

التحليل الدلالي للتعبيرات السينمائية

Semantic Analysis of Cinematic Expressions

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maysalih@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq**Abstract**

Film makers and cinematic critics depend on specialized jargons expressions in the process of both discussing their works and reviewing the latest releases. Theses expressions range from simple and direct to detailed and complex. Sometimes they are fully explained without the need of a full context and sometimes the full meaning is understood simply by using the jargon without others associations.

This study deals with the analysis of cinematic expressions and jargon in the light of Geoffrey Leech`s seven types of meaning. This framework has been chosen due to its wide scope and flexible features which makes it a proper model of analysis to examine the different meanings intended by these expressions.

Throughout the analysis the researcher has attempted to analyze the examples–within full sentences– applying the model of Leech and showing the

differences between the types and the reasons behind neglecting certain types and the repetition of other types.

Key terms: Cinematic language, types of meaning, cinematic jargons, semantic analysis

الملخص العربي:

تعد لغة السينما إحدى أكثر الأساليب التعبيرية توظيفاً للمصطلحات المتخصصة والتعابير السينمائية الفنية. وتتنوع هذه التعابير من بسيطة يسهل فهمها حتى من القارئ غير المتخصص لتعابير طويلة وتفصيلية تستلزم بعداً ثقافياً ودراية سينمائية. تقوم الدراسة على تحليل أمثلة من مواقع سينمائية متخصصة من خلال تطبيق نموذج جيفري ليج القائم على تحليل المعنى لسبعة أنواع. وتبين الدراسة – من خلال تحليل هذه الأمثلة اعتماداً على هذا الإطار التحليلي – السبب وراء توظيف نوع معين دون الآخر والمعنى من خلال توظيف هذه الأنواع من المعاني والدلالات.

Types of Meaning

Geoffrey Leech in his ‘Semantics– The Study of meaning’ (1981) breaks down meaning into seven types or ingredients giving primacy to conceptual meaning. This primacy comes from the fact that conceptual meaning is the core or essence upon which other types or shades of meaning are added,” it is the denotative or cognitive meaning, widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication “ (Leech, 1981, p. 9).

When shades of meanings are added to the basic conceptual meaning; it means that a new value has been added “Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it *refers to*, over and above its purely conceptual content.” (Leech, 1981, p. 12). Connotative meaning is a more expanded meaning, some may consider it a secondary one in comparison to the main and basic literal meaning. Other scholars believe that all types of meanings–other than the denotative

(conceptual) one- are connotative since they don't reflect the dictionary meaning. (Hervey & Higgins , 2016, pp. 95-107)

There is some similarity between the definition of jargons-as technical or special terms that are used in specific profession or by a specific age group- and what Leech considers as social meaning which is the third type of meaning according to Leech classification, considering the fact that they are related to different social groups," the social type of meaning includes all the social circumstances regarding the use of a piece of language. (Leech, 1981, p. 14). Socio-linguistic factors including: time, status and context, types of text, and singularity could be considered within this category.

It is important to note that meanings can be expressed directly or indirectly, and the (affective meaning) which is connected to the social meaning is an example of the meaning that can reflect the feelings and attitudes of the listener; according to (Leech, 1981, p. 15) "Affective meaning deals with the way a language can reflect personal feelings of the speaker that may include attitude to a listener or something he is talking about". Since we are dealing with attitudes and emotions; things like body language, gestures and tone of voice can add to the analysis and significance of affective meaning.

When more than one concept can be applied to a certain word, and these meanings are interrelated; it is known as (reflected meaning) according to (Leech, 1981, p. 16) who defines it as "when one sense of a word influences our response to another sense".

"Collocative meaning consists of the associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words which tend to occur in its environment." (Leech, 1981, p. 17). Collocative meaning is derived from the context or environment in which the intended

word occurs. This is to support the fact that words are not used in isolation. Collocation plays an important role to learn a language. (Benson, Benson, & Ilson, 2010, p. XIII) said that students must learn about how words collocate with other words; since understanding collocation can help to enrich vocabulary and fathom different aspect of language use and meaning.

Just like collocative meaning is studied within the environment of words, thematic meaning is another example of sentence meaning, “Thematic meaning is the meaning of words that arise due to the emphasis or focus on the conversation in a sentence or statement “ (Leech, 1981, p. 19). The thematic roles provide the words and phrases with certain tasks and functions within the sentence. This type of meaning is best understood when we think of the whole text as one main idea or concept, and each word fulfills its role. There are links between words that serve to present the main idea.

The meaning conveyed by the piece of language about the social context of its use is called the social meaning. The decoding of a text is dependent on our knowledge of stylistics and other variations of language. We recognize some words or pronunciation as being dialectical i.e. as telling us something about the regional or social origin of the speaker. Social meaning is related to the situation in which an utterance is used.

E.g. “I ain’t done nothing” The line tells us about the speaker and that is the speaker is probably a black American, underprivileged and uneducated.

Affective or Emotive Meaning. It refers to emotive association or effects of words evoked in the reader, listener. It is what is conveyed about the personal feelings or attitude towards the listener. As an e.g. ‘home’ for a sailor/soldier or expatriate and ‘mother’ for a motherless child, a married woman (esp. in Indian context) will have

special effective, emotive quality. For Leech affective meaning refers to what is convey about the feeling and attitude of the speak through use of language (attitude to listener as well as attitude to what he is saying). Affective meaning is often conveyed through conceptual, connotative content. Affective meaning goes beyond literal meaning to communicate emotions and subjective opinions.

“I hate you, you idiot”. We are left with a little doubt about the speaker’s feelings towards the listener. Here speaker seems to have a very negative attitude towards his listener. This is called affective meaning

Reflected meaning arises when a word has more than one conceptual meaning or multiple conceptual meanings. In church service ‘the comforter and the Holy Ghost’ refer to the third in Trinity. They are religious words. But unconsciously there is a response to their non-religious meanings too. Thus the ‘comforter’ sounds warm and comforting while the ‘Ghost’ sounds ‘awesome’ or even ‘dreadful’. One sense of the word seems to rub off on another especially through relative frequency and familiarity (e.g. a ghost is more frequent and familiar in no religious sense.). In poetry too we have reflected meaning as in the following lines from ‘Futility’ ‘Are limbs so dear achieved, are sides, Full nerved still warm-too hard to stir’ Owen here uses ‘dear’ in the sense of expensiveness. – But the sense of beloved is also eluded.

Reflected meaning is also found in taboo words. The word ‘intercourse’ immediately reminds us of its association with sex (sexual intercourse). The sexual association of the word drives away its innocent sense, i.e. ‘communication’

Collocative meaning is the meaning which a word acquires in the company of certain words. Words collocate or co-occur with certain words only e.g. **big business not large or great**. Collocative meaning refers to associations of a word because of its

usual or habitual co-occurrence with certain types of words. ‘Pretty’ and ‘handsome’ indicate ‘good looking

Thematic Meaning. It refers to what is communicated by the way in which a speaker or a writer organizes the message in terms of ordering focus and emphasis. Thus, active is different from passive though its conceptual meaning is the same. The ways we order our message also convey what is important and what not. This is basically thematic meaning. 1\The dean of the college donated the first prize.2\ The first prize was donated by the dean of the college. In the first sentence “who gave away the prize “is more important, but in the second sentence “what did the dean gave is important”. Thus, the change of focus changes the meaning also.

Language of Cinema

One of the main challenges of filmmakers is when dealing with the inner and exterior parts of their characters. In order to do so, they tend to make use of certain techniques to show in full details the interior and exterior conflicts of their protagonists. Such techniques include: Cinematography, sound, spatial dimensions, movement of the camera, the frame of pictures, the written script (the language used semiotically and verbally).

Both filmmakers and cinema critics rely on language –both as a tool of representing the plot and rating or criticizing movies– in addition to elements like shooting and editing and other visual requirements. When it comes to the language of cinema, it has often been describing as semiotic as Metz says” language of cinema is a system of codes” (Metz, 1976, p. 583). Codes in cinema is a system of images and various forms of narration and depicting events by which a bridge is established between the visual product and the viewer; for the sake of achieving the utmost goal: communication.

Aiming for a better communication, language of cinema can employ different strategies including imagery (which cinematic language shares with literature). As James Monaco explained “It is useful to use the metaphor of language to describe the phenomenon of film”. (Monaco, 2000) Metaphorical language is an essential part of the genre of film criticism because it means that this specific word or cinematic jargon is used in a new figurative way, or that it is being used due to its basic meaning but with a slight semantic change.

And since “the best criticism deepens our interest in individual films, reveals new meanings and perspectives, expands our sense of the medium, confronts our assumptions about value, and sharpens our capacity to discriminate” (Clayton & Klevan, 2011, p. 14). This implies that the use of language when discussing film issues includes linguistic elements, often expressing the creator’s aim and purpose.

In addition to metaphorical language, jargons and technical terms, idioms are heavily used in discussing movies. Idioms are used in everyday language and they are a very prominent feature of cinematic language since they make the writings on cinema more colorful, rich and intriguing – considering the fact that such writings are published on websites and that element of holding the reader’s attention is indispensable. It is important to note that “The meaning of idioms is often unpredictable based solely on word-for-word language knowledge. Therefore, understanding idioms requires cultural knowledge, the typical use of language, and the situational context in which the idioms are used”. (Kusomo Adi, 2024)

Most idioms used in cinematic writings are understood within the context –the film that is being discussed or the whole situation of cinematic industry– and the writer needs to tackle not only the plot, director’s vision, acting and editing but also factors like soundtrack and attraction. Writing for cinema is a comprehensive process in which both the writer and reader are in need of both the knowledge and cultural

background. If shots are the main focus in cinema and words are the main communicative tools in language; then cinematic jargons and expressions are the most expressive devices of the two worlds of language and cinema.

Analysis of examples

The following examples are taken from (The conversation) website. These essays on cinema discusses the latest news, critical reviews and updates on movies. The website is similar to Rotten Tomatoes –minus the percentages that show the status of the film–

The type of meaning –one of Leech`s seven types–will be mentioned first, followed by the example, then the justification of the specific choice.

1–Connotative meaning

1– “There are films **in the pipelines** for 2021”

The meaning of the idiomatic expression (in the pipelines) is to describe something that is being developed, prepared, or planned.

Meaning of the sentence: There are films that are prepared and will be released on 2021.

According to Leech, connotative meaning is the most inclusive type of meanings since all meanings that are not denotative are actually connotative. The virtue of connotative meaning lies in what it refers to rather than its literal or conceptual meaning. In this example, the association of both (pipelines) and (films) sets a context that clarifies the idiomatic meaning which can be summarized using cinematic jargons that new films are soon to be released.

2-“Un-Nollywood-like or beyond Nollywood”

The term (Nollywood) is inspired from (Hollywood) and it means the Nigerian Cinema and everything related to the movie industry in Nigeria. When the writer uses (un-Nollywood-like) he refers to certain films that fall outside the realm of the traditional cinematic Nigerian school.

It is connotative since connotation meaning main concern is the secondary meaning; the shades of meaning that are not reflected in the denotative and basic meaning of the word. The term Nollywood is formed as an analogy to Hollywood in order to connote or imply the meaning intended: the center of cinematic industry.

3- “For virtually all cinemas, the occasional mainstream biggie is essential to make the sums add up increasingly, those **tent –pole films** come from a small number of distributors”

The term –tent pole films– is used to describe films that are expected to be hit and very successful with big budgets. It is a slang (informal) term that refer to movies that are expected to achieve high profits by selling products related to the movie. The original term (tent pole) is used to describe events that require pre-planning and marketing campaigns.

It is connotative because connotation goes beyond the basic and dictionary meaning and concentrates on the cultural and social implication a word may have. Here, it is not about the meanings of tents and poles, but about the huge events and marketing campaigns that usually accompany releasing such big budget movies.

4- “Ten films that **bend, stretch and play** with time, from Citizen Kane to Memento”

The verbs (bend, stretch, play) are used figuratively and connotatively to discuss how certain movies deal with the concept of time. In linear and non-linear movies where the theme of (time) is the main factor, filmmakers employ this concept differently according to the genre of the film itself. The writer of the article used the three verbs mimicking the movement of the human body. A human being can play and stretch in his/her movements, and so do movies when depicting (time).

5- “Is Deadpool & Wolverine the hit Marvel needs? It’s entertaining – but it likely won’t cure our **superhero fatigue**”

The word (fatigue) is used to describe the need for a real superhero movie after a series of failed ones. This connotative use creates a very rich image where one can imagine the cinematic environment as exhausted, pale, and tired or filled with movies of questionable quality, and in need for fresh blood i.e., new interesting super hero movies that can start waves and end the fatigue.

2-Affective meaning

1-“horror genre”

This cinematic genre refers to the films that discuss the weight self-consciousness (overweight issues specifically) like The Whale, Surprise Me, The Nutty Professor, Fed Up ...etc.

Meaning of the sentence: the films that discuss the people’s general phobia concerning gaining weight and obesity.

It is affective because it goes beyond the literal meaning of (body horror) to describe the phobia and obsession of weight. And since affective meaning seeks to affect and create reactions towards a certain issue, the word (horror) was chosen for this

purpose– to produce a response. In this case, we have the body issues –discussed in many movies leading into a category –or genre– of its own that throughout the years attracted audience and grossed profits.

2–“What scholar Hamid Naficy calls –**Cinema of the averted gaze**–has emerged both male and female filmmakers”.

When we avert our gazes, it means that we tend to avoid something or turn a blind eye to something. This idiomatic expression is used to describe a type or genre of cinemas that tackle certain taboo topics that are usually avoided by other filmmakers.

It is affective meaning because it seeks to create a certain response by creating a mental image –averting our gazes in fear or avoidance–to describe a specific cinematic genre.

3–Collocative meaning

“**Till flesh do us apart**”

This line is taken from the movie (The Whale) where the main character uses the expression (till death do us apart) and changes the word (death) to be (flesh) in order to reflect his own struggle with weight as a means to commit a gradual suicide by gaining more weight deliberately. Death equals flesh in this new equation of quitting and letting life goes.

It is collocative, because as we have already mentioned before, collocative meaning is acquired in the company of other words. With some adaptation and replacing (death) with(flesh), the whole meaning is expected merely by mentioning the first two words.

4-Conceptual meaning

1-“Exorcist **premiered** 50 years ago”

In an example of (conversion) the term (premiere) which means the first public showing of a film is used as a verb.

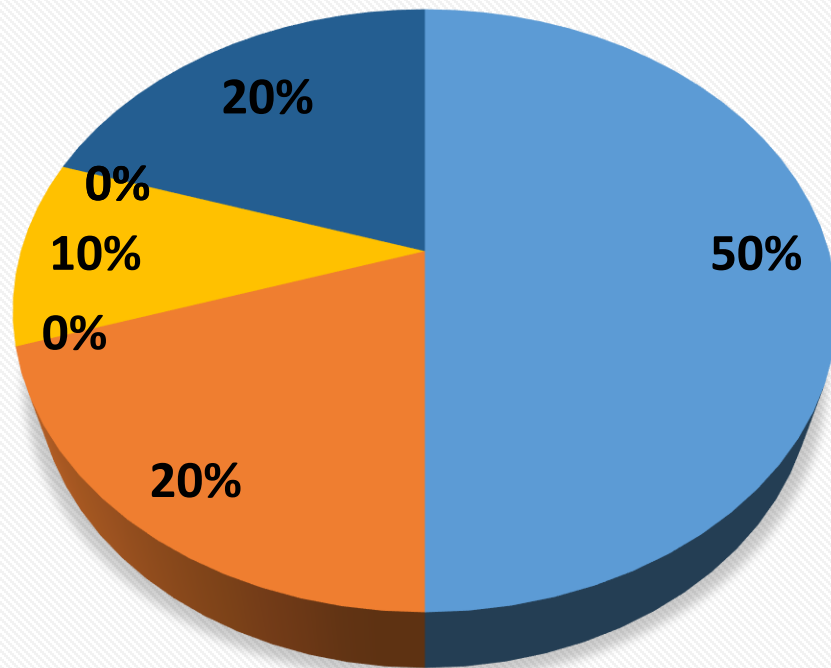
It is regarded as conceptual because the basic meaning (to show or exhibit for the first time) has been used without any additional shades or alterations. Some cinematic jargons are merely conceptual when dealing with certain news, information and updates. Language of criticism is usually rich with figurative and connotative uses of words.

2-“ A huge shark terrorizes people in new French hit Under Paris. When will we stop villainizing these animals?”

In literature and cinema, the word (villain) is the technical term describing the bad (evil) character in contrast to (hero) or (savior) characters. The word here is used as a verb in its literal, direct and conceptual meaning to discuss how sharks are usually depicted in movies. The stereotype of sharks being villains are strongly rejected by the writer of the article as shown in the headline.

Figure (1)

Cinematic expressions shades of meaning



■ connotative ■ affective ■ reflected
■ collocative ■ thematic ■ social

Conclusions:

- 1- Social meaning is rarely used since the language of criticism is objective and doesn't reflect the speaker's social or cultural background.
- 2- Connotation is repeated in many examples because the language of cinematic criticism is rich with meanings that are figurative and connotative. Language used in these articles are innovative, metaphorical and subjective, and therefore shades of meanings are distinguished features of this genre.
- 3- Thematic meaning is best represented when dealing with long sentences and paragraphs, and since this study deals with short sentences and expressions, thematic meaning is not illustrated in the examples of the study.
- 4- A technical and specific language like the language of cinema can never allow for the use of social meaning, considering the fact that such type of meaning is a reflection of social, cultural, and dialectical implications which are rarely reflected in specialized critical language.
- 5- Idiomatic meaning (and cinematic idioms included) is enclosed within connotative meaning since, as explained in the section of analysis, connotative meaning is the most inclusive type of meaning.
- 6- Both affective and collocative meanings are represented in the examples of analysis. Both types are used creatively by the writers of cinematic articles to reflect their reviews on films
- 7- Articles that reflect the latest news of films usually rely on denotative words, since they are objective and don't reflect the critics' views, while critical articles on cinema where the subjective opinions prevail are usually rich with connotative meanings.

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