

Analysis Of Verbal And Non-Verbal Signs Found On The Boy And The Heron Movie Poster

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Abstract

Anything can be a sign, including the elements found in the movie poster of The Boy and the Heron. This research aims to classify the verbal and nonverbal signs contained in the poster based on Peirce's semiotic theory, including examining the meaning contained in it. The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative research method with Peirce's semiotic approach regarding the semiotic triadic model of signs. Through his triadic framework, namely Representamen, Object, and Interpretant, this study found that the signs do not only convey the setting and brief information, but there is a deep meaning related to the theme of human relations with nature, as well as the meaning that the filmmaking company wants to convey to attract viewers. The poster not only functions as a visual communication tool, but also implies complex symbolic themes

Keywords: Semiotics; Peirce; verbal signs; nonverbal signs; movie poster.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool that people use to communicate, and language can be categorized as sign to convey meanings. Chander (2007) states that signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning. This indicates that signs are man made. Thus, the meaning expressed can be in the form of explicit or implicit. Semiotic is the study of how messages are communicated through signs (Simatupang, 2019). The semiotic theory is applicable to a wide range of situations in daily life, such as advertising. Offering basic information about a good or

service with the goal of attracting audiences is known as advertising. The globalization of commerce and culture has ushered in an age where advertisements are omnipresent, whether in magazines, newspapers, billboards, online platforms, television, radio, flyers, newsletters, or posters (Mason et al., 2021).

One of the most widespread applications of posters today is to promote a movie (Dewi et al, 2022). An attractive and informative movie poster can attract the attention of the audience and arouse their interest in watching the movie. Movie posters not only function as an information medium, but also as a visual communication medium that contains certain meanings and messages.

Semiotic analysis can help us to understand the meaning contained in the movie poster, as well as how the meaning is constructed and interpreted by the audience, as it can be used to analyze verbal and non-verbal signs in movie posters as stated by Eco (1976) that semiotic analysis is concerning with everything that can be taken as a sign. Verbal language in movie posters is usually found in the form of movie titles, taglines, actor names, and directors. This verbal language serves to convey information about the movie to the audience. The meaning of verbal language in movie posters can be interpreted directly by the audience. The non-verbal language in movie posters consists of various visual elements, such as images, colors, typography, and layout. These visual elements do not have explicit meanings like verbal language, but have implicit meanings that must be interpreted by the audience. Verbal and non-verbal language in movie posters are interrelated and reinforce each other's meaning. For example, a movie that uses dark-themed visual aspects might as well tell about the dark story within, or else. These meanings and messages can be interpreted using semiotic theory, as semiotics is the study of signs and meanings.

Studio Ghibli is a Japanese animation studio founded in 1985 by Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and Toshio Suzuki. The studio is famous for its animated movies full of imagination, heartfelt stories, and iconic characters. Studio Ghibli's movies have been internationally recognized and have won many awards, including an Academy Award. In 2022, they produced the movie "The Boy and The Heron" (Japanese: *キミたちはどう生きるか*, *Kimitachi wa Dō Ikiru ka*) The movie was directed by Hayao Miyazaki and produced by Toshio Suzuki. The movie tells the story of a boy named Mahito Maki, a young 12-year-old boy, who lives in rural Japan in the 1940s. He had to accept the harsh reality of his mother dying in a fire in the midst of the outbreak of the Pacific War. He and his father, Shoichi, leave Tokyo and move to the countryside. Mahito, still grieving his mother's death, is forced to build a new relationship with his stepmother Natsuko. In his new home, Mahito is constantly harassed by a gray heron who tells him that his biological mother is still alive. Mahito obeys the bird to enter the magical world in order to reunite with his mother. The movie poster of "The Boy and The Heron" is an interesting example for semiotic research. The poster is carefully designed to capture the audience's attention and convey a message about the movie.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Charles Sanders Peirce formulated a triadic model of signs consisting of the **representamen** (the form that the sign takes), the **object** (the entity or concept to which the sign refers), and the **interpretant** (the meaning or understanding generated in the mind of the interpreter). According to Peirce, these three elements are inseparable, as a sign can only function through their interaction. Unlike Saussure's dyadic model, Peirce viewed signs as part of a dynamic and continuous process known as **semiosis**, in which one interpretation gives rise to another, creating an endless chain of meaning-making.

In addition to the triadic model, Peirce classified signs according to the nature of the representamen into **qualisigns, sinsigns, and legisigns**. A **qualisign** refers to a quality that functions as a sign, such as color, texture, or visual tone. For example, the use of dark blue or gray in a movie poster may signify mystery, sadness, or melancholy. A **sinsign** is an actual, individual occurrence or physical manifestation of a sign, such as a specific image, gesture, facial expression, or object appearing on a particular movie poster. Meanwhile, a **legisign** is a sign whose meaning is established through social convention, rule, or repeated usage. Examples include typography, logos, production company emblems, film rating symbols, and genre conventions that audiences recognize based on shared cultural knowledge. These three categories enable researchers to examine not only what signs are present in a movie poster but also how visual qualities, specific visual elements, and culturally established conventions contribute to meaning construction.

Several previous studies have examined movie posters from a semiotic perspective. Ayub and Martadi (2018), in *Semiotic Analysis of the Movie Poster for "Parasite"*, analyzed the signs represented in the poster using Barthes' semiotic framework. Octavia and Sujana (2022), in *A Semiotic Sign Analysis Found in Hotel Transylvania: Transformania Movie Poster*, employed Peirce's semiotic approach to identify verbal and nonverbal signs based on the triadic model and examined the significance of color in meaning construction. Similarly, Monok et al. analyzed the verbal and visual signs found in the posters of *Grave of the Fireflies*, another Studio Ghibli production. However, to date, no study has specifically investigated the poster of *The Boy and the Heron* using Peirce's semiotic framework, particularly by examining the interaction of **qualisigns, sinsigns, and legisigns** alongside the representamen-object-interpretant relationship. Therefore, this study applies Peirce's semiotic theory to analyze the verbal and nonverbal elements of *The Boy and the Heron* movie poster and to explore how these signs contribute to attracting audience interest.

3. METHODS

Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to examine the verbal and nonverbal signs presented in *The Boy and the Heron* movie poster. The primary data consisted of the official English-language promotional poster of *The Boy and the Heron*, obtained from the official Studio Ghibli promotional materials. The poster was selected because it represents the primary visual medium used to promote the film and contains various verbal and visual elements that convey meaning.

The data collection process involved several stages. First, the official movie poster was downloaded in high resolution to ensure the visibility of all textual and visual details. Second, the poster was observed repeatedly to identify all verbal signs (e.g., title, tagline, release information, production credits) and nonverbal signs (e.g., characters, colors, facial expressions, objects, composition, lighting, and background). Third, each identified sign was documented and categorized into a data sheet to facilitate systematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. The analysis began by identifying each verbal and nonverbal sign appearing on the poster. Each sign was then interpreted using Peirce's triadic model, consisting of the **representamen** (the form of the sign), the **object** (the entity or concept represented), and the **interpretant** (the meaning generated by the viewer).

Furthermore, the representamen of each sign was classified into **qualisign**, **sinsign**, or **legisign**. Qualisigns were identified through visual qualities such as color, texture, and atmosphere; sinsigns referred to specific visual elements appearing on the poster, such as characters, objects, and facial expressions; while legisigns represented conventional signs whose meanings are socially agreed upon, including typography, logos, genre conventions, and production symbols.

After classification, each sign was interpreted within the context of the film's narrative and promotional purpose to explain how the combination of verbal and nonverbal signs contributes to constructing meaning and attracting the audience's interest. Finally, the findings were compared with previous studies on movie poster semiotics to identify similarities, differences, and the distinctive characteristics of *The Boy and the Heron* poster.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1. The Boy and The Heron Official Movie Poster

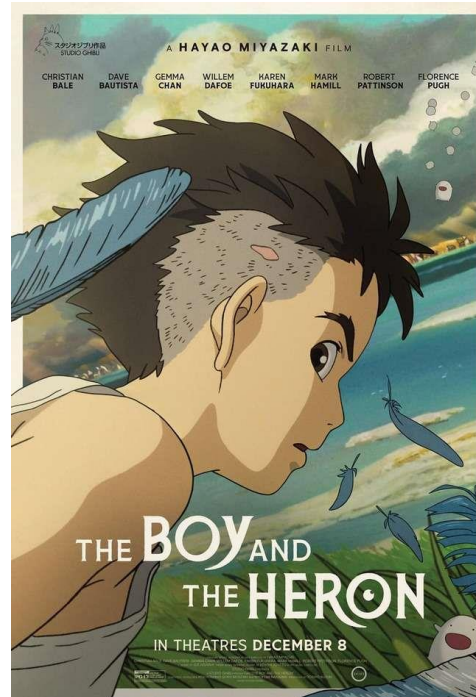





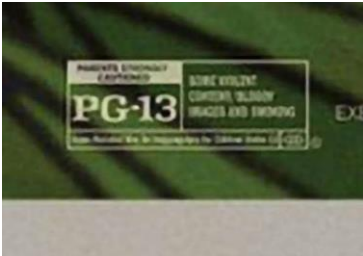


Table 1. Verbal Signs Found in The Movie Poster of The Boy and The Heron Movie

Sign	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
<p>THE BOY AND THE HERON</p> 	Legisign	Refers to the title of the movie that depicts the boy and the heron character as the central focus of the film.	The viewer understands that these two characters will be the main focus of the movie, indicating that there will be a relationship or journey between the two.
<p>Christian Bale Dave Bautista Gemma Chan Willem Dafoe Karen Fukuhara Mark Hamill Robert Pattinson Florence Pugh</p> 	Legisign	Names of actors who will be voicing the characters.	The viewer recognizes the popular actors that will be voicing the movie and expect performances on their known role and status in the film industry.

<p>IN THEATRES DECEMBER 8</p> 	Legisign	Providing information regarding the release of the movie, which is on December 8.	The viewer understands this as important practical information, helping them plan for the film's release.
<p>A HAYAO MIYAZAKI FILM</p> 	Legisign	The film was directed by Hayao Miyazaki.	This could be an acknowledgement and appreciation for someone's work. Also, this could make viewers recognize the creator, Hayao Miyazaki, the well known influential Japanese anime director, and set their expectation for the movie based on his reputation.
<p>スタジオジブリ STUDIO GHIBLI</p> 	Legisign	The film was produced by a studio known as Studio Ghibli..	Providing the information of company production, the Ghibli Studio, a famous company known for their magical and high quality animation works, will increase the audience's excitement of the movie.
<p>PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED PG-13 CHECK THIS BOX FOR SPECIFIC CONTENT INFORMATION Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13</p> 	Legisign	The film has caution of parental guidance for children under 13.	The viewer understands that the film may have inappropriate material for children under 13. Thus, it requires a parent or adult guardian company to watch the film.





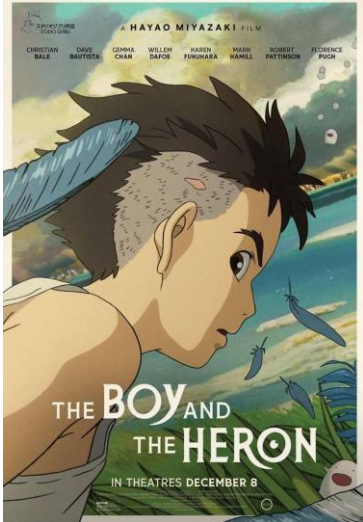
<p style="text-align: center;">GKIDS</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Legisign</p>	<p>The film is distributed by the GKIDS company.</p>	<p>GKIDS had a huge influence on the animation industry by introducing critically acclaimed films by filmmakers to American audiences, as this poster promotes the english version of the movie.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ORIGINAL STORY, SCREENPLAY, AND DIRECTED BY HAYAO MIYAZAKI CHRISTIAN BALE DAVE BAUTISTA GEMMA CHAN WILLEM DAFOE KAREN FUKUHARA MARK HAMILL ROBERT PATTINSON FLORENCE PUGH MUSIC BY JOE HISAISHI THEME SONG “SPINNING GLOBE” BY KENSHI YONEZU (SONY MUSIC LABELS INC.) STUDIO GHIBLI PRESENTS A STUDIO GHIBLI PRODUCTION “THE BOY AND THE HERON” EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS KOJI HOSHINO GORO MIYAZAKI AND KIYOFUMI NAKAJIMA PRODUCED BY TOSHIO SUZUKI ©2023 STUDIO GHIBLI</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Legisign</p>	<p>Showing the information about the staff that contributed to the filmmaking process as a form of appreciation.</p>	<p>It is important and meaningful to appreciate and acknowledge someone’s hard work. Also, showing names that is well known for their previous work and their influence on the filmmaking industry will increase the audience’s interest.</p>



Table 2. Nonverbal Signs Found in The Movie Poster of The Boy and The Heron Movie

Sign	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
A boy 	Sinsign	The boy is the main character of the film.	The audience interprets the boy as a central figure, possibly on a journey or perhaps facing challenges, as it is shown on his expression and scar on his head.
Feathers 	Sinsign	Representing the heron, not shown but indicated through the feathers.	The audience associates the feather with the heron itself as it is entitled The Boy and The Heron. It can also be associated with nature or freedom.
Floating little creature (warawara) 	Sinsign	Cute and adorable bubblelike mythical creature or elements.	The viewer may interpret these creatures as symbols of a magical aspect of the story since the film has a fantasy theme in it. Studio Ghibli is also known for having simple designed yet meaningful strange little creatures in their works.
Background (Sky, water, grass)	Qualisign	The natural setting of the rural world that the character lives in.	The audience sees a calm and natural environment, indicating the sense of exploratory, adventurous, and dreamy elements of the film.

			
<p>Poster's color scheme (blue and green)</p>	<p>Qualisign</p>	<p>It can represent the natural world, tranquility, or fantastical realm.</p>	<p>The audience may interpret the color scheme as indicating that the film has peaceful, serene, and magical elements. The use of cool pastel colors might suggest calmness and a dream-like atmosphere.</p>

6. CONCLUSION

The combination of verbal and nonverbal signs in The Boy and the Heron poster work synergistically to create layers of meaning. Using Peirce's semiotics, we can see that the signs not only serve to introduce the characters and setting of the movie, but also to hint at other deep themes. This analysis reveals that the poster is carefully designed to communicate both on an immediate literal level and on a deeper symbolic level, encouraging the audience to engage with the philosophical themes that the movie has to offer. In addition, there are also implicit meanings in the poster that are meant to appeal to the audience.

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