

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' VISUAL LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION OF A REGIONAL FILM

ROLEX P. GELIG, LPT, MSLT

City College of Ormoc, Aunubing St., Brgy. Cogon, Ormoc City
Leyte, 6541, Eastern Visayas, Philippines

geligrolex@gmail.com/rgelig@citycollegeoformoc.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Visual languages inherent in films often remain elusive to learners, resulting in misconceptions, diminished appreciation, and a failure to grasp the underlying messages. Forty senior high school students' participants of Baybay City, Leyte, Philippines, were assessed for their knowledge and comprehension of the visual languages employed in a regional short film. They interpreted symbolic codes of the establishing, conflict, and denouement scenes and deciphered their meanings through Semiotic Analysis. Kress and Van Leeuwen's Descriptive Visual Social Semiotic Analysis revealed participants' latent need for social distance and subject gazing. Barthesian Semiotic Analysis also determined a high understanding of object denotations; however, challenges arose in their comprehension of connotations and in deciphering hidden messages within specific scenes. Some confessed in the FGDs to their lack of orientation on visual languages during their media and information literacy classes, resulting in confusion and misunderstanding. There was a prevalent inclination towards online streaming as their preferred mode of entertainment. The findings underscored the impact of accessibility, availability, and economic factors, particularly the heightened reliance on online streaming platforms during the pandemic. Despite the widespread availability of films, this research makes a significant contribution to the broader understanding of non-verbal communication in visual literacy, particularly within the realm of film education. It advocates for a more explicit and shared visual language in cinematic storytelling, promoting a nuanced and accurate comprehension of the diverse elements contributing to the cinematic experience.

Keywords: *Visual Language; Semiotic Analysis; and Regional Film*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential aspect of one's daily life, and its significance cannot be overstated. The ability to communicate effectively allows people to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas, and to connect with others on a deeper level. In this generation, with the advent of technology and social media, people are constantly bombarded with information and messages, and the ability to communicate is crucial for building and maintaining strong connections with others. It allows individuals to express their emotions and needs, and to listen actively to the needs and emotions of others. This, in turn, helps to build trust, respect, and understanding in their relationships.

For many years, films were used as a common material for educational purposes both in formal and non-formal instruction; however, as the years go by, films in the Philippines got shallower and more redundant (Battung 2017), and this impacts how audiences perceive the messages the film wants to put across. It is a form of visual art and how an audience will be able to understand it largely depends on the visual grammar it used. In the Philippines there are Regional Films which explore the unique culture, traditions, and stories of the specific region.

Film like any other communication medium has a distinct "language" or "grammar" that is used to express meaning. In this context, the term "language" refers to the technical and symbolic components, codes, and conventions that media and information professionals may choose and employ in an effort to transmit concepts, knowledge, and information. Technical codes cover lighting, sound, camera positions, and shot kinds.

Three key considerations should be taken into account while studying media languages: How are media languages interpreted by media audiences? What are some of the most important rules and guidelines that those in the media and information industry utilize today?

Furthermore, studying the visual language and symbolic codes of film is important for a number of reasons. For language teaching, incorporating a comprehensive understanding of both verbal and non-verbal communication is essential.

This research delved into the significance of integrating non-verbal communication, particularly in filmmaking, within language education and emphasizes the crucial role of teachers in not only imparting verbal language skills, fostering the ability to interpret visual cues effectively. It also highlighted the importance of equipping language educators with the tools to navigate both verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication to ensure that students or viewers can grasp the intended message accurately.

Furthermore, it extended its relevance to development communication, emphasizing the need for teachers involved in film production to recognize the equal significance of verbal and non-verbal communication. It aimed to help individuals to better understand the messages being conveyed by filmmakers to appreciate the cultural significance of films, to become more critical viewers, and to develop their skills in visual storytelling.

In general, the research aimed to analyze the visual language of regional film among Grade 12 students in the Academic Track of Baybay City Senior High in Baybay City, Leyte. Specifically, the study attempted to: (1) Describe the socio-demographic profile of the selected senior high school students as the participants of this study; (2) Identify what are the symbolic codes that can be identified by the senior high school students from a regional short film; (3) Evaluate the connotation and denotation of the senior high school students identified from the

symbolic codes of a regional film; and (4) Analyze the meanings of the connotations and denotations of the symbolic codes identified by the researcher versus those of the descriptions made by the senior high school students from the regional film.

The integration of film into the classroom is becoming simpler for teachers of this generation as technology becomes more widely available. The utilization of movies in the classroom ought to act as a "catalyst for more language use." The use of movies in the classroom provides an authentic source with a wealth of contextual information and introduces culture, particularly difficult-to-replicate parts of culture, into the classroom.

The researcher believed that if senior high school students study visual language, it can be highly beneficial to them in several ways. Firstly, this will aid in their intellectual growth. Secondly, the analysis and interpretation of visual imagery, visual language in film can aid students in developing their ability to think critically. Additionally, studying visual language in film can help them become more media literate by understanding how visual images are constructed and how they can be used to manipulate audiences. Lastly, they can also learn to use different visual techniques to tell stories and convey their ideas in creative and unique ways.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual language is an integral part of film and is used by filmmakers to convey emotions, ideas, and messages to their audience. The use of visual language in film can greatly impact the audience's understanding and interpretation of a movie. The study of visual language in a film is very limited, specifically on how the respondents analyze and describe the symbolic codes in every frame. Symbolic codes frequently denote things that, at first look, apparently have nothing to do with, but only because they exist and are widely used in one's society (Reeper 2013). Further, numerous semiotic studies about film analysis focused on signs, codes, and conventions.

a. The Use of Visual Symbols

Each movie or television production employs an assortment of visual symbols, and these various image symbols can give the animation a different film or television effect (Jia 2014). Animations for film and television that use visual symbols strive to communicate knowledge appropriately. Animations on film and television are a way for individuals to communicate beliefs. Information is carried via symbols, which also specify the kind and degree of information. So, in the creation of television shows and films, the direction of visual elements is crucial.

b. Media Language – The Grammar of Film

The audience is informed of a media text's meaning through the use of media language (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010). One of the ways media language functions is through using signs and symbols that are extrapolated from the way a scene is arranged and filmed to convey meaning. The technique by which a media text's audience is informed of its meaning is known as media language. One of the ways media language forms is by evoking meanings through signs and symbols in a scene's set-up and filming.

Media language for television and film includes the way that ideas are communicated visually as well as verbally or through dialogue. With a moving image text, meaning can be understood from the characters' body language. This covers the characters' placement in the frame as well as their motions, facial expressions, attire, and props in a movie. The way the

camera sees the scene through shot size and camera angle is referred to as media language. The actors' interpretations of the script can likewise be studied under the heading of media language.

c. Visual Literacy and Student Learning

People exist in a visual society, and visual texts—from corporate logos to commercials, legion to feature films, television to video games—play an increasingly important role in people's communications and daily lives (McDonald 2013). Visual texts have to be part of the curriculum if teachers are to prepare their students to understand, express, and produce in ways that are current and relevant. The formalist study of images through visual 'codes', such as frame and arrangement, color, perspective, camera angle, focus, distance, and so on, is currently the powerful platform to symbolism in schools. Students are taught to spot these components and to think about how they affect the viewer's perspective and the way they elicit a response.

While paying enough attention to visual syntax makes some sense, placing too much focus on these alleged codes may cause students to respond in a checklist-like manner (Moon 2017). Many students have a propensity to list the components of a visual text without fully comprehending the effect that each given component has or the significance of the picture as a whole. When describing the significance of a particular scene from a movie or analyzing the visual impact of an image (as opposed to its rhetorical function), an examination of cinematographic or visual codes may be important. Notwithstanding, even in those situations, it might be argued that the vocabulary and ideas of codes and conventions should more help to clarify to viewers the purposes and outcomes than act as a goal in and of themselves.

d. Visual Grammar

The use of multimedia aids in communications, such as in film, photography, and graphic design, is controlled by a set of rules and principles known as visual grammar. It is the visual equivalent of linguistic grammar, which governs the use of language in communication.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that visualization, composition, and interaction are the three essential tenets of visual grammar. Visualization refers to the way visual elements are used to represent objects, people, and events. The organization of visual elements in time and place to convey meaning is referred to as composition. Interaction is the process through which visual elements interact between themselves and the viewer to produce meaning.

Visual grammar is an important concept in the study of film, as it helps viewers understand how visual elements are used to convey meaning and emotions. By analyzing the visual grammar of a film, viewers can identify the techniques used by the filmmaker to create a particular effect or convey a specific message. This can help them develop a deeper appreciation of the art of filmmaking and improve their ability to interpret and analyze films.

It is crucial to grasp the components of visual grammar, their connections, and how they are constantly used to create meaning and facilitate understanding if people are to effectively communicate using it. In secondary to being crucial for the practice of visual communication, acquiring enough knowledge of visual grammar can also help people express the ideas that form their thoughts in both spoken and written language.

First, "Contours" are defined as the boundaries within which one perceives concrete objects. The object, shape, and form are inclusive of the contour and inside. Anything else exists beyond the contour. First is the Forms that can take on organic, geometric, or abstract shapes as well. Objects made of concrete have a distinct shape, size, and color.

The second is Framing, which is the arrangement of visual components in time and space to convey meaning. Framing includes the use of camera angles, shot sizes, and editing techniques to create a particular effect or convey a specific message. The third is Modality, which describes how visual components communicate with one another and the spectator to convey meaning. Modality includes the use of lighting, sound, and movement to create a particular mood or emotion.

The fourth is Composition, which is the arrangement of visual elements in both time and space to convey a message. Composition includes the use of balance, symmetry, and contrast to create a visually appealing and meaningful image.

Every time one relates two or more objects to one another, a structure is created. The patterns that these structures create serve as a description of them. People must be able to spot patterns to be able to describe the framework. To connect diverse things, structure lines are also present. These lines serve as that of the direction along which object arrangement occurs.

The abstract structures come first. When the lines of this structure are inactive and invisible, it is considered to be abstract; in contrast, concrete structures are those that have dynamic or observable structure lines. Concrete structures directly portray the structure, whereas abstract structures do it indirectly.

Finally, the Information Value refers to the way visual elements convey information to the viewer. Information value includes the use of symbols, icons, and signs to convey meaning. A succession of the objects or an impression of the movement via a static representation is usually required to convey the sense that some kind of action is happening on a page.

When components are placed in a composition, they start communicating with one another (Sharma 2018). These relate to the overall layout, the format, and the audience as well. The elements' interactions with one another give them the power to create flow and movement as well as the capacity to repel or attract. Each of the elements communicates a topic and concept in respect to the overall design. Element relationships can also convey a wide range of thoughts to viewers.

By understanding these components of visual grammar, viewers can analyze and interpret visual communication more effectively. This can help them develop a deeper appreciation of the art of visual communication and improve their ability to create and interpret visual messages.

e. Barthesian Semiotic Analysis

This analysis was developed by the French literary theorist Roland Barthes, a method used to examine the underlying structures of meaning in cultural texts. Barthes was interested in uncovering the multiple layers of signification and interpretation present in various forms of communication, including literature, advertising, fashion, and every day objects.

One of the key concepts and principles he made was the Denotation and Connotation. He introduced the distinction between denotation or the literal meaning of the sign and connotation the cultural, symbolic, or ideological meanings associated with the sign (Barthes, R. 1967).

f. Film Analysis

Film analysis using symbolic codes involves examining and interpreting the various symbols and metaphors used in a film to understand its meaning, themes, and messages. The author of a

film is typically the director, and the year of release can also provide important context for understanding the film's themes and messages.

Numerous authors proposed various methods for film analysis (Dottorini 2003). In their book "Analysis of Cinema," (2004) Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie provided numerous significant suggestions on film analysis. These are: (1) There is a standard approach to film analysis; (2) Film analysis cannot ever be completed since there is always more to discover; and (3) One must have some acquaintance with film history to do a film analysis. In relation to this, there are five different methods for evaluating a movie: text-based analysis (structural method); topic-based analysis (narrative approach); image and audio approach (iconic analysis); psychoanalytical approach; and, historical approach.

Thomas and Vivian Sobchack suggested a unique approach in their book "Introduction to Film" (2017). They studied that the following elements can be seen by the viewer: (1) Analysis of film space; (2) Analysis of film time; and (3) Film sound. They also suggested additional characteristics like the image, tone, composition, and movement, while focusing mostly on iconic aspects of film.

For example, analyzing the film "Parasite" directed by Bong Joon-ho (2019) can reveal a lot about the themes of class, wealth, and power. The film's use of symbolic codes, such as the use of stairs and the contrast between light and dark, all contribute to its overall meaning and message. The use of stairs in the film represents the class division between the wealthy and the poor, with the wealthy living at the top of the hill and the poor living at the bottom. The contrast between light and dark is also used to represent the contrast between the wealthy and the poor, with the wealthy living in brightly lit, spacious homes and the poor living in dark, cramped basements.

g. Related Studies Adapting Gunther Kress' and Theo Van Leeuwen's visual social semiotic resources

The explanation of semiotic systems, what can be conveyed and done with images and other visual methods of communication, as well as how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted are all part of social semiotics of visual communication (Van Leeuwen et al 2004). Visual social semiotics is founded on Halliday's (1960) theory of metafunctions, which argues that language serves the conceptual, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions simultaneously. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) grammar of visual design has extended the same metafunctions to visual social semiotic resources and labeled them as representational, interactive, and compositional. They believed that for the visual to operate as a complete system of communication, it must fulfill a number of communicational and representational requirements, identical to all other semiotic modes.

The first metafunction is focused with representation patterns (representational metafunction). Either narrative frameworks or conceptual structures carry the visual encoding. Similar to how simple or complex phrases can occur independently or together in language, narrative and conceptual structures can do the same. Embedding happens when they appear together. The relative size and prominence of the elements dictate how major and minor processes are distinguished in images (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006).

In interactive metafunction, the participant interaction patterns provide as a visual representation of the following: (1) Image act is influenced or worried by the varying sizes of the frame: close-up, medium, or long; (2) Social distance is influenced or concerned by the gaze

direction of the portrayed participant. The image producer determines the point of view or perspective with the goal of conveying all that is known about the image through the use of various angles, such as horizontal and vertical; (3) The sizes apply to images of human figures as well as objects, buildings, or landscapes; and, (4) The concept of modality involves a complex interplay of markers, such as color saturation, differentiation or modulation, contextualization, and representation.

The idea that actions of representation and communication come together just to form the type of meaningful whole known as text is the metafunction of composition. The three interlinked systems that make up meaning are the following: (1) Information value, which is related to the three main visual areas of left and right, top and bottom, and center and margin; (2) Saliency, which distinguishes between elements using visual cues like size, sharpness of focus, tonal and color contrast, placement in the visual field, perspective, and specific cultural factors; and (3) Framing, which links the representational meaning to the interactive one in which the specific topic comes into contact with the artifact (Stoian 2015).

h. Theoretical Framework

This study took the quantitative and qualitative path of inquiry, and semiotics was used to guide this study. In order to evaluate images for the sake of this study, an interpretative framework based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic method was used. This strategy highlights how semiotic resources are simultaneously the by-products of cultural histories and the cognitive resources utilized to produce and understand visual and other types of messages.

Visual social semiotics reveal hidden meanings and disclose contradictions between a visual and verbal message that the students have identified from the regional film and the meanings that they have attached to it. The depiction of the experiential world (representational meaning), the interaction between the participants represented in a visual design and its viewers (interactive meaning), and the compositional arrangements of visual resources are all metafunctions of visual images that, as according Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), are fulfilled by language as well (compositional meaning).

METHODOLOGY

a. Research Design

This researcher employed a descriptive quantitative-qualitative research design. The participants were asked to answer a research questionnaire on their knowledge and understanding of visual language in a regional film.

b. Description of the Research

The research was conducted at Baybay City Senior High School, Baybay City, Leyte. Ten (10) Grade 12 senior high school students from four (4) strands namely, Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM); General Academics (GA); Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS); and, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), were purposively selected. The study involved a total of 40 participants. Ten (10) students in the class were chosen based on their third-quarter grades.

c. Inclusion Criteria

Only the students of Baybay City Senior High School who have currently taken a course in Media and Information Literacy were selected to be the participants of the research in the film

viewing. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was administered after the data analysis to validate their responses written in the questionnaire.

d. Sampling Procedure

The respondents of this research were the students in Baybay City Senior High School who were officially admitted to the course entitled Media and Information Literacy for the Academic Year 2022-2023, third quarter. The respondents were selected using Purposive Sampling.

e. Research Material and Instrument

One regional short film with a runtime of 10:53 minutes was chosen as the research material. The title of the Film was K[U]ADRADO, directed by Kyle Ferminoza. He is an award-winning filmmaker, actor, cinematographer, visual artist, and tattoo artist from Iloilo, Philippines. His film K[U]ADRADO [FRAME/D] (2021) was one of the films of Eksena Cinema Quarantine: Covid-19 Filmmakers' Diaries funded by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (Committee on Cinema) and was nominated for Best Short Film at the Gawad Urian given by the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (Critics of the Philippine Cinema).

Prior to the film showing, the students were given an orientation lecture about the research and what they were expected to accomplish. After the film viewing, three (3) screenshot photos from the film showing varied symbolic codes chosen by the researcher was shown to the students. These screenshots represent the 3 major sequences of the film. The first screenshot photo was an establishing shot of an actor; the second screenshot was the conflict of the film; and the third and the last screenshot photo was the denouement of the film.

The use of the screenshot from the film was adopted from the "Shot by Shot Analysis" developed for film analysis by Ryan and Lenos (2012). According to the technique, it will facilitate the description of the selected shot composition of a film which is difficult to accomplish if motion sequence is used. The screenshot is the picture of what is on screen which can be conveniently reviewed by the viewer and can be utilized for the descriptive Visual Social Semiotic analysis of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

The film, which was shown to the participants, was played in the audiovisual room. A research questionnaire was distributed to the participants that asked them about their sociodemographic profile and description of the symbolic visual codes that they could identify from each of the 3 screenshot photos of the film. After the students had filled out the questionnaire, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) composed of 10 participants was conducted to validate the responses of the students. The questionnaires and the FGD results were prepared for analysis. A total of 120 responses from the participants were described and analyzed for their meanings from the group of senior high school students, whereas a total of 3 images were described and analyzed on part of the researcher. Overall, a total of 120 screenshot images had undergone the description process and analysis.

f. Data Analysis

To analyze the visual grammar of the student participants, the descriptive Visual Social Semiotic analysis of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) was used. Different elements of visual grammar under the 3 metafunctions were used to describe the 3 screenshots, which were presented to each senior high school student-participant. The answers of the participants were then coded and categorized using visual grammar description tables. The answers were classified into categories.

After the categories were identified, the second round of analysis was conducted for denotative and connotative meanings. An inclusion criterion was set for the participants, and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted to help validate the data analysis. To further deepen the analysis, the descriptions and meanings made by the senior high school students were compared with the descriptions and meanings made by the researcher. The sociodemographic profile of the students and the results of the FGD were also used as references in the discussion of results. The results and discussion (sense-making) were presented in the form of a narrative.

g. Ethical Considerations

The researcher had first sought permission from the School Principal of Baybay City Senior High School to research students who were officially enrolled and had already taken the Media and Information Literacy course. The researcher did not force participants to complete the survey. He also assured them that all information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Only ten (10) of the forty (40) participants were able to attend the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), three days after the survey, due to their conflicting class schedules.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research, conducted at Baybay City Senior High School, involved forty Academic Track participants, aged 17 to 21, representing various strands. The aim was to explore participants' proficiency in reading visual languages, a crucial aspect for a comprehensive understanding of films beyond verbal communication. The research revealed that accessibility, availability, and economic factors strongly influenced the media preferences of the participants, with a notable inclination towards online streaming platforms, particularly accentuated during the pandemic.

a. Analysis of Social Distance

In the analysis of social distance in the regional film, focusing on the perceived emotional or psychological distance between viewers and film elements, uncovered diverse interpretations among participants. The study used screenshots from the film "Kuadrado" to assess participants' visual literacy, exposing challenges in correctly identifying social distance categories. The findings indicated disparities in participants' abilities to recognize these categories, emphasizing the need for enhanced visual literacy skills.

b. Analysis of Subject Gaze

The exploration of subject gazes, categorized as demand and offer gazes, demonstrated varying levels of understanding among participants. Despite the visual significance of gazes in conveying emotions and narrative cues, some participants struggled to differentiate between demand and offer gazes in the provided screenshots.

Further analysis during focus group discussions revealed discrepancies in participants' comprehension, with only seven out of ten aligning their answers with a clear understanding, while three participants appeared to guess their responses. This underscores the importance of fostering visual literacy skills in film education to ensure a more nuanced and accurate interpretation of cinematic language.

c. Analysis First Screenshot Symbolic Codes

The first screenshot of the regional short film presented various symbolic codes, with the primary focus on the researcher's interpretations compared to those of the participants.



Figure 1. Screenshot Photo SEQ Screenshot_Photo \^ ARABIC 1. The first screenshot photo shows the establishing shot/scene of the film which provides visual and contextual information to set the location, time, and mood for the viewers.

The "rock" was unanimously recognized and denotatively defined as a "solid mineral material." Participants shared a connotative interpretation, associating the rock with "toughness" and life challenges, aligning with the researcher's perspective.

The second code, a "framed wooden structure with a white curtain," symbolizing imprisonment per the researcher, encountered divergent interpretations. Participants emphasized opportunities, resilience, and direction, highlighting potential communication barriers in decoding complex symbolic elements.

The third code, "light coming from the sun," was universally acknowledged and correctly connotatively interpreted by participants, reflecting the heavy mood in the film. The "black and white" color palette, noted by one participant, was recognized as a challenge, aligning with the researcher's insight into the director's intentional use to signify separation and imagination.

The final code, the actor "facing away from the camera," depicting isolation, went unnoticed by participants. This oversight is crucial, as the researcher posits its poignant contribution to the film's theme of isolation amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

While participants generally captured the essence of certain symbolic codes, the divergence in interpretations, especially regarding the wooden structure and the actor's gaze, underscores the complexity of conveying nuanced themes. The filmmaker's deliberate choices in visual storytelling may require more explicit cues for audience comprehension, emphasizing the importance of shared understanding in cinematic interpretation.

d. Analysis of Second Screenshot Symbolic Codes

In the second screenshot of the regional short film, participants identified several symbolic codes that played pivotal roles in conveying the narrative's conflict.

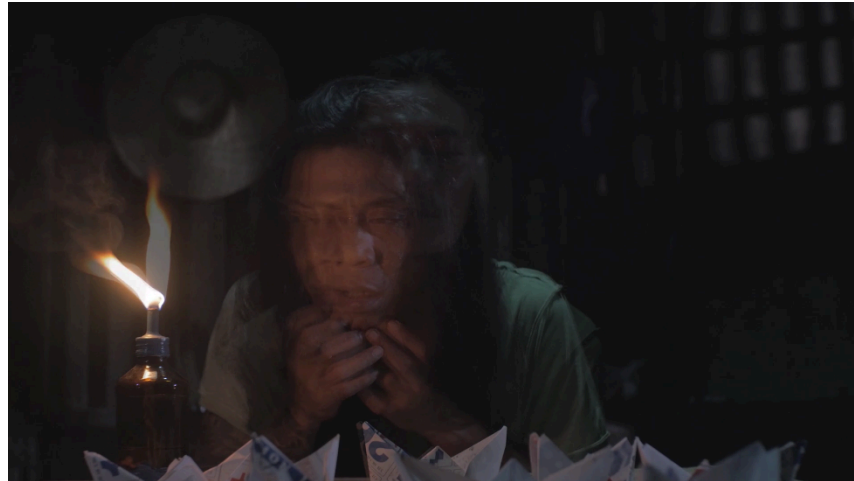


Figure 2. Screenshot Photo 2. Revealing the essence and internal conflict within the film as the actor grapples with himself

The "paper boat" in the foreground, recognized by thirty-one participants, was denotatively interpreted as "origami art" and connotatively associated with "imagination" and "flashback." While the participants captured the essence of childhood and adventure, only one participant explicitly linked it to a flashback, which aligns with the researcher's observation of the symbolism.

The "lamp," noticed by twenty-nine participants, was denotatively defined as a "traditional source of light." However, the connotative meanings provided by participants, such as "light of life," "hope," and "life," diverged from the researcher's interpretation. The researcher saw the lamp's swaying fire as a metaphor for the actor's struggles with anxiety and depression, a nuance that went unnoticed by participants.

The "window," identified by fifteen participants, was denotatively understood as a "part of the house." However, the connotative meanings diverged, with participants associating it with "prison," "gateway to hope," and "hope." The researcher emphasized the window as a metaphor for observing the external world, conveying a sense of imprisonment, which participants did not explicitly capture.

The "man" in the screenshot, recognized by four participants, was denotatively interpreted as an "adult human male." Connotatively, participants associated it with the "actor," "life," and "challenger," aligning with the researcher's understanding of the symbolic representation of the actor's role and life challenges.

The "calendar" used to create a paper boat, identified by two participants, was denotatively defined as a "list of days, weeks, or months." Connotatively, participants associated it with the "days of pain" and "various facets of encountered challenges," aligning with the researcher's insight into the actor's struggle and transformation of plans.

The "dark room" color palette, recognized by two participants, was both denotatively and connotatively associated with a "dark world." The participants accurately captured the symbolic meaning of a dark room representing evil, malice, or pain, in line with the researcher's observation.

While participants identified key symbolic codes, there were notable divergences in connotative interpretations, especially regarding the lamp and window. The nuanced layers of the filmmaker's visual storytelling, such as the lamp's metaphorical representation of the actor's struggles, require explicit cues for audience comprehension. This comparison emphasizes the challenges in conveying complex symbolic elements and the importance of shared understanding in cinematic interpretation.

d. Analysis of Third Screenshot Symbolic Codes

In the third screenshot, marking the denouement of the regional short film, participants identified key symbolic codes that provided insight into the film's resolution.



Figure 3. Screenshot Photo 3. The third screenshot photo shows the image on the denouement

The "paper boat" once again captured their attention, with thirty-seven participants interpreting its denotative meaning consistently with the second screenshot. However, the connotative meanings shifted towards more positive associations such as "freedom," "progress," and "challenges." Interestingly, the researcher noted this shift as well, emphasizing the symbolic transformation of the actor's perspective on life.

The "water" symbolic code, recognized by thirty-four participants, received denotative interpretations aligning with its physical properties. Connotatively, participants associated it with "challenges," "hope," and the "direction of life," echoing the positive thematic elements in the film. This convergence in interpretation between the researcher and participants reflects a shared understanding of water's symbolic significance in the narrative.

e. Connotation and Denotation of Meanings Between Participants

The "rocks" symbolic code, identified by twenty-five participants, maintained consistent denotative meanings with the first screenshot, but connotative meanings shifted towards positive qualities like "strength" and "boldness." The researcher acknowledged this shift, emphasizing the participant's positive interpretation. However, the researcher retained the original connotation of challenges in life, highlighting the subjective nature of symbolic interpretations.

The "calendar," recognized by two participants, retained consistent interpretations from earlier in the film, indicating a certain coherence in participants' perceptions throughout the screening. This continuity in interpretation suggests that certain symbolic codes maintain their significance across different scenes, creating a thread of meaning throughout the film.

The "mountain," identified by one participant, was denotatively interpreted as a "landform," aligning with the researcher's understanding. The participant's connotative interpretation associated the mountain with the "strong personality of the actor," capturing the metaphorical strength and resilience often attributed to mountains. The researcher validated this interpretation, emphasizing the actor's symbolic representation through the mountain. In the comparison and evaluation of symbolic codes between the researcher and participants, notable alignments and divergences were observed.

The shift in connotative meanings, particularly regarding the "paper boat," highlighted the nuanced evolution of themes in the denouement. The shared understanding of certain symbolic codes, such as "water," suggests successful communication of thematic elements in the film. However, variations in interpretations, especially regarding the "rocks," underscore the subjective nature of symbolic analysis.

Overall, this comparison emphasizes the importance of nuanced visual storytelling and the role of shared understanding in interpreting complex symbolic elements in cinema.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research underscored the influence of accessibility, availability, and economic factors on media preferences, particularly the heightened reliance on online streaming platforms during the pandemic. This shift in viewing habits emphasizes the need for educators and filmmakers to adapt to changing consumption patterns and leverage online platforms for visual literacy education.

The exploration of social distance in films revealed diverse interpretations among participants, highlighting the challenges in accurately identifying and categorizing emotional or psychological distances between viewers and film elements. This emphasizes the necessity of enhancing visual literacy skills in film education to ensure a more nuanced understanding of cinematic language.

The analysis of subject gazes further emphasized the importance of visual literacy skills, as participants demonstrated varying levels of understanding when differentiating between demand and offer gazes. The study highlighted the need for explicit cues in visual storytelling to facilitate a shared understanding among viewers, particularly in conveying emotions and narrative cues.

The in-depth examination of symbolic codes in the regional short film exposed both successful communication and challenges in conveying nuanced themes. While some symbolic

elements were universally recognized and interpreted, such as the "rock" and "light coming from the sun," others, like the "framed wooden structure" and the actor's "facing away from the camera," exhibited significant divergences in interpretation. This emphasizes the complexity of conveying abstract and layered themes through visual storytelling, necessitating explicit cues for audience comprehension.

The detailed examination of symbolic codes in the film "Kwadrado" offered valuable insights into the realm of non-verbal communication, emphasizing the potency of visual language in conveying nuanced messages. This research reinforced the significance of non-verbal cues in cinematic storytelling, showcasing how directors strategically employ symbolic elements to communicate complex themes and emotions without relying on explicit dialogue. Scholars in the field of non-verbal communication, such as Blatt, Tracy, and Owens (2006), can draw from this study to enrich their understanding of how visual symbols serve as a powerful mode of expression, transcending linguistic barriers and resonating with diverse audiences.

The comparison and evaluation of symbolic codes between the researcher and participants across different screenshots highlighted the subjective nature of symbolic analysis. While there were notable alignments in understanding certain symbols, such as "water," variations in interpretations, especially regarding the "rocks," underscored the need for a shared understanding in interpreting complex symbolic elements in cinema.

The findings also highlighted the need for a multidisciplinary approach, merging principles from cinematography, semiotics, and psychology to comprehensively grasp the intricacies of non-verbal communication in film. By referencing established works by Bordwell and Thompson (2010), Barthes (1977), and Eco (1977), scholars can build on the foundation laid by this research to explore the cultural and psychological dimensions influencing the reception of visual symbols. This interdisciplinary perspective contributes to a more holistic understanding of non-verbal communication in the cinematic context, paving the way for future studies that delve into the intersectionality of semiotics, psychology, and film studies.

Overall, this research contributes to the broader understanding of the significance of non-verbal communication in the realm of visual literacy, particularly in film education. The study underscores the challenges and opportunities presented by evolving media preferences, the complexities of social distance and subject gazes, and the nuanced interpretation of symbolic codes. It advocates for a more explicit and shared visual language in cinematic storytelling, ensuring a richer and more accurate comprehension of the diverse elements that contribute to the cinematic experience.

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