



An Analysis of Verbal and Visual Sign Found on Grave of The Fireflies Posters

Maria Alvita Nai Modok¹, I Dewa Ayu Devi Maharani Santika², Desak Putu Eka Pratiwi³

English Study Program, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Mahasaraswati Denpasar University, Jl. Kamboja No. 11A, Dangin Puri Kangin, Denpasar Utara, Bali.

Correspondence Email: rinalvita45@gmail.com

Abstract

The aims of this research are to analyse the meaning of verbal and visual signs found in the poster of *Grave of The Fireflies*. The data of this research were downloaded from the internet. The semiotic theory by Saussure (1983) was used to analyse the verbal and visual sign while the theory of meaning by Barthes (1977) is applies to explain the meaning of verbal and visual sign in the poster. Besides Saussure and Barthes theory, a supporting theory from Wierzbicka (1996) regarding colours was also applied. The data of this research were analysed by using descriptive qualitative method and the result of this research reveal that 3 verbal signs and 5 visual signs were found in *Grave of The Fireflies*' poster. These signs contain both denotative and connotative meanings. In which the denotative meaning reveals the literal meaning of the signs and the connotative meaning reveal more explicit meaning about the film such as the theme, the storyline and the character of the film.

Keywords: *verbal sign, visual sign, film, poster, Grave of The Fireflies*

Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini untuk menganalisis makna tanda verbal dan visual yang ditemukan dalam poster film *Grave of The Fireflies*. Data dari penelitian ini di unduh dari internet. Teori semiotik dari Saussure (1983) digunakan untuk menganalisis tanda verbal dan visual sementara teori makna dari Barthes (1977) di gunakan untuk menganalisis makna dari tanda verbal and visual pada poster. Selain teori Saussure dan Bathes, teori warna dari Wierzbicka (1996) juga digunakan sebagai teori pendukung. Data dari penelitian ini di analisa menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif and hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa 3 tanda verbal and 5 tanda visual di temukan dalam poster film *Grave of The Fireflies*. Tanda-tanda ini ngandung makna donotatif and makna konotatif. Yang mana makna denotative mengungkapkan makna harfiah dan makna konotatif menungkapkan makna yang lebih mendalam megenai isi film seperti tema, alur cerita dan karakter dari film ini.

Kata kunci: *tanda verbal, tanda visual, film, poster, Grave of The Fireflies*

Introduction

Throughout the years, language has been used as a tool to communicate. Finegan and Besnier stated the same idea in Fasold and Connor-Linton (2013) by saying that

the elements and the principles of language are the blue prints that speakers use to constructs sentences as well doing other communication activities.

Over the centuries, language has gone through many evolutions and have been studied by a lot of scholars. Some of the scholars has offers many elaborate theories regarding the function of language and how language develop as well as how language impacted the general public. One of those theory is the semiotic/semantics theory. Crystal (1991) believes that semiotic is one of the many branches of linguistic studies and as stated from Yule (1996:3) the study of semantic is known to be a study that focuses on the relation of linguistic and the world in the sense of how words can actually connect with things.

Ferdinand de Saussure is a well-known theorist in the field of semiotic after popularizing the famous dyadic diagram in which the diagram shows the idea of signifier (sound/image) and signified (concept) and their mutual connection as signs. Cited from (Prior 2014), Saussure argued that signifier in the actual representation of images and sounds while signified is a concept of those images and sounds. On the flip side, Barthes popularized the theory of meaning in which he believes in two order signification that is known as the level of meaning. Moreover, Barthes also believe in denotative and connotative meaning. In which denotative meaning is the literal meaning of a sign while connotative meaning is a secondary meaning that changes from person to person or as cited from Hall (in Chandler 2020) connotation is a changeable, conventionalized meaning of a sign that vary from one instance to another.

The theory of semiotic can be use is many different aspects in everyday life. One of that aspects is advertising. Advertising is a way to provide information generally regarding a product or service with the intent to draw customers. Morales (2012) stated that advertisement already exist since early human civilization and hit a rapid growth in 1622 after the published of first English newspapers. There are many forms of advertisement and one of those form is poster. According to Cambridge dictionary (2019) poster is a printed sheet of picture or photograph that can be used as decoration or a tool to advertise anything such as opinion, propagandas and community ads.

Studio Ghibli is a well-known Japanese animation studio that was founded in 1986 and has produce popular animated films. Studio Ghibli has produced various film with various genres and one of those film in Grave of The Fireflies with the war tragedy as its genre. This film was directed by Isao Takahata based on a book with the same title by Akiyuki Nosaka. The release of this film gains a lot of attraction and critics due to its genre and because of it the poster of this film is widely known for its symbolism to the storyline of this film. The poster of the film is using verbal and visual signs to deliver the messages.

There are many similar studies about semiotic that have been conducted in the past year. The first study is a journal entitled *Semiotic Analysis of "The Conjuring" Movie Poster Advertisement* by Juliantari (2014). In this journal, the researcher uses 3 different poster of The Conjuring that were downloaded from the internet and focuses the finding of the study to revealed the meaning behind the verbal and visual signs that were presents in the poster as a way to point out the type and the film of the story. To analyzed the posters, the researcher uses Saussure (1974) as the main theory and for

supporting theory, the researcher uses Dyer (1986) in regards to verbal and visual aspects. Another additional theory that was used in this journal was the theory of colour terms by Wierzbicka (1996). From what has been described before, the similarities between the research study conducted by Juliantari (2014) and this study lies on the theory that was used. Juliantari's study uses Saussure's semiotic theory and Wierzbicka's colour terms theory. As for differences, the previous study uses Dyer's theory while this study used the theory of meaning by Barthes (1977). Moreover, the data for this study is completely different from the previous study.

The second study is an article from English and Education journal entitled "*An Analysis of Semiotic Signs in Romance Movie Poster*" by Darliati & Mahmud (2020). This article used 15 movie posters taken from Indonesian romance movie. The theory that was used in this article belong to Kress and Leeuwen (2006) regarding visual grammar theory and the reason for uses of visual grammar theory was because the article aimed to identifying as well as describing the types of signs meaning. For researched method, this study uses qualitative method to described and listed the type of meaning consisted of representational, interactive and compositional meaning. The finding of this article revealed that the posters has most of the visual grammar aspects but each poster contains different aspects. However, the researcher cannot find some aspect of the visual grammar theory in the posters that can be classified as sub process in perspective aspect. The only similarities that Darliati & Mahmud (2020) article shares with this researched study was the semiotic sector. The differences between the article and this researched study can be found in the theory that was used and the aims of the study. This study used Saussure's semiotic theory and Barthes' theory of meaning as the main theory and Wierzbicka's colour terms for supporting theory whereas Darliati & Mahmud's researched study uses only Kress and Leeuwen (2006) visual grammar theory.

The last study is another journal by Burty (2014) entitled "*A Semiotic Analysis On The Movie Poster of Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows*". This journal aimed to reveal the semiotic interpretation of the signs found the movie posters. Burty's researched study uses Chandler (2002) theory of connotative meaning to analyzed the two posters used as object analysis. The journal uses qualitative method to presents the full analysis of the data. The finding of this journal reveals the signs functions for the posters because the signs was used to give the audience a rough idea of the movie. Burty noted that the most stand out sign in poster is the release date of the movie as it was the key information and the important part of poster that tells the audience when they can be able to watch the movie.

Method

The data for this study were downloaded from the internet; Imdb.com as well as pinterest.uk. The posters are the official posters of Grave of The Fireflies. The posters were picked because they have many unique hidden meanings both on verbal and visual signs. Moreover, these posters are well-known and well-loved by the viewers of the film because it holds nostalgic memory regarding the film. Additionally, these

posters best convey the idea, theme, and the overall feelings of the film *Grave of The Fireflies*. There are three steps on collecting the data. The first step is to download the posters (data) from the internet. After being downloaded, the second step is applied by carefully examined or observed the data and the last step is to marked down all the important visual and verbal signs that can be found on the posters from the examination. For analyzing the data, the semiotic theory by Saussure (1983) and the theory of meaning by Barthes (1977) are applied. Moreover, the theory of colour terms by Wierzbicka (1996) will be applied as a supporting theory. There are two steps on data analysis. The first step was to identify the signifier and the signified on both visual and verbal signs based on Saussure’s semiotic theory. The second steps were to use Barthes’ theory of meaning to analysed the message behind the signs. This study uses formal approach to displayed the findings through tables and images and informal approach to described and explained the meaning of this analysis.

Result

The film poster of *Grave of Fireflies* was analyzed by using semiotic theory by Saussure (1983) and the theory of meaning by Barthes (1977) as well as Weirzbicka (1996) The researcher able to found a total 4 verbal signs and 9 visual signs from the posters. The first poster consisted of 3 verbal signs and 5 visual signs while the second poster consisted of 1 verbal sign and 4 visual signs. The data is as follows:

Table 1. Result of verbal and visual signs on the Posters

Posters	Verbal Sings	Visual Signs
Poster 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grave of The Fireflies 2. The awards 3. List of Names 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Two young kids 2. Broken umbrella 3. Fireflies 4. The clothes of the kids 5. The background color
Poster 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grave of The Fireflies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Silhouette of two kids 2. Red sun 3. Red dots 4. Overall gradation of red

The verbal signs in these posters consist of title, awards and a list of names while the visual signs consist of the main character and the state of their living condition through their depiction on the poster. The visual signs appear mostly in the posters. The maker of the poster able to reveal the important information regarding the film such as the theme and the possible storyline of the film through the signs connotative meaning. On the other hand, denotative meaning only reveals the literal meaning of the signs.

Discussion

This part of this researched study is aimed to show the analysis of each signs for both posters in order to give the reader a better understanding. The analysis presented by giving short explanation of the sign focuses on the meaning carried by the signs.

Data 1



Figure 1. Grave of The Fireflies Poster

This film poster contains 3 verbal signs. The first verbal sign is “**GRAVE of the FIREFLIES**”. This sign is a signifier and it signified the climax of the story in which Setsuko had died and the Seita is mourning her death on the side of a lake while the fireflies fly around him not only referring to the climax of the story, it also refers to a scene where Setsuko and Seita had capture a handful of fireflies that they use as a light source for their new home. Denotatively, this sign is a title of the movie while connotatively, the fireflies have a metaphor use in which it was a subtle reference to the short life of both Setsuko and Seita because fireflies is known for their short lifespan. Moreover, the word “**GRAVE**” is another subtle reference to the inevitably death of both Setsuko and Seita.

The second verbal sign is the awards listed on the poster. These awards are signifier to the success of this film. It signified that this film is well made and generally receive positive reaction from audience and critics. Denotatively, awards are symbols of recognitions for things and people. As for connotative meaning, these awards show the

excellences of this film from many aspects such as the story, the depictions of its characters, the animation as well as how the film able to capture and beautifully frame venerable scenes that Seita and Setsuko shares with each other which draw great sympathy from audiences and critics.

The last verbal sign is the list of names. This list of names is signifier to the people that worked for the production of this film. The names signified every single effort, sacrifice and hard work that these people put for this film to be made. Denotatively name is words or symbol that refers to an entity (Merriam Webster, 2018) while connotatively, this list of names is a token of gratitude toward these people especially towards Akiyuki Nosaka as the writer of the novel that *Grave of The Fireflies* was based on.

The first visual sign of *Grave of The Fireflies* is the figure of two kids. The boy was named Seita and the little girl was named Setsuko. This sign is a signifier for their relationship as siblings that had lost both of their parents to war. It also signified their dynamic in which Seita has taken the role of the protector and the provider for Setsuko after they become orphanage. Denotatively, both Seita and Setsuko is the main character of the film and connotatively, this sign capture and illustrates the sibling bond that Seita and Setsuko shares with each other in which the bond only getting stronger after the death of their parents that forces them to become homeless in which they rely on each other for comfort.

The second visual sign is the broken umbrella. The umbrella is a signifier to their living condition after they become homeless. It signified their poor living condition in which they cannot afford trivial things such as umbrella. Denotatively, the broken umbrella is a handmade Japanese style umbrella. This umbrella connotates the time setting of the film because the umbrella is commonly used in daily life in 1900s during World War II.

The third visual sign is the fireflies. It is a signifier to the film title and several scenes that Seita and Setsuko shares in the film. The fireflies signified Seita and Setsuko relation as sibling and their short life span. Denotatively, fireflies are common insect that have the ability to glow at night. As for the connotative meaning, the fireflies refer the climax of the film where Seita is grieving on Setsuko's death when fireflies started to appear around him as if Setsuko is visiting him.

The fourth visual sign is the clothes worn by Seita and Setsuko. The clothes are the signified of their everyday life before their life was ruined by the war. However, the state of the clothes signified their financial struggles after their parents were killed which lead them to become homeless orphanages. Denotatively, the clothes worn by seita is a military style clothing worn by the Japanese soldier and the clothes worn by Setsuko is called *Jinbei*, a traditional clothing worn by man, woman and children. Connotatively, both clothing established the time setting of the film. Furthermore, Seita clothing help established the fact that their father is a member of Japan military forces during World War II and the hat the he had referred to the marine division that their father had joined. In regards to their appearance, it connotes their living condition where they are really poor that they cannot afford standard living condition to the point

where Seita had to steal for food.

The last visual sign is the background of the poster that is a signifier to the general idea of the film. It signified how war can have a huge impact on civilian life in many aspects including how and when those civilian with meet their death in this case Setsuko died because high fever induced by malnutrition and Seita died of starvation while their mother died because of air attack and their father died because of the shipped that he in was attacked by the enemy. Denotatively, the colour black is a colour spectrum and it connotes the heavy theme of movie that revolves around struggles and death by war since the black is often associated with death and despair.

Data 2

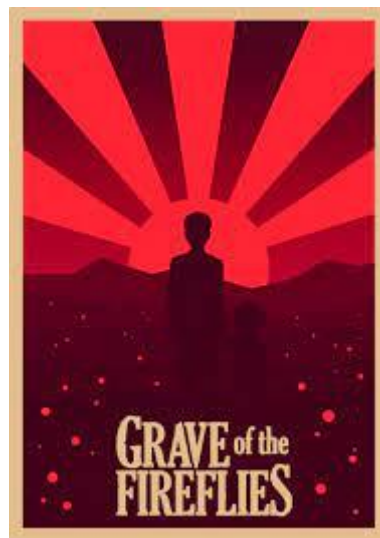


Figure 2. Grave of The Fireflies Poster

This is the other poster version from the same movie. The only verbal sign of this version is “**GRAVE of the FIREFLIES**”. Which again is a signifier to the story of the film; a scene to be exact. It signified the climax of the story where the film shows a scene with a mourning Seita sitting near a lake thinking about his sister after she sadly passed away due to malnutrition. Dennotatively, “**GRAVE of the FIREFLIES**” clearly indicates of the title and the words that was used in the title connotes the life of Seita and Setsuko in which they died not long after they become homeless. The word “**FIREFLIES**” was beautifully used as a metaphor of Seita and Setsuko life, a subtle foreshadowing to their sad death in the film. Moreover, the colour of “**GRAVE of the FIREFLIES**” is light brown. The colour of brown and light brown often associate with dirt, ground and earth which symbolize how they were burried that after their death.

The first visual sign is the silhouette of the two kids, Seita and Setsuko. This sign

is a signifier to the event that happened to them. It signified their death due to starvation for Seita and malnutrition for Setsuko. The silhouette denotes its literal meaning which is a shape or outline of something that is visible against a lighter background. It connotes that after their death, Seita and Setsuko lives as a memory to the village people and slowly the memory of them and their existence started to fade away as the outline of the lower part the silhouette become blurry. Furthermore, the color of the silhouette perfectly describe their life. The red symbolize the all the blood that have been shed in World War II including the blood of their mother and father. The black tint symbolize the dark reality of war and the death of the kids and their parents as black often being associated with death.

The second visual sign the red sun. The sign is a signifier to the war that was going on in the film. It signified Japan military. Denotatively, sun is a burning star in space but connotatively, the sun had a long history regarding Japan colonialism under the command of emperor Hirohito. The sun is used as a symbol that Japan as a country is the rightful ruler of Asia and this particular design of the sun can be seen through war and history documentation. However, in this poster, the placement of the red sun as if it shine behind Seita and Setsuko is used as a foreshadowing of the war that Japan went through their enemy during World War II and this war is the catalyst that lead to the death of Seita, Setsuko and their parents. Furthermore, the sun help established the idea that this film is set in during World War II in the 1990's.

The third sign is the red dots. These red dots is a signifier to one of the element in the film and it signified the fireflies. Denotatively, the red dots are just tiny red colored circle. However, connotatively the red dots can easily be seen as droplets of blood because red is often being associated of blood. This sign was used as a metaphor for the war and the blood shed that happened early in the film due the air attacked that killed Seita and Setsuko's mother. Moreover, having the red dots as fireflies gives a grim feeling about the poster and the film itself which perfectly capture how the film is going to be.

The last sign is the overall gradation of red. The gradation of red is a signifier to the general feeling of the film. It signified how this film depicts the struggles of two kids, trying to survive by themselves after their parents were killed due to war. Denotatively, the colour red and its gradation is just one of the many spectrum of colour. However, connotatively, red is often being associate with blood, horror, evil and other sinister things. The use of red in this poster help shaped the idea of the film for the audience because the shade of the red tells the audience that this film will be filled by blood depicted through death that happened in the film as well as the sinister reality of war that caused so much pain to everybody, not only to the families of the soldiers that had died in the war but also to the civilian that must live fear and might had lose their loved ones due to enemy attack.

Conclusion

The entirety of this study concluded that the posters of Grave of The fireflies

consists of 4 verbal signs and 9 visual signs which was divided between the two posters. The first poster has 3 verbal signs and 5 visual signs while the second poster has 1 verbal sign and 4 visual signs. The verbal signs are made up by the title, awards and a list of names of the people that were involved in the making of this film while the visual signs are made up by the main characters and other small details as a subtle reference to the story of the film itself. Furthermore, both visual and verbal signs consist of both denotative and connotative meaning in the denotative meaning it conveys the literal meaning of the signs such as the title and the characters. On the other hand, the connotative meaning conveys more detail regarding the signs such as the story line of the film and some important plot points that happened in the film.

References

- “Definition of NAME.” Merriam-Webster.com, 2019, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/name.
- Burty, A. D. (2013). A Semiotic Analysis On Movie Posters Of Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows. *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa FIB*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://jimbastrafib.studentjournal.ub.ac.id/index.php/jimbastrafib/article/view/12/12>
- Cambridge Dictionary. 2019. POSTER | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary. Retrieved from Cambridge.org website: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/poster>
- Darliati, & Mahmud, M. (2020). An Analysis of Semiotic Signs in Romance Movie Posters. *Research in English and Education Journal*, 5(4), 139–153. Retrieved from <http://jim.unsyiah.ac.id/READ/article/view/16431/7567>
- Daymette, L., & Daymette, M. (2017, October 20). (PDF) The History Of Advertising. Retrieved October 6, 2020, from ResearchGate website: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320719721_THE_HISTORY_OF_ADVERTISING
- Fasold, R., & Connor-Linton, J. 2014. *An introduction to language and linguistics*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Juliantari, N. L. P. (2014). Semiotic Analysis Of “The Conjuring” Movie Poster Advertisement. *Humanis*, 9(3). Retrieved from <https://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/sastra/article/view/10984>
- Prior, Paul. “Semiotics.” Research Gate, Mar. 2014. Accessed 18 May 2021, from ResearchGate website: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326111684_Semiotics
- Semiotics for Beginners. 2020. Retrieved January 9, 2021, from Pdx.edu website: <http://web.pdx.edu/~singlem/coursesite/begsem.html>

Weirzbicka, A. 1996. *Semantic Primess and Universal*. United Kingdom: Oxford University.

Yule, George. *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press, 1996.