

Interface between Visual and Non-Visual Media Texts - A Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract: Semiotics is the scientific study of the properties of signaling systems, whether natural or artificial. It also refers to the study within the philosophy of sign and symbol system in general. In the semiotic approach, linguistic, psychological, philosophical and sociological characteristics of communicative systems are studied together. Philosophers like Rudolf Carnap look at semiotics as a field which is divisible into three areas namely, Semantics, Syntactics and Pragmatics. Semantics is the study of the relation between linguistic expression and the objects in the world which they refer to. The semiotic analysis was developed as a part of an attempt to analyse all aspects of communication as systems of signals such as music, film, dance etc. The study of visual communication is known as kinesics and a film for example may be a translated version of a verbal text into movie which includes in it both verbal and non-verbal forms. In that background this article is an attempt to analyse the printed text and its translated version (film) to find out the signal changes and thus the impact that the translated version has on the reader and viewer and to understand the differences that a printed text undergoes when it is converted into visual text. The novel considered for this study is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in both the digital form (film) and the printed form. The analysis has been focused only to find the effect and the functions that the language performs.

Keywords: Translation, Digital Text, Verbal, Visual, Text, Film, Digital Media.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The word 'Semiotic' is derived from the Greek word 'Semion' which stands for sign. The credit for the invention in the modern discipline of semiotics goes to Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) which later got a form and was published as 'Course in General Linguistics (1906-1911). Talking about film, it is the art of visual abbreviation. Film can be considered as synesthetic as it arouses senses. Film making on the other hand is the process of choosing the precise image for the particular story and every picture for that matter has and tells its own story. It is noteworthy to see how a single image has many meanings to it. It should be noted that the core aspect of semiotics is that a sign has twofold functions,

1. The Physical or the sign as object,
2. The Psychological or the sign as concept.

The study of semiotics is related to the text, which may be literature, film or even music for that matter. In film, meaning is constructed through signs. A sign for that matter as mentioned earlier has two parts,

1. Signifier,
2. Signified.

Signifier is physical or that are tangible, things that can be seen and heard. Signified on the other hand is the psychological part, the mental picture that the signified evokes or the internal responses to the signifier. It is possible that signified could mean different things to different people. The signifier can be considered as the vehicle whereas the signified as meaning. The most important aspect is that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Let us consider the fact that the novel '*Robinson Crusoe*' starts with the word 'I'. The first person narration right from the beginning of the novel signifies a state of self-centeredness or the urge of being self-sufficient. Hence the key feature of semiotic is that the sign exists within a system of differences. Thus, a sign becomes a part of that code which permeates the whole of social life.

Film makers on the other hand show the signs in terms of visual images such as scars, hairstyle, dress, background, facial expressions, body language etc. At this point it is important to make a note of the word 'Synecdoche'. Rhetorician Richard Lanham describes synecdoche as 'the substitution of part for whole, genus for species or vice versa'. Thus one term is more comprehensive than the other. (Hire more hands – represents hiring more workers, stopped by the law – represents police, etc). Consider Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson*

Crusoe, where there is

Evident and drastic shift in the dressing. The first part where we see him well dressed tells that he comes from a good family about as the novel build and he is thrown on an island, he covers himself with rags which suggest that he is fighting to survive. Film images for that matter are signs. If one looks at any given movie poster will definitely be able to notice how the poster is created and furthermore sends signals about which genre that particular film belong to.

The major difference between film and novel as forms of art is the involvement of money in the production of the former. It is as known, not possible to make films without substantial financial backing. One cannot simply come up with the idea of making a film on an urge, the way one would write or pen down a script. It is obvious that Virginia Woolf remarked in '*A Room of One's Own*' (1929), 'all that you require is a piece of paper and a pen'. But while actually putting that script on the screen, a lot of issues need to be dealt with, the primary concern being the economic viability of the project at the hand and the importance of planning it out in the most cost effective way possible.

Film as a medium can be described as a processing system of information and sign. What distinguishes the sign system of the film from other sign system such as language, body language, kinesics or communication is that it utilizes these sign systems in the formation of the text of the film. A film can thus be called as a multimodal text for that matter. It consists of layers of meaning which are and can be quite different and are communicated through the photographic images and the sound systems of the film. The translation for that matter is between the text uttered and the visible lip movements, between the text and the facial expression of the onscreen speaker and between the text and the physical activity of the speaking and other characters who are involved. A text of the film consists of two layers, namely,

1. Visual information
2. Verbal information

Both the visual and verbal layers are of equal importance because it is only with these two combination that the message is effectively presented to the encountered audience.

The novel on the other hand, is the process of textualisation of history through the narrator's point of view. The narrator in the process of narration keeps reminding the reader about the importance of narrativization. Indeed there is a very close bond between novel and film, but it should be noted that films and novels have a pervasive influence on people's conceptualizing and understanding of the world. What is portrayed and conveyed in the film is the point of view of the film maker. Watching a film is indirectly watching through the lenses of the film maker. We see what the film maker intends to show in the way he wants us to see it. It should be noted that both novels and films have their own ways of narrating a story through presenting and representing. Though the characters remain the same in both medium, the representation differs to a very great extent and in different levels.

Translation of the text

A novel is built with a story line which is arbitrary to a very great extent. A fixed target of story line size or length is possible in the novel. A film on the other hand is derived from the novel but need not be the exact same as the novel. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is one of the important novels of the 18th century, which stands out as a unique novel in English literature because of its narrative techniques. When we look at the novel and the film and compare, the major characters are the same in both which includes Robinson Crusoe and Friday. Though the storyline remains the same, there are some major differences when it comes to the film. As in the novel, the character Robinson Crusoe is at the center of the film. The film in a way uses the concept or the formula of superior white and the inferior black which can be considered as of great importance here. The film mainly gives attention on the evolving relationship of Crusoe and Friday instead of focusing on Crusoe as an independent individual as in the novel. We see that there is a romantic interest in the movie which in fact replaces Crusoe's parents. The detailed description of his origin, his family, where they lived is not given much importance in the film. All the other voyages, which Crusoe undertook are removed in the film except for the one in which he is hit by the tragedy. The ironic death of Friday is one of the major twists and tragedy in the film, wherein he is shown as being killed by white men on the island of cannibals although Crusoe saves Friday from his people in the novel.

When we talk about adaptation, we always tend to compare the movie with the original book. Hence the challenges for the translation start right from the beginning not because of the possible competition but because of the comparison. When it comes to film, often the director gets the chance to make changes in the process of adaptation to cater to the needs of the viewers because film is not just about telling a story, it involves the aspect of 'money making' also. When we look at a novel, characteristically it deals with time and the complexities branch out from the reader's inner motivation. The film on the other hand renders motivation and action, which is rather the imposed external quality within the firm work of time. A novel for example may take more than a week to be read and the reader has the freedom to indulge in the luxury of leisurely expression,

whereas the film is at the mercy of the speeding time that cannot dwell, turn back or diverge from the content presented. A novel can give pages to the description of minute details and skip over years in a sentence, while a film can dismiss time but cannot expand it or hold it back to examine.

Visual and the Verbal

A film as we can is primarily visual in nature while the novel is verbal. Film tells the story with images, sound and dialogue. Novel on the other hand has only one tool and that is language. Though there are books which include images as well as text, but the older the intended audience, the fewer illustrations tend to appear. In a novel, everything and every detail should be given through words, which are processed in a linear fashion as they are read, right to left, one word at a time. What this means is that a movie can make a huge impact with a single image. The novelist writes for a small audience with whom he can assume a certain rapport. The film on the other hand is aimed at everyone, young and old, men and women, educated and illiterate. Codes in the novel are given to the reader to be decoded whereas in the film the decoded version is directly presented.

II. CONCLUSION

Since the camera can only show the surface, the film has to use some other methods to express people's thought. For example, the storm in the novel *Robinson Crusoe* signifies the inner turmoil or the running and crying reveals the helplessness of the protagonist. This difference between film and novel actually gives the audiences and readers different experiences.

The translation or the adapted version tend to use alternatives which may be non-equivalent linguistic structures to refer to the information for the necessary insertion and deictic devices, which are quite relevant and connect linguistically to the pictorial elements. Due to this, the presented spoken discourse is explicitly linked with the physical surroundings of the given communicative encounter. With reference to the English language, the relationship between the verbal utterance and the accompanying visual sign will remain lexically implicit most of the time. It is due to the translation that the interpersonal and the textual meanings expressed in the written text may result in variations in the film narrative.

If we look closely, the most significant loss that can be found during the transformation from novel to film, is the fact that thought cannot be directly expressed in any way. Dialogue and music are no doubt the most important elements of the film which are dominant, but even if dialogue is accepted as an external expression of thought, it should be noted that once spoken it is no longer a thought. And of course language cannot convey non-verbal experiences.

It is true that the sound of the film could greatly enhance the audiences' comprehension. The film audiences could receive the information from both images and sounds, while the novel readers only from the text. The sound in the film can be classified into three types, namely, speech, music and noise. In some situations, even any of them alone could tell a story. Though as accurate as the novel cannot achieve, the sound in the film could create the environment in which the audiences could feel the characters' emotion. The magic of the sound in films is that it could duplicate the sounds in real life, and together with the images, it creates and displays the real life to the audiences directly and immediately. By contrast, the novel could only describe things through words. The film director could show a successful hunt with joyful laughter and erect body posture signifying confidence and hope, but what the novel writer could do is using silent words. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the multilayered film is much more powerful in creating the real life than the novel but the novel in fact stands independently in telling a story. Hence both the mediums have their own ways of bringing out and telling the story.

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