A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS ON ONOMATOPOEIA IN "JOKER" MOVIE SCRIPT

Meita L. Sujatna
Tasya Valeria
Muhamad Alfi Fazri
Muhamad N. Jihad Nurzaman
Farhan Fauzi
Della Shafira Febristy

Meita L. Sujatna, English Department, Faculty of Languages, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia
Email: sujatna.meita@widyatama.ac.id

Tasya Valeria, English Department, Faculty of Languages, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia

Muhamad Alfi Fazri, English Department, Faculty of Languages, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia

Muhamad N. Jihad Nurzaman, English Department, Faculty of Languages, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia

Farhan Fauzi, English Department, Faculty of Languages, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia

Della Shafira Febristy, English Department, Faculty of Languages, Universitas Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia

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Abstract

As one of the types of figurative language, onomatopoeia is commonly used in every context, even in entertainment products such as films. "Joker", a movie released in 2019, is no exception. It relies on the different sub-types of onomatopoeia to describe actions or to be part of the dialogues as the transcript demonstrates. This study focuses on the use of onomatopoeia in the movie, especially 1) the frequency of various subtypes of onomatopoeia that appear in Joker's movie script, 2) whether they appear in the dialogues or the description, and 3) how their usage helps to build the messages conveyed in the movie. It employed the qualitative descriptive approach to provide a description of how onomatopoeia is used in various scenes and circumstances found in the movie. From the 47 data found, 17 (68%) were considered unique, while the remaining 8 (32%) are variants of the unique words. There was more onomatopoeia found in the description (38 data or 81%) than in the dialogues (9 data or 19%); the most frequent sub-type was that of mechanical sound. Even though almost all the data were lexically well-established, the contribution to meaning was highly dependent on context. It may be concluded that the dominant sub-type

replicates the paralinguistic communication by human and non-human characters, while the least frequent was due to no animal or its resemblance appearing in the movie. The research suggests that more investigation may be needed into similar film genres to justify or refute the findings of the study.

Keywords: onomatopoeia, sub-types, films, Joker, communication.

Introduction

Despite the advancement of the film industry that incorporates the latest technology for the audio-visual presentation, films still rely on dialogs to deliver the story and transcripts to produce them. The language style contributes to the uniqueness of a film, either in parts as memorable quotes or in the entire film.

Language uniqueness is often used as a marketing tool to entice the established and future audience. Its consistency throughout the film and perhaps its sequels or spin-offs exhibits the effort to linguistically adapt to other elements of the story, such as genre, setting, characters, and theme. Besides aesthetic values, it also contributes to the functionality of the language in providing concise description or mimicking paralinguistic factors.

Onomatopoeia is one of the figurative languages still used in films as in everyday communication. It provides a means of mimicking or describing actions and sounds by humans and non-humans alike. Comics are known to use it to enhance their storytelling. As they revolve around TV shows and films, the degree of their usage varies, depending on the presentation style.

DC comics, TV shows, and films are examples of such a style. In their early production, it was used to enhance the fighting scenes (Batman and Robin TV series), appearing in bubbles simultaneously with the action visible on the screen. "pow!" or "zoom!". There were also variants such as exaggerated use of letters ("pooww!" or "zooooom!")[1].

Later productions, however, employed less visual onomatopoeia. Instead, it is incorporated in the dialogues for the audience to hear and the transcript for the production people to comprehend and deliver the story. An example is Joker, the 2019 spin-off of the Batman film sequels. It premiered on August 31, 2019, with Todd Phillips as the producer and the co-writer with Scott Silver. They were inspired by Scorsese's 1970s film styles that conveyed compelling stories through dramatic dialogues and scenes, especially Taxi Driver and The King of Comedy. Such inspiration proved to diminish the use of onomatopoeia as part of the visual presentation since it was considered to lessen the seriousness of the story[2].

In connection to the changing style of DC comic adaptations, the researchers are interested in seeing the extent of the onomatopoeia used in the film. Thus, this study focuses on onomatopoeia since it was a distinctive trait of the TV show. It sought to answer the following questions: 1) What types of onomatopoeia sub-types appear in Joker's movie script?2) Are they mentioned in the dialogues or in the description?3) How do their applications contribute to the development of the messages conveyed in the film?

Literature Review

Figurative language is the use of language to describe something by comparing it to something else and it serves many linguistic purposes. Figurative language allows people to express their abstract thoughts and it creates tone and communicates emotional content [3, 4]. One of its sub-types is onomatopoeia, which refers to the mimicking of sound represented in written form [5]. [6]concluded that even though it attempts to linguistically represent the sound, the lexical meaning is arbitrary and varied across cultures, but it is closer to the object of reference than other types of figurative language. They further argued that its fixed lexical meaning contributes to the context of a conversation or situation despite its arbitrariness. When verbally

delivered, it provides a means to visualize the mind of the writer in relation to the context and the details of a communication occurrence [7, 8].

Previous research on similar topics, such as [9] on [10] on the adaptation of [11]The Great [12, 13] investigated various figurative languages used in various genres. They concluded that figurative languages are still used to some extent in modern film production.

Methods

The study was initiated by watching the movie for two reasons. The first reason is to anticipate any occurrence of onomatopoeia visually presented on the presumption that the tradition was maintained. The second reason was to mark the scenes where it verbally appeared.

The next stage involved studying the script. First, the noted occurrences were confirmed with the script. Next, further data collection took place for non-verbal appearances. Once collected, they were categorized based on two parts, namely where they were found (dialogue or non-dialogue) and the subcategories of the sound origin based on literarydevices.com: human, mechanical, collision, animal, and other. Finally, each datum was scrutinized for its semantic meaning and how it related to its respective scene.
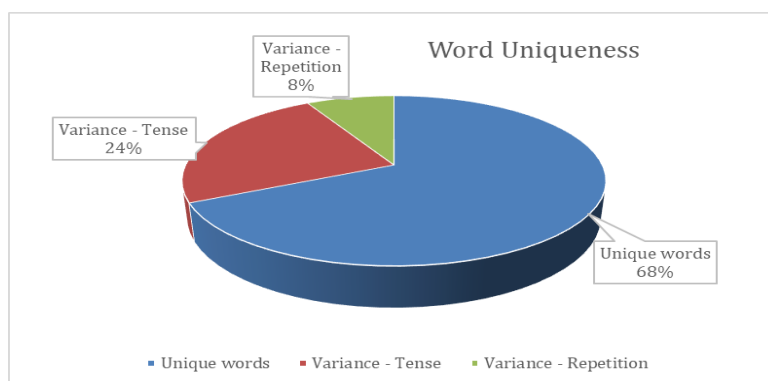
Results and Discussions

Fig. 1 Word Uniqueness Distribution

In all, there were 47 occurrences of onomatopoeia in the script. Only one onomatopoeia was found to be part of the visual presentation, which was a sign with the word 'claps' which was displayed to instruct the audience in the studio to clap as part of the greetings for the host and the guest stars in a scene.

Most of the mimics were unique, meaning that they appeared individually without variance (tenses and word form), such as 'tinkling', 'whap!', and giggles. They amounted to 17 data (68%), while 8 data (32%) were variants of the unique words, such as 'screaming' and 'scream', 'beep', 'beeps' and 'beeping', as well as 'whisper' and 'whispering'. Some of the unique and variant words appeared repetitively throughout the script with 'screaming' being the highest (8 data or 17%). All onomatopoeic words in the list are well-established since they can be found in the dictionary, with the exception of 'wha-wha-wha-whuuuuh' which imitated a sound call from the main character. The last data is an example of a non-established onomatopoeia. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of uniqueness.
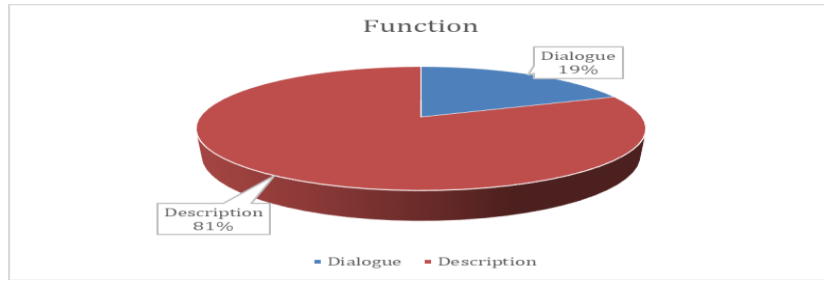
Fig. 2 Onomatopoeia Function

The next finding is related to the function of onomatopoeia. The classification is based on whether it was part of a dialogue or description. The audience were able to hear them (9 data) as part of the verbal interaction between the characters. Meanwhile, the description (38 data) remained in the script so that it was not available for the audience during the film. The following Fig. 2 shows the results of their distinction.

Next is the sub-type of the onomatopoeia found in the data source. The total number of the words followed that of the uniqueness total since all of them had the same meaning lexically and contextually. The mechanical type amounted to 12 data (48%); the human-sound mimic amounted to 8 data (32%); the collision sound imitation amounted to 3 data (12%); animal and other sounds amounted to one each or 4% each.
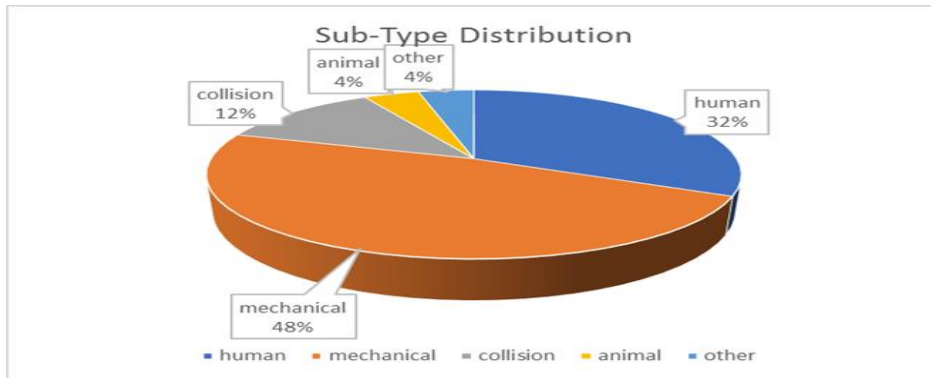

Fig. 3 Onomatopoeia Sub-Type Distribution

The other sounds refer to the call of the Joker, which had no lexical meaning nor masked any identifiable entity. Also, it is worthy of noting that the film does not involve animals, and the only appearance is the character's mimic of howling. The two factors may be used as ground to justify the insignificant frequency of the animal-sound subtype of onomatopoeia.

The last stage of the analysis involved scrutinizing the text for semantic contribution on the part of onomatopoeia to the meaning of the text. Below are examples of onomatopoeia and its sub-types found in the source text.

Datum 7

"…surrounding Joker on the ground, kicking him deliberately, sadistically, and BLAM!"

The data above is taken from a non-dialogue part of the transcript. It shows a mimic of a collision to describe the intensity of an action. In this case, the word 'Blam!' and the exclamation mark emphasizes the impact of the board when an assailant hit him with a sign board.

Datum 22

"Applause sign lights up. Everyone claps."

Datum 22 shows an onomatopoeia that imitates a non-linguistic sound a human produces. The term 'clap' in the scene refers to an action when the audience was prompted to greet the host and the guests of the talk show. The usual greeting includes clapping made by hitting repetitively the palms of the hands. In the scene, the studio audience were prompted to do so and thus the use of the sound mimic to indicate the expected action of the people.

Datum 4

"He howls softly like a wolf."

The sound produced by canines and particularly wolves as a call to their pack is also replicable as an onomatopoeia. In the scene, the main character 'howls' to signify an animal-like behaviour to express his excitement follow suit. In this case, the term is considered as an animal-produced onomatopoeia.

Datum 10

"He raises the gun to his head and pulls the trigger— Click."

The word 'click' here is considered as the other type of onomatopoeia that doesn't belong to that of human and animals. In normal circumstances, one of its uses is to describe the sound of a gun cylinder rotating to a ready-to-fire position. However, the scene involves the main character using a lighter that resembles a revolver, and the 'click' sound imitates the trigger lighting a lighter.

Conclusion

This research was able to prove that figurative language is still applicable for dialogues and other elements of film transcripts. It shows that onomatopoeia plays an important role even in a drama-action genre. Also, they are essential not only in the dialogue but also in the non-verbal description. In dialogues, it provides a means of conveying implicit and explicit meaning by mimicking the sound of an object, while in non-verbal descriptions, it provides a concise description of the action or condition the scene requires. However, context still governs how the words semantically relate to the situation or the meaning of a conversation.

The author recommends continuing the analysis since there are other types of figurative language used in the film. A consideration for future research is the focus on figurative languages in dialogues. Ideally, it reflects the traits of the characters and aids the audience in relating the traits to the story. Another recommendation would be a study on how non-native speakers can associate onomatopoeia with meaning by looking at the elements that circumnavigate around it.

Organization of the Text.

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