical for literary interpretation. Contemporary German literature illustrates this trend: authors increasingly use deixis as a narrative strategy to explore and express cultural identity (Lum et al., 2022; Tenbrink, 2022). For example, in *Die Sommer* Othmann employs deictic cues to bridge German and Kurdish milieus, enacting cultural negotiation through language.

Understanding deixis in speech is best approached through a context-based framework (Ehlich, 2011): key components such as speaker, addressee, time, and place define meaning. Lexical items that have their meanings determined by context are known as deictics (Redder, 2019). Deixis is thus essential for guiding reader orientation; as Stockwell (2020) points out, "the cognitive processing of linguistic pointers leads to the construction of complex mental spaces." This is particularly evident in *Die Sommer*, which alternates between Leyla's life in Germany and her family's homeland in Kurdistan.

The narrative is organized by intricate networks of personal, temporal, and spatial references that

simultaneously connect different cultural spaces and time levels. As Rapaport et al. (2013) suggest, such complexity can challenge readers' comprehension. By analyzing *Die Sommer* through the lens of Bühler's and Ehlich's theories, we show how Othmann's purposeful use of deixis not only situates events in space and time but also reflects and interrogates the characters' hybrid cultural identity and historical context. This method guarantees that deixis is not an abstraction of linguistic thought, but a narrative device that contributes to the novel's meaning rather than merely a function of that meaning (Kita, 2003).

Such instability in deictic reference is particularly evident in bicultural narratives. When texts frame multiple cultural settings, temporal and spatial references can appear inconsistent or even contradictory, meaning that deixis's role becomes more complex than in monolingual narratives. As Stockwell (2020) reminds us, linguistics traditionally focuses on monolingual, monocultural corpora, obscuring our view of transcultural referential space. In other words, current research often overlooks how deixis operates across cultural boundaries. This highlights a clear gap: existing studies have not fully explored how deixis functions in narratives that weave together different cultural and temporal experiences.

Over the past decades, deixis has gained scholarly interest that stretched beyond pure linguistics and into literary studies. For example, Fludernik (2003) showed that temporal adverbs (e.g., yesterday, then, soon) serve not only to orient readers but also to structure narrative time in layered, non-linear ways. Tsur (2008) demonstrated in *Ozymandias* how shifting perspectives give repeated expressions different meanings, engaging readers' emotions. Vandelanotte (2019) found that skillful narrators use deixis to guide readers' perceptions of events and characters, and Dancygier (2019) noted that proximal versus distal expressions (such as here/there, now/ then) add depth to narrative timelines. Altogether, these studies provide a window into deixis's flexible role in shaping temporal perspectives and emotional resonance.

However, most of this work examines traditional narratives with familiar patterns. As Fludernik & Packard (2021) note, we lack studies of more "innovative configurations" in modern works. Nünning (2022), similarly, notes how detailed linguistic analyses of the deictic structures in transcultural texts remain to be developed. In other words, the gap is that deixis in contemporary, cross-cultural narratives remains underexplored. Othmann's *Die Sommer* (2020) exemplifies such a text: its non-linear narrative and German–Kurdish settings create a heterogeneous reference space in which traditional ich-hier-jetzt assumptions are challenged. This novel thus serves as an ideal case study to address the gap. By examining how Othmann uses spatial and temporal deixis across cultures, this study offers a unique contribution that bridges linguistic analysis with literary interpretation of transcultural narrative.

This novelty is in the integration of linguistic analysis of deixis with transcultural literary interpretation. Through a systematic examination of deictic structures, this research gives a deeper understanding of the complex spatial and temporal dimensions in transcultural narratives (Feshchenko, 2023). Nünning (2022) further emphasized that a more advanced understanding of deictic mechanisms significantly improves readers' capacity to understand complex narrative structures, expanding their literary competence.

This study examines the spatial and temporal deictic elements in Ronya Othmann's *Die Sommer* (2020) and investigates how these elements shape the novel's narrative, particularly regarding its intercultural dynamics. The novel grapples with complex themes, family history of war, German–Kurdish ties, oppression, and political turmoil in Syria (including the Kurdish resistance against ISIS)—which can challenge readers' understanding. In order to clarify the work, we pose the following research questions: (1) What are the major spatial and temporal deictic expressions used in *Die Sommer*? (2) How do these deictic expressions influence the narrative's portrayal of intercultural identity and historical experience? Answering these questions will show how a focus on deixis can help readers interpret the characters' perspectives and the novel's messages more clearly. As Feshchenko (2023) suggests, detailed textual analysis can illuminate difficult narrative passages, and Redder (2019) argues that understanding deictics aids in decoding textual meaning. Thus, explicitly addressing these questions guides our analysis of *Die Sommer*.

METHOD

Primary data for this study consist of deictic words and phrases, as well as narrative elements such as plot and setting, drawn from the German novel *Die Sommer* by Ronya Othmann (Carl Hanser Verlag, 2020). We identified deictic linguistic units: words, phrases, and sentences whose meaning depends on context, as the main data through careful close reading. To analyze these, we employed three complementary techniques: referential sorting (identity) analysis, distributional analysis, and sign-oriented reading. In referential sorting, we categorized each deictic expression by its referent (place and time) based on contextual clues (Sudaryanto, 2015). In distributional analysis, we examined how these

expressions are distributed across the text: we split sentences into constituents to detect patterns and recurring deictic markers. Finally, sign-oriented reading considers deictic expressions as contextual signs, interpreting how they function pragmatically within the narrative. For example, we noted whether *hier* ('here') or *dort* ('there') aligned with particular narrative viewpoints.

Data validity was ensured through in-depth observation, triangulation, and peer discussion. Following Moleong (2017), we used observer triangulation by collaborating with fellow researchers to cross-check deictic identifications and interpretations. Additionally, our interpretations were validated using relevant theoretical frameworks: Bühler's (1997) and Ehlich's (2007) deixis theories (linguistics) and narrative frameworks from Fludernik (2021), Stockwell (2020), and Dancygier (2019) (literary studies).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Die Sommer by Othmann (2020) is a socio-political novel that was the main source of this study. The main theme was about the historical journey of the protagonist, including the war's impacts, German and Kurdish cultural ties, and political oppression in Syria. These themes develop in contrast dimensions: the world of Germany (Leipzig) and Kurdistan (a Kurdish village in Syria/Turkey), as well as across different periods. The main character, Leyla, exists within this space and time, where her linguistic experiences are marked by the use of deixis elements.

This study analyzed the use of deixis elements in the novel, with a focus on spatial and temporal deixis, and the role of these elements in improving readers' understanding of narrative texts, especially in the complex structure of intercultural deictics. The analysis results found various forms of those deictics in *Die Sommer*.

Spatial Deixis

Deictic elements are linguistic forms that tell the situational context and are used as referential markers whose interpretation is highly dependent on context (Basile et al., 2019). Specifically, spatial deixis means the encoding of relative location in a particular context. In the novel, this is clear in the tension that arises between Germany and Kurdistan. Spatial deixis is the main linguistic device to illustrate the divided reality in Leyla's life, split between Germany and Kurdistan/the Middle East.

Our analysis revealed multiple forms of spatial deixis, each reflecting aspects of Leyla's dual existence between Germany and Kurdistan. Below, we outline the primary categories of spatial deixis and discuss how they orient the narrative and characters.

Table 1. Spatial Deixis in the Novel *Die Sommer*

No	Forms of Spatial Deixis	Deictic Expression
1.	Concrete location descriptions	Regions in Germany: <i>Leipzig, Bielefeld, Celle, bei München, Mensa</i> Spaces: <i>Lecture hall, Library, city, new apartment, new room in a new neighborhood.</i> Regions in Kurdistan/the Middle East: <i>that village, Aleppo, Shingal, Rojava, Deir-e-Zor, Nusaybin, Tirbespi, Kobane, Daraa, Hama, Idlib, Damascus, northern Syria, Turkey area.</i> Movement between spaces: <i>on the way from the tram stop to the seminar hall, on the way from the seminar hall to the library.</i> Movement in travel: <i>They landed in Aleppo.</i>
2.	Spatial deixis in Germany and Kurdistan	here (<i>hier</i>) vs. there (<i>dort</i>) <i>"Why do they all look the same here?"</i> This deictic expression references the airport in Syria. <i>"We always swim there."</i> This deictic expression refers to the Baltic Sea/the country of Germany.
3.	Spatial orientation through prepositional phrases	Vertical orientation: <i>"underneath the dark joints, "Leyla sits on the floor."</i> These expressions refer to position in space. Above: <i>"above their heads the starry sky", "above their heads", "above the stove in the yard."</i> These expressions refer to places in the form of objects. Opposition on top/bottom: <i>"She connects top and bottom like this."</i> Inside/outside opposition: <i>"The air inside is warm, flowing towards her", "It's very sunny outside"</i>
4.	Processual-dynamic spatiality	<i>"Leyla went to the lake with Bernadette", "went to the library", "went to her room", "She went home", "went to the Baltic Sea with Sascha", "returned to Leipzig", "A few weeks later, her mother brought Leyla to town."</i>

Temporal Deixis

Temporal deixis refers to how time is encoded according to the context (Zimmerer et al., 2017). In *Die Sommer* appears in several categories, each aligning Leyla's personal narrative with broader historical contexts. The following analysis outlines these temporal deixis forms and their narrative roles.

Table 2. Temporal Deixis in the Novel *Die Sommer*

No	Type of Temporal Deixis	Deictic Expression
1.	Concrete events	<i>'It was the end of summer in 1973'</i> (concrete historical context) <i>'In 2011, they were very enthusiastic'</i> (referring to the Arab Revolutions) <i>'When the massacre of Armenians began in the early 20th century'</i> <i>'1915, 1916'</i> (referring to genocide) <i>'In 1987, I applied for citizenship as a stateless person'</i> Concrete dates ("1962", "1987", "1945") link personal stories with collective history.
2.	Seasonal cycle references	<i>"Es ist Hochsommer"</i> 'the height of summer', <i>"im Winter"</i> <i>'in winter', "im Herbst", 'in autumn'.</i>
3.	Narrative tense structure (tense usage)	Switch between past tense (<i>Präteritum</i>) and historical present tense (<i>historischem Präsens</i>) Use of perfect tense for a completed action (<i>Perfekt</i>): <i>"Hat sie geheiratet"</i> 'got married' Use of past perfect tense (<i>Plusquamperfekt</i>): <i>"hatte sich vorgestellt"</i> 'had imagined'
4.	Temporal adverbs	<i>"jetzt"</i> (now): <i>"Jetzt können sie uns nicht mehr schützen."</i> 'Now they can no longer protect us.' <i>"damals"</i> (back then): <i>"...damals noch ein Kleinkind"</i> '...back then, she still a toddler.' <i>"früher"</i> : <i>"Wie früher auch heftete sie Kopien"</i> 'As in the past she stapled copies.' <i>"nachts"</i> (every night): <i>"Nachts träumte Leyla vom Dorf"</i> <i>- Every night, Leyla dreams of the village.</i> <i>"am Morgen"</i> (in the morning): <i>"Am Morgen schlug Sascha vor..."</i> 'In the morning, Sascha suggested...' <i>"später"</i> (later): <i>"drei Tage später," "zwei Tage später"</i> 'three days later, two days later' <i>"irgendwann"</i> (sometimes): <i>"Irgendwann schlafe ich bei dir, Oma."</i> 'Someday, I (Leyla) will sleep with you, Grandma.'

Discussion

Spatial Deixis forms and their role in Die Sommer narrative text

Spatial deixis is a linguistic form used to indicate the position of objects or events about the speaker or listener within a given context. This linguistic aspect is very important for conveying spatial relationships and is used in various languages and contexts. It appears in varied linguistic forms, such as adverbs, prepositional phrases, and demonstrative expressions (Lander & Haegeman, 2018). Spatial deixis is essential in helping readers situate themselves within the story's setting, which should be done on a narrative level. Deixis plays as a point of reference that allows readers to follow where events unfold and track how characters move through different locations. This becomes even important in complex narratives, where spatial organization shapes plot development and influences how readers interpret the story (Caracciolo, 2013; Fludernik & Keen, 2014).

Spatial deixis also increases reader engagement by making the story's setting more accessible and immersive. Through connecting events and characters to specific spatial environments, deixis allows readers to experience the story in a real sense. Not only does this process enhance emotional and expressive involvement, but it also shifts the setting from something static to a dynamic element for the making of meaning in this rich narrative space; readers actively participate in creating their experience of the story world (Caracciolo, 2013).

Our findings indicate several key forms of spatial deixis in *Die Sommer*, which we detail below in terms of their narrative significance.

Concrete Locations in Germany (konkrete Orte in Deutschland)

By naming actual cities like Leipzig, Bielefeld, and Munich, *Die Sommer* anchors its narrative in concrete cultural spaces. This grounding serves as a shifting deictic origo (Bühler) that orients Leyla's bicultural identity in physical locations. Each city name becomes a cognitive landmark, linking Leyla's migration journey to familiar geography and framing her outsider perspective within the reader's world.

Not only does it heighten the realism of the narrative, but it also makes the storyline more relatable and understandable to readers. For the reader, this creates a connection between the fictional events and the reader's lived reality (Lum et al., 2022). In the novel, these spatial references illustrate the lived experiences of political asylum seekers in Germany, as reflected in the following excerpts.

- (1) „Ich bin in **Leipzig** angekommen. Später war ich in **Bielefeld**, dann in **Celle**.“
I arrived in **Leipzig**. Later, I was in **Bielefeld**, then in **Celle**. (p. 134)
- (2) „Bei **München** geht Leyla aufs Gymnasium.“
Leyla attended high school near **München**.
- (3) „in der **Mensa**, in den **Hörsälen**, in den **Bibliotheken**..“
in the **canteen**, in the **lecture halls**, in the **libraries**. (p. 191)
- (4) „Sie bekamen eine neue **Wohnung**, in einem neuen **Stadtviertel**, mit neuen Nachbarn.“
They got a new **apartment**, in a new **neighborhood**, with new **neighbors**. (p.201)

Taken together, the spatial deixis in these excerpts particularly highlighted the city names and the reference to a new apartment to identify locations while also reflecting significances in the characters' migration journeys. Specifically, excerpts (1), (2), and (4) marked points of arrival, education, employment, and exile, as well as transitional spaces encountered by political asylum seekers. Moreover, in 4re3, excerpt (3), the mention of university spaces such as the canteen, lecture halls, and libraries highlighted Leyla's everyday academic environment. However, although Leyla is involved with and seems to care about academic life, Othmann (2020) notes that she remained positioned as an outsider. Her presence in institutional spaces did not fully erase her sense of alienation because of the continued, ineluctable tension between inclusion and marginalization that is the ongoing experience of migrants in host societies.

Concrete locations in Kurdistan/Middle East (Konkrete Orte in Kurdistan/Nahost)

On the one hand, this region represents an area of ongoing conflict. On the other hand, it forms the topographic area of the protagonist's home region. This dual significance is evident in the following excerpts:

- (5) „Das Dorf lag in **Nordsyrien**, nahe an der **Türkei**.“
The village was located in **northern Syria**, close to **Turkey**. (p. 1)
- (6) „Es war bloß ein Dorf von vielen zwischen **Tirbespî** und **Rmelan**.“
It was just one of the many villages between **Tirbespî** and **Rmelan**. (p. 4)

The deictic expressions in the data function to describe the specific areas of *Shingal*, *Rojava*, *Nusaybin*, *Aleppo*, *Damascus*, *Deir-e-Zor*, *Daraa*, *Hama*, *Idlib*, and *Kobane*. When it names towns like Aleppo, Kobane, and Rojava, the text carries the burden of collective trauma in those places. Each deictic place-name summons memories of conflict and loss; for example, 'Aleppo destroyed by Assad' immediately conjures the Syrian war. In this way, spatial deixis here threads Leyla's own story into the texture of Kurdish history, situating her identity with sites of resistance and suffering. This is exemplified in the following data:

- (7) „Im Internet sah sie das von Assad vernichtete **Aleppo**, die Ermordung der Jesiden durch den IS.“
On the Internet, she saw **Aleppo** destroyed by Assad and the murder of the Yazidis by ISIS. (p. 1)

By specifically naming certain Kurdish regions, it encourages readers to construct a mental map of Leyla's divided world. Each geographical reference becomes an emotional signpost; readers vividly imagine war-torn villages and border crossings from Leyla's viewpoint. Spatial deixis as such serves as a narrative conduit: It collapses cultural distance and lets the reader 'walk' with Leyla through landscapes charged with meaning. This process involves the emotional expression of the storyline, helping readers to imagine the characters' movements and interactions within the spatial framework of the narrative (Fludernik & Keen, 2014).

Movement between spaces (Bewegung zwischen Räumen)

Moreover, the main spatial-structural motive that stands out most prominently is the movement between spaces, such as within the city or during travel. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

- (8) „Auf dem Weg von der **Straßenbahnhaltestelle zum Seminargebäude**“
On the way from **the tram stop to the seminar building**. (p.4)
- (9) „Dann **den Schotterweg am Garten entlang**“
Then, along **the gravel path near the garden**. (p. 4)
- (10) „Auf dem Weg vom **Seminargebäude zur Bibliothek**“
On the way from **the seminar building to the library**. (p.191)

In these examples, spatial deixis not only encodes physical locations but also positions space as a site of activity and a domain of cognition. This kind of use allows more dynamic engagement of the readers and the narrative environment. Here, spatial deixis supports a deeper consideration of the environmental and social facets within the narrative (Sales, 2022).

Cross-border movements-traveling to Kurdistan (über Grenzen - Reisen nach Kurdistan)

Cross-border journeys are also articulated through expressions of spatial deixis, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

- (11) „Jeden Sommer flogen sie **in das Land**, in dem der Vater aufgewachsen war.“
Every summer, they flew to the country where the father had grown up. (p. 9)
- (12) „Sie sind **in Aleppo** gelandet.“
They landed **in Aleppo**. (p. 11)
- (13) „Wenn sie dann endlich **ankamen** und aus dem Flugzeug stiegen und ihnen ein heißer Wind entgegenblies...“
When they finally **arrived** and got off the plane, a hot wind blew towards them... (p. 10)

These expressions of spatial deixis, related to transnational movement, reflect a journey that connects the protagonist, Leyla, to her ancestral homeland. However, this connection does come with its complexity, as it is often accompanied by uncertainty, border surveillance, torture, and violence. Furthermore, the author employs spatial deixis in nuanced ways: static geographical locations (e.g., *Leipzig, Aleppo*) are used to construct a sense of geographical space, institutional spaces (e.g., *canteen, library*) signify educational settings and emotional distance, rural spaces in Kurdistan (e.g., *Tel Khatoun*) embody notions of belonging and personal history, while transitional spaces of mobility (e.g., *airports, footpaths*) signify migration and liminality. The purpose of using these deixis expressions is to create diverse spatial concepts in narrating identity as something that is moving, concrete, and can be used as a discussion theme (Bridgeman, 2007).

Spatial deixis expressions between Germany and Kurdistan: here (hier) vs. there (dort)

The deictic expressions *here (hier)* and *there (dort)* are fundamental to spatial deixis, serving as the main ground for indicating proximity or distance. These adverbs are frequently used to establish spatial reference points relative to the speaker's location (Lander & Haegeman, 2018).

Here (*hier*) and there (*dort*) emerge as shifting origos in the narrative, materializing Leyla's liminal identity between two homelands. Each use of *hier/dort* marks a pivot in perspective: for example, "*hier*" often anchors the narrative in German settings, while "*dort*" points to Kurdish locales. This constant deictic shift not only orients the plot but also symbolizes Leyla's cultural tension – her sense of belonging is never fixed to one place. Consider the following excerpts:

- (14) „Leyla sitzt in ihrem Gymnasium **hier** bei München...“
Here, Leyla goes to school near the city of München... (p. 1)
- (15) „Hier lernten wir Vokabeln, **dort** wurde gekämpft.“
Here we learned vocabulary, **there** we fought. (p. 43)
- (16) „Hier tragen die Menschen Jeans, Sportschuhe und T-Shirts.“

Here, people wear jeans, sneakers, and T-shirts.

In Leyla's narration, 'here' (*hier*) typically signals everyday life in Germany, a site of schooling and routines, yet it is tinged with estrangement. Germany is 'here' in a physical sense, but this 'here' (*hier*) is '*nah, aber fremd*' (near yet foreign) to her. In other words, the word *hier* not only designates a location but also highlights Leyla's emotional distance and outsider status even within Germany. Germany is depicted not merely as a geographical location, but as a space for unfamiliarity, ignorance, and separation from violence and history. Interestingly, the deictic expression *here* can also mean close, but foreign (*hier - nah, aber fremd*). This is evident in a scene set at a Syrian airport, where Lelya reflects:

- (17) „*Warum sehen die alle gleich aus **hier**?*“
Why do they all look the same **here**?' (p. 11).

This phrase appears in the description of the situation in which Leyla observes people from the Syrian secret service. Although she is geographically located in Syria, the homeland of her father, the term *here* (*hier*) is still used. This highlights that spatial deixis operates not only geographically, but also in terms of perspective. *The place is here in a physical sense*, yet it feels unfamiliar and emotionally distant (Othmann, 2020). In this case, *here* refers to a concrete physical presence while simultaneously indicating emotional alienation and uncertainty. This statement underscores Leyla's alienation, even within a location that is culturally associated with her family's origins (Othmann, 2020). The deixis expressions there (*dort*), such as:

- (18) „***Dort** lebten meine Großeltern, **dort** war der Brunnen, **dort** die Felder, **dort** die Geschichten*“
There my grandparents lived, there was the well, there were the fields, there were a lot of history had happened. (p. 4–5).

This spatial deixis represents closeness to family and ancestral land, yet it simultaneously invokes a history of violence. Similarly:

- (19) „***Dort** explodierten die Minen, **dort** verschwanden Menschen.*“
Mines exploded **there**, and many people disappeared **there**. (p. 17).

Conversely, *Dort* evokes Leyla's ancestral village: it speaks of close family bonds and tradition, yet it also carries danger and loss. Calling the Kurdish village 'dort' makes it simultaneously intimate and haunting, a home rich in memory but scarred by war, a homeland with trauma, underscoring the protagonist's connection to a place that is beloved and yet the phrase consistently refers to the village of Tel Khatoun in northern Syria/Kurdistan, a place of ancestry, tradition, and memories, but also associated with war and existential threats. However, the use of the deictic expression *there* can also express spatial distance while denoting emotional familiarity. Consider the following line:

- (20) „*Wir schwimmen immer dort.*“
We always swim **there**. (p. 132)

Although this statement refers to the Baltic Sea in Germany, Leyla's current place of residence, it is labelled *there*, not *here*. She refers to Germany as *there* even though she lives in the country. This suggests a shift in perspective; she was likely in Kurdistan or Syria at the time, referring to Germany as the place she would soon leave.

Interestingly, *there* (*dort*) is not associated with alienation, but with reality, childhood, and repetition. In this sense, Germany is framed as an everyday place for rituals and order. We always swim *there* suggests familiarity, ritual, and regularity (Othmann, 2020). The use of deictic expressions referring to a specific region also reflects the dimension of perspective change (*Dynamik des Perspektivwechsels*), as the spatial terms like *here* and *there* are not fixed to national boundaries but depend on the speaker's point of view. For instance, „*Hier*“ kann Syrien sein – aber auch Deutschland.

The term *here* can refer to Syria or Germany, while „*Dort*“ kann Heimat bedeuten – oder Ferne. The term *there* may signify a hometown or a distant place.

The interpretation of the deictic expression *here (hier)* vs. *there (dort)* in this novel is context-dependent, influenced by both linguistic and extralinguistic factors, which can vary significantly in the context of different cultural and temporal frameworks of identity (Zeman, 2017). The deictic expressions thus serve not only as spatial markers but also as devices of emotional and cultural positioning, reflecting the protagonist's negotiation of self across multiple geographies.

Spatial form of prepositional phrases (Raumorientierung durch Präpositionalphrasen)

Deictic expressions to describe vertical spatial relationships, such as *above/below* or *inside/outside*, not only describe places, but can also convey strong, prominent emotional and social meanings (Forker, 2020).

Vertical orientation: down/up/down (Vertikale Orientierung: unten/auf/unter)

For example:

- (21) „*Leyla saß auf dem Boden.*“
Leyla sat on the floor. (p. 5).

This seemingly simple spatial description extends beyond a physical position. Sitting on the floor becomes an expression of physical closeness to the earth, a moment of calm and reflection. A more metaphorical vertical reference is found *under the dark segment - unter den dunklen Fugen* (p. 5), which refers to an invisible structure that symbolizes the protagonist's confrontation with history and trauma. Such complex deictic elements enhance their interpretation engagement, allowing deeper insight, narrative depth, and character dynamics (Hallet & Neumann, 2015).

Vertical orientation: Over/Above/Up (Vertikale Orientierung: über/oben)

The upward spatial orientation is particularly associated with protection and expansiveness.

- (22) „... *über ihren Köpfen der Sternenhimmel.*“
... above their heads, the starry sky. (p. 6)
(23) „... *über dem Ofen im Hof.*“
... above the fireplace chimney. (p. 6)

This choice of diction creates a feeling of safety through *the fireplace chimney* or infinity and vastness from *the starry sky*. These upward spatial openings allow room for dreams and memories, but also for latent threats, such as airplanes and bombs, that remain unspoken yet resonate throughout the narrative. Furthermore, expressions such as:

- (24) „*Er verbindet oben und unten so.*“
He connects the top and bottom like this. (p.7)

The author in this case emphasizes the connection between symbolic displacement through family lines or history (Othmann, 2020). The spatial signs inside and out do not just concern physical space, but also social and emotional ambience. One of the most significant distinctions in the novel *Die Sommer* lies in the contrast between inside and outside spaces. For instance:

- (25) „*Die warme Luft im Inneren strömt auf ihn zu.*“
The warm air inside flows towards her. (p. 7)
(26) „*Draußen ist es sehr sonnig.*“
It is very sunny outside. (p. 7)

The expression *inside* (25) is often interpreted as safety, family, memories, whereas *outside* (26) is associated with crowds, heat, and political reality. This contrast is particularly strong in her grandparents' village: the inside is cool, quiet, familiar, while the outside is hot and dusty (Othmann, 2020).

Dynamic-processual spatial deixis (dynamische prozessuale Räumlichkeit)

The dynamic and processual space in the novel plays an important role in the representation of displacement, orientation, and identity affirmation. It is not just about stationary sites, but about traversal of space, i.e., traces, transitions, and changes of direction (Hallet & Neumann, 2015). The themes of *return and place of origin* (*Rückkehr und Herkunft*) are marked by dynamic spatial deixis, particularly in the journey from Germany to Kurdistan. For example:

- (27) *Jeden Sommer **flogen** sie in das Land, in dem der Vater aufgewachsen war.*
Every summer, they **flew** to the country where their father had grown up. (p. 9)
- (28) *Wenn sie dann **ankamen** und aus dem Flugzeug stiegen und ihnen ein heißer Wind weiterging.*
When they **arrived** and got off the plane and the hot wind blew towards them. (p. 10).

The diction of *fliegen* ‘fly’, *ankommen* ‘arrive’, and *weitergehen* ‘move’ indicates dynamic processes that reflect cultural, political, and emotional boundaries. The dynamic and processual spatial deixis in *Die Sommer* illustrates how movement through spaces simultaneously conveys physical, emotional, and cultural orientation. Space is not fixed; it moves with the character.

- (29) *„Sie geht **nach Hause**.“*
She is **going home**. (p.11)

The phrase home is both a term of description; it can be Germany, it can be the grandparents’ village in Kurdistan. The selection of spatial deixis through space, i.e., traces, displacements, and dynamic and processual changes in direction, as mentioned above, is related to identity (Hallet & Neumann, 2009).

Forms of temporal deixis and their role in Die Sommer narrative text

In *Die Sommer*’s narrative text, temporal deixis has many different forms and has a significant role in describing the concrete events experienced by the main character. Particularly, temporal deixis refers to linguistic elements that connect events in the time dimension and allow readers to understand the sequence and timing of events in the narrative (Duchan et al., 2012; Sanders & van Krieken, 2019). (Nilsen, 2023) Temporal deixis is important for understanding how individual life stories are situated in broader political and historical frameworks. It allows personal experiences to be interpreted as part of a broader narrative shaped by historical events. Also, the interaction between conflict and temporal deixis in narrative is a complex thought process, as it involves the concept of time and the reader’s point of view. This interaction is crucial to comprehend the temporal structure in a narrative (Zhang, 2022). The novel’s temporal deixis appears in several forms, which are detailed below.

Temporal Deixis in the Form of Concrete Time Markers (konkrete Zeitbeschreibung)

Concrete time markers in *Die Sommer* bind Leyla’s personal story to wider history. References such as “Sommer 1973” or “2011” do more than fix chronology; they juxtapose her family’s own experience with events like the Yom Kippur War or the Arab Spring. In this way, temporal deixis collapses private and collective timelines, illustrating how Leyla’s identity and family history are shaped by, and interwoven with, historical upheavals. For instance:

- (30) *„Es war das Ende des Sommers **1973**“*
It was the end of the summer of **1973**. (p. 18)
- (31) *„Ich war zwölf...“*
I was twelve years old... (p.18) Then, he stated:
- (32) *„Im **Jahr 2011** waren sie sehr aufgeregt“*
In 2011, they were very excited. (p. 20)

The expression in (30) does not merely refer to a specific time but also evokes a historical context, the Yom Kippur War between Syria and Israel, as experienced subjectively by the father.

Meanwhile, (31) and (32) reflect how regional structures influenced political decisions, revealing

the impact of geopolitics on individual lives, marking a historical turning point that significantly affects the protagonist's life. Straub (2022) emphasizes that reconstructing the temporal structure of narrative texts, such as in this example, underscores the relationship between events and their historical context. These deictic expressions reveal how understanding historical events requires contextualizing them within individual biographies and political narratives. Collective trauma is also visualized through temporal deixis, as the following statement refers to historical events.

- (33) „*Als das Massaker an den Armeniern im frühen 20. Jahrhundert begann und im Jahre 1915-1916*“ ...
 "When the massacres of Armenians began in the early 20th century and in 1915 – 1916"
 ... (p. 30-31)
- (34) „*1987 beantragte ich die Staatenlosigkeit*“
 I applied for statelessness in 1987. (p. 57)

Example (33) refers to the Armenian Genocide and appears in the narrative as a part of the grandfather's history and his Armenian friend's background. The expression in (34) relates to the father's personal decision to renounce his nationality, a politically and emotionally charged act. Dates and specific time references become turning points in the narrative: they tether Leyla's memories to shared traumas. For instance, mentioning '1915–1916' invokes the Armenian genocide in the grandfather's past, while '1987' refers to the father's statelessness. Each date transforms into a narrative anchor where personal and historical timelines meet. In sum, temporal deixis here is not just chronological; it threads individual and collective memory together, highlighting how personal identity is continuously refracted through historical conflict. This technique is a distinctive feature of non-fiction writing, aligning with the concept of narrated contemporary history by Schwenk (2012), where personal and historical timelines intersect to produce a multifaceted narrative structure.

Temporal Deixis: Cyclical Time References (Zyklische Zeitreferenzen)

Seasonal deictic markers not only structure the narrative of the passage of time but also function as markers in the cycle of life between Germany and the Syrian-Kurdish village (Othmann, 2020). These temporal deixis markers show the cycle of nature as a narrative sequence to provide contextual information that is aligned with the reader's knowledge, which enhances understanding and facilitates the integration of new information with existing knowledge (Zarcone & Demberg, 2021). For instance, the expression *Es ist Hochsommer* (It is the peak of summer) refers not only to a natural condition but also evokes the heat and dust-laden atmosphere of the Syrian village:

- (35) „*Das Gras verbrennt nur in den Sommermonaten in der Sonne, die Hitze trocknet die Erde aus, der Wind bläst noch mehr Staub vor sich her.*“
 This grass withers in the sun during the summer months, the heat drying out the earth, the wind blowing more dust into the air. (p. 5)

The temporal deixis *Sommer* functions as an annually recurring anchor point that marks Leyla's lived temporal rhythm. In contrast, the expression *im Winter* (in winter) conveys her experiences in Germany:

- (36) „*Im Winter schlafen sie auf Schafwollmatratzen und Teppichen im Haus.*“
 In winter, they sleep on wool mattresses and carpets inside the house. (p. 6)

This seasonal contrast signifies not only a difference in climate but also a cultural shift from the rural summer world of Syria to the daily realities of urban Munich. Additionally, the phrase *im Herbst* (in autumn) acts as a temporal marker with symbolic and political significance, pointing to a period of illness experienced by Leyla's uncle in Syria (Othmann, 2020).

These seasonal deixis expressions do more than represent chronological sequences; they create a poetic temporal layer distinct from linear historical time. As Bal (2009) argues, such markers contribute to a structure of temporality that is cyclical and subjective rather than strictly chronological. Thus, temporal deixis in this narrative serves as a literary strategy to express the protagonist's experience of

living between two worlds and to reflect the hybrid and dislocated nature of diasporic identity.

Narrative Time Structure Through Tense Expressions

Temporal deixis in the novel is also expressed through verbal tense. According to Fludernik (2003), tense markers, such as past tense, present tense, historical present, perfect, and pluperfect, are used to signify different temporal levels and to narrate life journeys, reflections, and historical events. The complexity of tenses in narrative texts emphasizes that tenses function as textual devices rather than just temporal markers. The transition between past tense and historical present tense (*Wechsel zwischen Präteritum und historischem Präsens*) illustrates how events from the past are narrated using the present tense to convey immediacy and emotional proximity (Helbig & Buscha, 2021), such as:

- (37) „Die Juden **sind** grausam“, hatte der arabische Lehrer gesagt.
The Jews **are** cruel, the Arabic teacher said. (p. 57)

In this excerpt, the use of the present tense form *sind* (are) functions as a temporal deixis that brings past events into the narrative present, creating a sense of vividness and immediacy (Helbig & Buscha, 2021). The perfect tense is specifically employed to describe completed actions that retain relevance in the present (*Perfekt: für abgeschlossene Handlungen mit Relevanz zur Gegenwart*), particularly when recalling personal or biographically significant memories (Weinrich, 2001). For instance:

- (38) „Onkel Nûrî hatte sich erkältet.“
Uncle Nûrî had a fever then. (p. 14)
(39) „Er hat die Arztrechnung von Bêrîvans Großvater bezahlt.“
He had paid Bêrîvan's grandfather's hospital bill. (p. 25).

This tense indicates that what is remembered continues to affect the author's mind and remains biographically significant (Othmann, 2020). The past perfect tense for the past (*Plusquamperfekt*) is used to describe past events and is particularly productive in the context of the protagonist's family story in the village:

- (40) „Sie hatte ihm ein neues Kleid gekauft.“
She had bought him new clothes. (p. 7)
(41) „Leyla hatte sich vorgestellt, wie die Sterbenden Stapel frisch gewaschener Kleidung überreicht bekamen.“
Leyla imagined how the dying man was rewarded with a pile of freshly washed clothes.
(p. 7)

This event form is essential to further subdivide the temporal levels in the flashback. In this way, the author creates a multi-layered memory structure in which there are interrelated levels of biography, culture, and historical chronology implied in the tense (Zhang, 2022).

Temporal Deixis Adverbs (die zeitdeiktischen Adverbien)

Temporal deictic expressions are also productively used in this novel, such as *jetzt* (now), *damals* (back then), and *früher* (formerly). The use of these temporal adverbials plays a crucial role in guiding the reader through the narrative by providing temporal cues that help structure the sequence of events (Helbig & Buscha, 2021). These markers offer contextual information aligned with the reader's schematic knowledge of typical event sequences, thereby facilitating the construction of a coherent mental representation of the unfolding events (Zarcone & Demberg, 2021).

Deictic expression *jetzt* (now), representing present perspective (*gegenwärtige perspective*), refers to events experienced by the characters in the narrative present. It is frequently used in reflective passages, such as:

- (42) „**Jetzt** würde Leyla nichts machen.“
Now, Leyla would not do anything. (p. 28)

- (43) „**Jetzt** können sie uns nicht mehr schützen.“
Now they can no longer protect us. (p. 32)

The adverb “*Jetzt*” is often used to visualize shifts in thought or condition. It indicates that, emotionally, politically, or personally, the present moment differs significantly from the past (Feshchenko, 2023). The expression *damals* (back then), indicating an anchored past (*verankerte Vergangenheit*), refers to specific and selective past situations that help construct perspective and narrative grounding:

- (44) „**Damals** war ich noch ein Kleinkind.“
A long time ago, when I was a toddler. (p. 9)
(45) „*Damals hatten sie gedacht, es wäre für immer.*“
At that time, they thought it seemed like it would be forever. (p. 37)

This deictic marker typically signals the beginning of a flashback and emphasizes temporal distance. “Back then” is often associated with notions such as childhood (*Kindheit*), returning to one's homeland (*Heimatbesuche*), or political upheaval (*politische Umbrüche*). The expression *früher* (formerly), suggesting repetition and continuity (*Wiederholung und Kontinuität*), generally denotes a longer or recurring past timeframe, as illustrated below:

- (46) „*Wie früher auch, heftete sie Kopien an die Wand.*“
Just long ago, she stuck the copies on the wall.

The word *long ago* refers to a normal situation in the past. The function of these temporal adverbs within the narrative contributes significantly to both cohesion and coherence. As deictic markers, they guide the reader through the chronological structure of events and aid in the overall comprehension of the text (Virtanen, 2012).

Temporal deixis was also employed through lexical items and temporally structured sequences that were rhythmically aligned with the narrative flow, providing temporal orientation within layered events. Expressions such as *nachts* (every night), *am Morgen* (in the morning), *dann* (then), *später* (later), and *irgendwann* (sometime) functioned as linguistic markers indicating a linear and diverse temporal progression (Diamond & Levine, 2020). To begin with, the deictic expression every night served as a marker of subjective retreat time (*Nachts als subjektive Rückzugszeit*). This was exemplified in the sentence:

- (47) „*Nachts träumte Leyla von diesem Dorf.*“
Every night, Leyla dreamed of that village. (p. 73)

Time references *every night* as a sign of a recurring subjective phase, where the experience of self comes to the surface.

In a similar vein, the temporal expression in the morning denoted a sense of beginning and renewed activity (*Am Morgen– Neubeginn und Aktivität*). This appeared in:

- (48) „*Am Morgen schlug Sascha vor...*“
In the morning, Sascha suggested... (p. 79).

The phrase *in the morning* often signalled a point of departure, a new structure, or a decisive moment. Mornings symbolized action and turning points, frequently initiating shifts in tone or atmosphere. According to the narrative, the morning served as a signifier of events transitioning in life (Othmann, 2020). Furthermore, the use of the *then* indicated linear narrative progression („*Dann* “– *lineare Fortschreibung*), as seen in:

- (49) „*Dann den Schotterweg am Garten entlang.*“
Then, along the gravel path by the garden.

The adverb then helped to map the unfolding of events as a sequence of temporally defined events traversing either time or space. In addition, the expression *later* reflected a forward temporal shift („*später* “*als rückblickende Zeitverschiebung*”), as in:

- (50) „... drei Tage später“, „zwei Tage später“
 ‘... three days later,’ ‘two days later’.

Such phrases suggested structured transitions and clearly defined time intervals within the storyline. Moreover, the use of *sometime* represented an indefinite point in time („*irgendwann* “*als unbestimmte Zeitpunkte*”), exemplified by:

- (51) „Irgendwann später in einem Sommer gab es sogar einen Krieg.“
 Sometime later, in the summer, there was even a war. (p. 57)

At times, it evoked a vague and uncertain temporal reference, underscoring the ephemeral nature of memory. This was notably distinct from the reference to fixed historical events such as *1973* or *2011*. The temporal markers, then, later, one time not only structure the narrative but also engage the reader’s ability to process by creating rhythms that reflect temporal events in real life (Singhal & Srinivasan, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined the spatial and temporal deixis in Ronya Othmann’s *Die Sommer* to answer two research questions: (1) What are the key spatial and temporal deictic expressions used in the novel? And (2) How do these expressions influence the narrative’s portrayal of intercultural identity and historical experience? Our analysis identified a range of prominent deictic forms. For spatial deixis, the novel repeatedly uses concrete place names in Germany and Kurdish regions, directional adverbs (*hier* “here” vs. *dort* “there”), prepositional phrases indicating orientation (e.g., *auf dem Boden* “on the floor”, *über dem Ofen* “above the oven”), and verbs of movement (e.g., *fliegen* “to fly”, *ankommen* “to arrive”). For temporal deixis, it features explicit dates and historical events (e.g., “Sommer 1973”, the “Arab Spring of 2011”), seasonal markers (Hochsommer, Winter), tense shifts (e.g., historical present vs. past tense), and temporal adverbs (*jetzt* “now”, *damals* “back then”, *später* “later”). These findings directly answer RQ1 by cataloging the main deictic elements that structure the novel’s spatial and temporal references.

Regarding RQ2, we found that these deictic elements significantly shape the narrative’s depiction of intercultural identity and historical context. Spatial deixis places Leyla’s story in two worlds: Germany (“here”) and Kurdistan/Syria (“there”). For example, naming cities like Leipzig or Aleppo and repeatedly using *hier/dort* not only orient the reader geographically but also symbolically reflect Leyla’s bicultural experience. Germany is “here” yet feels foreign, while her ancestral village is “there” yet intimately remembered, highlighting her simultaneous belonging and alienation.

Similarly, temporal deixis grounds personal biography in collective history. References to specific years or events (e.g., 1915–16 Armenian Genocide, 2011 Arab revolts) and the use of tense contrasts (historical present vs. past) weave Leyla’s family history into broader timelines. These markers guide readers through shifts in time and space, clarifying how Leyla’s life between cultures is influenced by historical conflicts. In sum, spatial deixis locates characters in multiple cultures and landscapes, whereas temporal deixis places the characters’ experiences within historical memory, working to extend the transcultural narrative.

We fill a conspicuous gap in the literature by highlighting the under-explored role of deixis in contemporary, cross-cultural narratives. Through a contemporary German–Kurdish novel, we show that deixis isn’t just a grammatical matter of course, but also part of a narrative strategy. These studies address a gap in the field by integrating linguistic theory and literary critique. Specifically, we show how Bühler’s and Ehlich’s concepts of deixis apply to a complex intercultural story, revealing how deictic strategies express hybrid identity and historical awareness. Our paper has been considered as a model for considering diasporic literature and its spatial and temporal deixis to be read within the context of its narrative structure, and our contribution to the literature is found in the systematic and coherent account. By focusing on deixis, our results suggest that readers and researchers might better decode difficult narrative shifts and cultural attitudes. This analysis shows that deixis is also essential to

narrative understanding and encourages further study of linguistic devices involved in transcultural storytelling.

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