

A Phonosemantic Study of Some Selected Hollywood Romantic Movies' Titles

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الباحث

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Abstract:-

This study is an attempt to reveal the effect of sounds on the meaning of the form (word) that they formulate. A phonosemantic study is done of ten romantic movies' titles to show how sounds can reflect meaning and associate with feelings, emotions and attitudes. The Universal Theory that Agrawal suggested is used as a model in this study. The results show that sounds are meaning-bearing elements. Furthermore; it reveals that the titles reflect the events of their movies.

Key words:

Phonosemantics, Romantic movies, The Universal Theory.

المخلص:-

تمحور هذه الدراسة حول تطبيق نظرية الكاتب الهندي كومار اكراول في الكشف عن تأثير الاصوات في معاني عناوين الافلام الرومانسية المختارة التي انتجتها شركة هوليوود. تم التوصل إلى العديد من النتائج بعد تطبيق النظرية المذكورة. حيث بينت النتائج ان الاصوات تحمل العديد من المعاني وان هذه العناوين تعتبر انعكاس لأحداث الافلام التي عنونها.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الصوتي، الدلالي، الأفلام الرومانسية، النظرية الكونية.

Introduction:-

Language is the essential tool that is used for conveying a message among people. This vital tool is constructed from sounds, and sounds compose words, then the words link together to form a large unit which is a phrase or a sentence. Sentences are associated with each other to formulate a larger section which can be called a text. The smallest elements of the language (i.e. phonemes) may or may not reflect meanings. Some linguists claim that sounds do not have any association with meaning of the forms that they construct, such as de Saussure, whereas others believe that sounds are meaning-bearing elements, such as Spire and Jespersen.

Yaqoob (2021, p.3) states that media, such as newspapers, magazines and movies can be added to them reflect social and political issues from the fact of life. Thus, movie-makers follow many steps to produce a well-formed movie that reflects life and attracts the audience's attention. One of these steps is constructing a title which depends on the sounds that composing.

How does a specific word describe a specific entity. What kind of relationship is there between a word and its referent? Is there any natural relation or association between the two? The Swiss linguist Feridnad de Saussure proposed two terms, they are: signified and signifier, the relationship between them is arbitrary. Signified is the mental representation of the idea or the object, whereas signifier is the sound of the spoken word of that mental aspect in the external world.

Linguists, such as Ohala, Jespersen, Jakobson, who adopted the idea about the natural relation of sound and meaning produced a new term which is phonosemantics. It can be understood clearly from its name "phonosemantics" that is a combination of phonology (the study of sounds pattern, and all systematic use of sounds within language) and semantics (the study of the meaning of signs, words and larger units). So, the aim of this field is meaning and how phonemes or sounds have the role or natural reflection of the meaning of larger units, such as clusters, syllables and words. The ruling idea in linguistics is that when deleting a phoneme (the smallest segmental unit of a language) from a morpheme, such as /pæt/ the remaining phonemic sequence becomes odd and

meaningless. Phonosemantics looks to a phoneme as having a potential meaning.

Methodology:

In this study, an attempt is made to explore this discipline (i.e. phonosemantics) to clarify the association between sounds and the meanings of the forms they construct. Pramod Kumar Agrawal who is a science scholar and works in the field of philosophical aspects of science, suggested in his books "Theory of Phonosemantics" in 2010 and "The Meaningfulness of Sounds" in 2016 a general theory called "the Universal Theory".

Agrawal (2016, p. 50) states that the human body is made of many cells; each cell is constructed and controlled by a code which can be called DNA. The world is comprised of many existences each of which is formulated and controlled by the same DNA or inbuilt unitary code which can be called God or sometimes Science. The previously mentioned word "existence" does not refer to an object as Agrawal believes, but to the root of the object which is found in all kinds of existing objects. Each existence is comprised of cosmology, physical, biological, psychological and intellectual worlds. The relationships among these worlds are the same, and each world or level has its own science, but the same unitary code. It is believed in this theory that phonosemantics can be seen under the same unitary code to be explained on the platform of existence.

Some notes should be taken into consideration during the application of "The Universal Theory" Agrawal (2010, 2014, 2016, 2020):

- 1- There is a specific psychological feeling for each phoneme. These feelings are explained in literary meaning. Agrawal believes that the development of languages takes place by converting feelings into sounds.
- 2- Language is a stream of psychological messages that convert into intellectual messages, so grammar does not attach any attention.
- 3- The focus in the description is on the phonemes only without focusing on the effect of stress, tunes or intonation.

- 4- This theory does not deal with function or grammatical words, such as “the”, “but”, it deals with content or lexical words only, since grammatical words have little identifiable meaning.
- 5- There is not any description for diphthongs and triphthongs, they can be analyzed according to their elements. For example, the sound /eɪ/ can be described with the features of the sounds /e/ and /ɪ/.

Romantic Movies:

A romantic movie is a term that refers to those movies that show love affairs between the characters of a story or a movie. The website Britannica mentions that the word romance or romantic can be attached to two kinds of stories; those which end sadly and the others which end happily in marriage. Altman (1999, pp. 30-31) says that Hollywood uses music with romantic movies to indicate amusement and enjoyment. Cawelti (1976, p. 41) mentions that while adventure stories central character are males, the central figures of the romantic stories are women. He adds that romantic works focus on love affairs and their development between men and women. Most modern romantic stories tend to end in marriage and the reunion of the lovers. So, romantic works in general refer to the works which focus on the relationships and love affairs among the characters of the works or movies. The ten selected movies' titles to be analyzed phonosemantically are⁽¹⁾ “gone with the wind”, “the sound of music”, “pretty in pink”, “say anything”, “pretty woman”, “sense and sensibility”, “titanic”, “the wedding singer”, “twilight” and “la la land”. Merriam Webster Dictionary will be used for the dictionary meaning of the application.

1- “Gone with the Wind”

The movie is about the story of a beautiful and rich lady who lives in America. Scarlett dreams to complete her life with the man that she falls in love with. But, the civil war changes everything. Tara, the man whom she falls in love with decides to marry another lady, and Scarlett becomes in a miserable condition. Then, she gets married to three men. Therefore, her dreams are gone with the wind. The movie was based on the old story that Margaret Mitchell had written; later it was rewritten by Sidney Howard as a movie story, and then was directed by Victor Fleming in 1939. It was the Oscar award

winner in (1940) and the National Board of Review award winner in (1940). Moreover it was nominated for the New York Film Critics Association award in (1939).

Application “1”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Gone	lost or ruined	/gɒn/	/g/ result, /ɒ/ accept invisible ability of existent, /n/ emptiness
Wind	the natural movement of air that moves in a natural motion horizontally	/wɪnd/	/w/ acceptable existence, /ɪ/ evident, /n/ fullness of identity, /d/ activated

After the application of the Universal Theory, the phonosemantic meaning of the first part can be read as {an existence which results in emptiness and invisibility}. The second part can mean {there is an evidence that the existence (air) is fully active }. So, the final title can be read phonosemantically as the state of emptiness for an existence.

2-“The Sound of Music”

The movie is about a young lady who is sent by her convent to be a governess for the children of a widowed naval officer. Maria fails to be a nun after she falls in love with George Trapp the officer. George asks for the help of the convent to send him a governess after the failure of many other previous governesses for his mischievous children. At the end of the movie, Maria finds herself in a love affair and fails as a nun. The movie was written by Russel Crouse, and then it was directed by Robert Wise in 1965. It was the Oscar award winner (1966), the Golden Globes award winner in (1966) and the Photoplay award winner in (1966). Furthermore, it was nominated for many awards, such as the BAFTA award in (1966) and the New York Critics Circle award in (1965).

Application “2”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Sound	the sensation perceived by the sense of hearing	/saund/	/s/ expressible, /a/ existence with existent, /u/ hidden, /n/ eager to acquire, /d/

Music	the art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity	/mju:zɪk/	activated. /m/ eagerness to be acquired, /j/ evident, /u/ accepting existent inside, /z/ continuous aliveness, /ɪ/ visible, /k/ towards clarifying the features with open consciousness
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The phonosemantic meaning of the first part is {an existence which is hidden, activated and acquired by others}. The second part can be read as {an existence which is eager to be acquired by others since it is characterized by a continuous aliveness and it shows clarification for the inside features}. The title that can be attached to the above analyzed one is an existence that indicates aliveness and which is eager to be acquired by others.

3-“Pretty in Pink”

The story of this movie is about a poor girl in a high school. Andie comes from a poor town and she is not popular in her school. She loves her childhood sweetheart boy “Duckie”, then, she meets a new friend called “Blane” a playboy and from high a rank class. Her friends say that she will not be able to complete her relationship due to social class differences, but the couple (Andie and Blane) confront such differences and love each other. The movie was written by John Hughes, and then it was directed by Howard Deutch in 1986. It won the BMI Film award and the TV award in 1987.

Application “3”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Pretty	appearing or sounding pleasant or nice	/prɪtɪ/	/p/ towards acquiring the identity with support, /r/ sensation, /ɪ/ noticeable existent, /t/ occupying, /ɪ/ evident
pink	a color which is bluish red to red in hue	/pɪŋk/	/p/ towards acquiring the identity with support, /ɪ/ noticeable existent, /ŋ/ confusing, /k/ hesitating

The phonosemantic meaning that can be obtained for the first part is {an existence which has evidence that it has sensation}. The

second part can be read as {existence (color) which is confusing and hesitating}. So, the final title can be read as an existence who has sensation and wears a confusing color.

4-“Say Anything”

The movie tells a love story between high school students. Lloyd Dobler wants nothing more than winning heart of his beloved Diane Court who was aloof girl. The couple meet at the graduation festival and Dobler hopes to speak to Diane who is a beautiful girl, but she is protected by her wary father. Therefore, she cannot have a love affair because of her father. The movie was written and then directed by the same man who was Cameron Crowe in 1989. It won the Chicago Film Critics Association award in (1990) and was nominated for the DVD Exclusive award in (2003) and the Satellite award in (2009).

Application “4”

The tile	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Say	to express in words	/seɪ/	/s/ clear expression, /e/ indicative existent, /ɪ/ noticeable existent
Anything	anything whatever: any such thing.	/enɪθɪŋ/	/e/ indicative existent, /n/ act of acquiring, /ɪ/ noticeable existent, /θ/ towards offering the appearance with established display, /ɪ/ noticeable existent, /ŋ/ lively

The phonosemantic meaning that can be associated with the first part of the above analyzed title is {expressing noticeable things (words)}, whereas the second one can be read as {offering and displaying any indicative thing}. The final title is the state of providing a noticeable thing.

5-“Pretty Woman”

The movie deals with the story of a wealthy and smart man who looks for a lady to be his girlfriend in social events. Edward Lewis is a very rich man who falls in love with a beautiful young lady named Vivian. Vivian leaves her previous work and becomes the beloved of that wealthy suave man. The movie was written by J. F. Lawton, and then it was directed by Garry Marshall in 1990. It won the BMI Film

and TV award in (1991); furthermore, in (1991) it was nominated for the Oscar award, the BAFTA award, and the Golden Globe award.

Application “5”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Pretty	appearing or sounding pleasant or nice	/prɪtɪ/	/p/ towards acquiring the identity with support, /r/ sensation, /ɪ/ noticeable existent, /t/ occupying, /ɪ/ evident
Woman	an adult female person	/wʊmən/	/w/hidden existent, /u/ inside existent, /m/ substance, /ə/ existence, /n/ fullness of identity

The phonosemantic meaning of the first part of the selected title is {an existence which has evidence that it has sensation}, whereas the second part can be read as { an existence that has hidden substance and kindness}. So, the final meaning that can be associated with the title is an existence who has sensation and kindness.

6-“Sense and Sensibility”

The movie presents the story of three sisters with their mother who lives a difficult life after the death of their father Mr. Dashwood. Mr. Dashwood left all his fortune to his son from his first wife. So, the second wife with her three daughters live in a misery. But, later on they are taken by their cousin Elinor kindly. He supports them and they live happily. The movie was written by Emma Thompson, and then it was directed by Ang Lee in 1995. It was the Oscar award winner in (1996) and the BAFTA award winner in (1996). It was nominated for many awards, such as the Chicago Film Critics Association award in (1996) and the Chlotrudis award in (1996).

Application “6”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Sense	discerning awareness and appreciation	/sens/	/s/ expressible, /e/ indicated, /n/ eager to acquire, /s/ clear expression
Sensibility	awareness of	/sensəbɪlətɪ/	

	and responsiveness toward something, such as emotion		/s/ expressible, /e/ indicated, /n/ eager to acquire, /s/ expressible, /ə/ existence, /b/ bonding, /ɪ/ evident, /l/ fullness of available expansion of emotion, /ə/ existence, /t/ tendency, /ɪ/ noticeable existent
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The phonosemantic meaning that can be associated with the above analyzed title is {clear and indicated existence that links to expressible things} this is for the first part. The second part can be read as {an existence which has evidence that it has an expandable emotion}. So, it can be said that the final title can be read phonosemantically as an existence which indicates expressions and emotions.

7-“Titanic”

The movie tells the story of an aristocrat lady who falls in love with a poor young man. The story of Rose, the lady, and Jack, the young man happens in a very big ship called Titanic. Rose is departing with her upper-class family with other rich people and Jack won a ticket to be there in that voyage. Rose falls in love with Jack and they face many troubles. Titanic sinks and many people die. Rose loses her boyfriend and she survives. The movie was written and then directed by the same man who was James Cameron in 1997. In (1998) it was the Oscar award winner, the Screen Actors Guild award winner, the American Cinema Editors award winner, and was nominated in (1998) for many other awards, such as the BAFTA.

Application “7”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Titanic	having great magnitude, force or power	/taɪtænɪk/	/t/ towards occupying, /a/ placement, /i/ out exposing, /t/ status, /æ / visibility of existent, /n/ fullness of identity, /ɪ/ evident, /k/ toward explaining the clarity

After the application of the Universal Theory, the phonosemantic meaning of the title can be read as {an existence (ship) which is visible and has status with evidence that it is great}.

8-“The Wedding Singer”

The movie is a romantic and comic one. It tells the story of a singer who meets his beloved in a party. Robbie is a singer and Julia is a waitress both of them are engaged to the wrong people. One night, in a party Robbie meets Julia and he falls in love with her. The couple live a great love story and forget their previous engagement. The movie was written by Tim Herlihy, and it was then directed by Frank Coraci in 1998. It won the BMI Film and TV award in (1998) and the Kids’ Choice award in (1999). Furthermore, in (1999) it was nominated for the American Comedy award. and the Chlotrudis award.

Application “8”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Wedding	a marriage ceremony usually with its accompanying festivities	/wedɪŋ/	/w/ acceptable existence, /e/ display, /d/ activated, /ɪ/ evident, /ŋ/ emotionally strong
Singer	a person who sings	/sɪŋə(r)/	/s/ clear expression, /ɪ/ evident, /ŋ/ emotionally strong, /ə/ existence, /r/ sensation

After the application of the theory, the phonosemantic meaning that can be suggested for the first part of the selected title can be read as {an existence (event) which displays something and has an evidence that it is emotionally strong}. The second part, on the other hand, can be obtained as {an existence (person) who has evidence that he/ she has sensation to express a strong emotion. The final phonosemantic meaning that is connected to the title as a whole is the emotional display where an existence uses her/ his sensation to express emotional things.

9-“Twilight”

The movie tells the story of a love affair between a vampire and a mortal lady. Bella Swan lives a very different life from her schoolmates. One day, she meets a handsome boy called Edward. He can run faster than a loin of a mountain and can stop a train with his bare hands. He is a vampire, but does not have fangs. Edward falls in love with Bella, and she becomes the twilight for his darkness. When other vampires feel that there is a human being among them, they try

to attack her and Edward struggles to save his beloved Bella from that danger. Stephenie Meyer wrote the novel on which the movie is based, and then it was directed by Catherine Hardwicke in 2008. It was the ALMA award winner and the ASCAP Film and Television Music award winner in (2009). Furthermore, it was nominated for the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films award in (2009) and the Broadcast Film Critics Association award in (2013).

Application “9”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
Twilight	the light from the sky between full night and sunrise or between sunset and full night	/twaɪlaɪt/	/t/ tendency, /w/ hidden existence, /a/ entity, /ɪ/ noticeable existent, /l/ fullness of availability expansion of spread, /a/ existence with existent, /ɪ/ evident, /t/ achieving time

The phonosemantic meaning that can be attached to the above selected title is {an existence that has the tendency of expansion and it spreads to achieve time}.

10-“La La Land”

The movie tells the story of an actress named “Mia” who falls in love with a musician called “ Sebastian”. Both of them are eager to be a star in the world of stars. Mia comes from a very small town to be a star and she meets the musician, Sebastian, and the couple live marvelous days full of music and love. The movie was written and then directed in 2016 by Damien Chazelle. In (2017) it won the Oscar award and the BAFTA award; moreover it was nominated for many other awards, such as the African-American Film Critics Association award in (2016) and the Alliance of Women Film Journalists award in (2017).

Application “10”

The title	The dictionary meaning	Transcription	Semantic value
La la Land	euphoric, dreamlike mental state detached from the harsher realistic of life	/lə lə lænd/	/l/ fullness of available expansion of emotion, /æ/ visibility of existent, /l/ expandable, /æ/ visibility of existent, /l/ emission, /æ/ visibility of existent, /n/ eager to acquire, /d/ activated

After the application of the Universal Theory, the phonosemantic of the above selected title can be read as {existences (activities) that indicate an expansion of emotion and are eager to acquire activated things}.

Discussion of the Results

A movie and a language have some common features. Language is constructed from small parts which are words to formulate a larger unit (i.e. sentence), and the same process can be attached to a movie which is constructed from fundamental units "shots" and these shots are linked together by the edit process. Many phases precede the final stage of the production of the movie, one of which is called the post production stage. In this stage many items are arranged appropriately, and one of these items is the title (Villarejo, 2007, pp. 24-90).

The scientific study of a language can be coined out from many levels: the phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels to reach the real use of any language. The same thing might be linked to the language of movies. The above mentioned levels have a vital role in revealing the beauty of one of the elements that a movie is constructed from which is the title and how phonological devices are used to uncover and reflect the core of that movie.

The study of the sounds which formulate movies' titles can reveal the role of the sounds in that structure. The romantic movies' titles are composed of sounds that can reflect soothing feelings and softness in the structure of the title, such as the sounds /s/ and ///. The presence of other sounds might refer to singing and music, such as the sound /n/, /m/ and /ŋ/. As Altman (1999, p.31) mentions that music is always linked to romantic movies, so the sounds that indicate music and joyfulness are presented within the formulation of the above selected romantic titles. When these movies' titles are analyzed, they can be read as linguistic tools used by movie-makers to reflect the events of the movie by using such musical and soft-indication sounds. These linguistic tools can be named as a linguistic identity, and this term is defined by Joseph (2006, p.262) as the way that we use language to express ourselves and interpret others. Then such kinds of sounds are clearly associated with romantic and musical events.

In poetry there are some phonological devices that poets use to attract the audience's attention and provide music in the structure of the words, such as alliteration, assonance, consonance and even repetition of sounds. These mentioned features are used by the movie-makers in the above selected titles to show that their movies' title are romantic or musical ones. The alliteration device is used in "sense and sensibility" and "pretty in pink". Assonance is used in "sense and sensibility", "pretty in pink", and "the wedding singer". Consonance is utilized many times in the above analyzed titles, such as in "sense and sensibility", "the wedding singer" and "gone with the wind". Repetition can provide music and attract attention to the title when the sound is repeated many times, so repetition is used frequently, such as in "titanic", "la la land", "sense and sensibility", "pretty in pink", "pretty woman", "say anything" and "twilight".

The structure of the selected romantic movies' titles language indicates cheerfulness, music and kindness and this is clear from the high front vowels that formulate the titles. High front vowels refer to smallness and softness if they are compared with low back vowels which indicate harshness and aggression as Jespersen (1921) and Ultan (1978) state. High front vowels represent 78% of the simple vowels that formulate the titles, whereas the low back vowels are only 22% of these simple vowels.

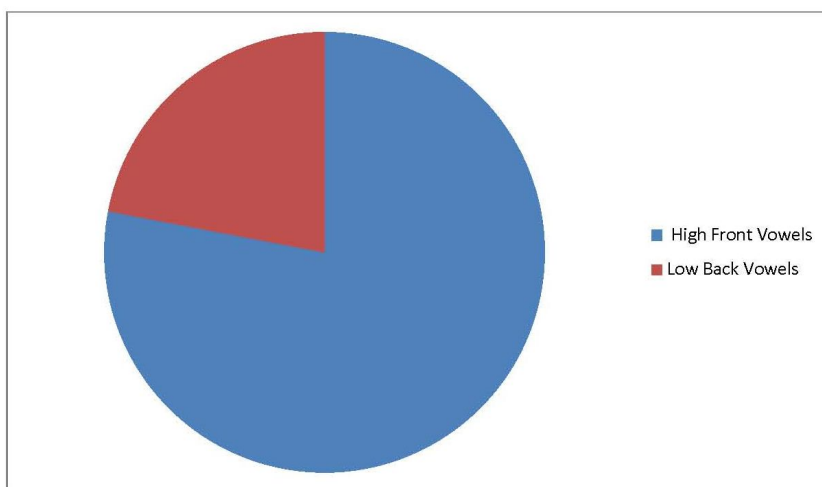


Figure (1) show the percentage of the high front vowels and the low back vowels in the analyzed romantic titles.

It is worth mentioning that most of the analyzed romantic titles are seen as iconic items for the events of the movies. The words “sound”, “music”, “pretty”, “wedding” and others are reflecting softness and music which can be linked to a romantic events. But, the title “Titanic” can be misleading one, since the phonosemantic analysis associates it to largeness and huge existences which can be read as if indicating actions or fighting and not referring to love story. This is opposite to the claim of Allen & Smith (1997, p. 300) when they mention that a title of a movie suggests the events of the movie.

Conclusions:

After the application of the theory, it can be said that sounds have an association with the meaning of the words that they formulate; moreover, they reflect feelings. Titling the movie is an important process in movies industry, since titles can lure the audience to watch the movie and be commercially successful. There are some items that can be read out of the analysis and the discussion:

- 1- Consonant sounds are the meaning-bearing elements in language, and many consonant sounds are used within the construction of the selected movies’ titles, and the most used sound within the formulation of the selected titles is the sound /s/ which refers to smoothness and softness, moreover it refers to music.
- 2- Many sounds that stand for music, softness and smoothness are used in the construction of the selected romantic movies’ titles; furthermore these titles are full of high front vowel sounds which indicate cheerfulness and kindness.
- 3- Repetition of sounds, syllables or even a word, and other stylistic devices, such as alliteration, assonance and consonance are used by the movie makers to make the movies’ titles more attractive and grasp the attention of the audience.

- (1) This theory does not deal with function or grammatical words, such as “the”, “but”, it deals with content or lexical words only, since grammatical words have little identifiable meaning.

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