

**THE
RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN SYMBOL
AND MEANING
IN THE FILM
*ZOOTOPIA***

**Dwi Lestari Septiani
Sari Rejeki
Ni Made Widisanti S.**

ABSTRACT

This research discusses the relationship between the symbol and meaning in *Zootopia*, a film by Jared Bush and Phil Johnston. The objectives of this research is to show the types of symbol in *Zootopia* and its meaning by identifying the types of symbol and its meaning based on the speaker's utterance and the context of the utterance itself. The method used in this research is descriptive analysis with library research technique. The results of this research shows that there are 15 symbols in this movie. From 15 symbols mentioned, all the symbols in *Zootopia* are private symbol. The meaning of symbol are determined by its reference, which refers to the words and sentences, and also by supportive context which explains the reference. Symbols and meanings in this movie are closely related and become a unity that builds storylines and characters. The symbols in this movie are intentionally used to help in conveying the content and message of the movie.

Keywords: Symbol, meaning, movie.

Introduction

One of the entertainment media that has various functions is film. Aside from being an entertainment medium, the film contains informative, educative, and also persuasive functions that can be seen through symbols. With these various functions, film is one of the

most effective media in delivering a message because it is easily accepted by the community. The contents of the film will develop if it is full of meanings, or symbols, and has context. Films that use a lot of symbols, signs, and icons will challenge the recipient to increasingly try to digest the meaning and nature of the film.

These symbols do not rule out the possibility of an audience to experience difficulties in understanding the storyline and characters presented in a film. As a result, it makes the audience fail to enjoy the sequence or important parts of the film that lead to other parts. Therefore, it is important for the audience to understand the meaning reflected in each symbol.

Sobur (2017: 128) states that films are generally constructed with many signs, which are more important in films used by iconic signs, namely signs that describe something. Dynamic images in films are iconic for the reality they denote. The signs include a variety of sign systems that work well together in an effort to achieve the expected effect.

One film that contains many symbols in it is *Zootopia*. The symbols in the film *Zootopia* are interesting to analyze because they have meaning outside the symbol itself. Not only that, the meaning of symbols in this film is highlighted through utterances spoken by characters and supported by various contexts in each of these utterances. The other interesting aspect of this film lies in the content or message that is conveyed through the symbols and meanings in the film. One of the messages that the film tries to show is about the stereotypes that have been inherent in society. So indirectly, by understanding the symbols in *Zootopia*, it is expected that the audience will also find it easy to understand what the film is about.

Research Methods

Data source

Data sources were taken from the film *Zootopia*, by Jared Bush and Phil Johnston as script writers and directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore. The film lasted around 108 minutes and circulated in 2016. In addition, *Zootopia* was released by Walt Disney Pictures starring Shakira as the voice of a Thomson deer named Gazelle, Ginnifer Goodwin (a rabbit named Judy Hopps) and Jason Bateman (a fox named Nick Wilde). The data taken is in the form of scenes as well as conversations of characters that show the symbols contained in the film.

The Analysis Phase

First of all, the film will be watched to find and observe any symbols contained in the film, followed by noting every symbol found in *Zootopia* to make it easier to analyze. Then, the data will be classified by type. The data that have been classified will then be analyzed based on the meaning contained in it based on the reference which refers to words and sentences accompanied by the context. Disclosure of meaning in a symbol aims to find out the content or message that is going to be conveyed to the audience. As the final step, overall conclusions will be drawn from data analysis.

Literature Review

Semiotics

Semiotics is a science or method of analysis to examine signs. Semiotik is related to everything that is considered a sign. Semiotics concerns what is behind something else (Emzir and Rohman, 2016: 51). The word semiotics originated from Greek, *semeion*, which means "sign" (Sudjiman and van Zoest in Sobur, 1996: vii) or *seme*, which means "sign interpreter" (Cobley and Jansz in Sobur, 2017: 16). From the origin of the word, it can be said that semiotics is closely related to signs.

Symbol

A symbol is a form that marks something else outside the embodiment of the symbolic form itself. Symbols bearing the flower, for example, refer to and carry a picture of facts called "flowers" as something that is outside the symbolic form itself (Sobur, 2017: 156). Symbols are often paired with emblems because they have the same understanding. The word is a symbol. Words are expressions commonly used by someone to say things, feelings, ideas, and values. The word has a social meaning (Syam, 2013: 38). This is similar to one of the oldest opinions expressed by Plato in Pateda (2010: 62), symbols or emblems are words in a language, therefore, words can be said as a name, as a label to every object, activity, or event.

The Types of Symbol

Symbols are often classified as traditional symbols, original symbols and personal symbols, depending on the source of the association that provides its meaning (Pickering and Hoepfer, 1981: 71). Here are three types of symbols:

1. Traditional symbols

Traditional symbols are symbols that have a general association from a society or culture that is widely recognized and acceptable. Traditional symbols can be said to be universal.

2. Original Symbols

The original symbol is a symbol which is an indirect association of a tradition that has a certain meaning.

3. Personal symbols

Private symbols limit the source of the meaning even more than the original symbol. We all have certain objects in our lives that connect to the

mind into various personal associations, writers or people who create a work using certain symbols that are a form of their imagination and knowledge both in terms of philosophy or belief.

The three types of symbols presented by Pickering and Hoepfer have their differences. If traditional symbols refer more to symbols that are universal in society such as: forests and the sea, the moon and the sun, day and night, black, white and red, and seasons, the private symbol is the opposite, emphasizing symbols that have meaning based on individual assumptions. Personal symbols limit the source of their meaning even more than just the original symbol. Some writers use symbols which are products of their own peculiar and peculiar philosophical systems or beliefs, as well as a number of symbols found in the poems of William Blake and William Butler Yeats (Pickering and Hoepfer, 1981). Personal symbols based on the source are esoteric and most cannot be understood, except by the author (the creator of the work) or the critic. In addition, the presence of traditional symbols, it should be noted, does not mean we are free to ignore the context of framing work and impose from outside patterns or others as desired. Traditional symbols, for all their companion associations, must always be determined by the context and signs in them, not outside. Different from traditional symbols and personal symbols, the original symbol emphasizes the original meaning of the symbol itself.

Meaning

Meaning (mind or reference) is the relationship between symbol with reference or referent. This boundary of meaning is the same as the term mind, reference that is the relationship between symbols with reference or referent (Ogden and Richards in Sudaryat, 2009: 19) or concepts (Lyons in Sudaryat, 2009: 19). In understanding the meaning behind a symbol, the first thing to

do is to understand the reference itself, this is in line with what was stated by Plato in Pateda (2010: 62), that meaning is the object we live in this world in the form of a reference indicated by the symbol . So that it can be concluded that meaning is determined by the reference.

Reference or referent is something that is designated or referred to, in the form of an object in reality or something that is symbolized or interpreted. Reference is an outside language element designated by the element of language. For example, objects called “rumah” (“home”) are referents of the word *rumah* (house) (Sudaryat, 2009: 24). Another example, in everyday life people say, “*Kerbau!*” (“Buffalo!”) Or “*Hey, Kerbau! Mengapa duduk saja?*” (“Hey, buffalo! Why are you just sitting down?”) We understand what is meant by the word *kerbau* (buffalo). We know the reference, but what we see before us is humans. Then the reference is human, not the overall reference that is physical. Here we are dealing with references that are transferred (Pateda, 2010: 54).

According to Pateda (2010: 53) that if someone mentions a *chair*, the word *chair* refers to an object called a *chair*. Reference (referent), object is something designated by the symbol. Reference refers to the relationship between linguistic elements in the form of words, sentences, and experiences. The reference will not be understood if the notion of symbols in the form of words and sentences, does not exist. Based on this, it can be concluded that the meaning of a symbol is also related from its linguistic side. So that the meaning (meaning) can be said as what it is in words, sentences, and experiences about the object (reference) indicated by the symbol.

Context

As it is known, when discussing words and sentences in speech which is the dialogues of the

characters, the context behind the speech must also be known, because as Chaer (2009: 285) says context is a part of a description or sentence that can support or add clarity to the meaning of a situation that has something to do with an event. Besides that, Eriyanto (2011: 9) adds that the context includes all situations and things that are outside the text and influences the use of language, such as participants in the language (speaker and interlocutor), situations in which the text is produced, intended functions, and so on.

Nurutkeun Valdman (1966, in Sudaryat, 2009: 154) in his book *Trend in Language Teaching*, explains more about all situations and things that are outside the language referred to by Eriyanto, as an extra-linguistic context. The extra-linguistic context is in the form of non-verbal behavior such as gestures. According to Purnama (2014: 48), gesture is a form of non-verbal behavior in the movements of the hands, shoulders and fingers. Gesture is also a combination of hand shape, orientation and movement of hands, arms or body and facial expressions to convey messages from someone. So, from the explanation, the scenes and facial expressions of the characters when speaking the words in this film can determine and clarify the meaning of a word or sentence in speech.

Data Analysis

Personal symbols

Personal symbols are symbols that limit the source of their meaning even more than the original symbol. People produce a work using certain symbols which are a form of their own imagination and knowledge both in terms of philosophy or belief (Pickering and Hoepfer, 1981: 71). In this film, Jared Bush and Phil Johnston, screenwriters and creators of *Zootopia* express their philosophy and beliefs based on the research that has been done, which basically has shaped their philosophy that is reflected in this

film. The belief in question is about how humans realize that there is still prejudice and bad side within themselves and in the end, only when we realize and accept the presence of these bad things can it eliminate the prejudices and various ugliness. So that with the loss of bad attitude can we foster a new, more open and positive mindset.

In addition, the animal characters created in this film are also the beliefs of filmmakers formed from the research that has been done. The research in question is research in observing animals that will be filmed in *Zootopia*, especially the character of rabbit and fox as influential animals in this film. The dynamics of life and every background built in this film as a form of imagination and the shadow of the filmmaker himself is nicely presented (Sciretta, 2016).

The meaning of the personal symbols contained in this film is analyzed according to the theory of Pateda (2010: 53), which is determined in terms of language, based on the words and sentences designated by the reference and which describes the reference itself. In addition, the context theory of Chaer (2009: 285), Eriyanto (2011: 9) and Nurutkeun Valdman (in Sudaryati, 2009: 154) are also used in this research, the theory states that context includes all things outside the text, then the context support every sentence of speech and can clarify meaning.

Personal Symbols Referring to the settings of *Zootopia*

In this film, *Zootopia* is a symbol that is classified as a private symbol that refers to the background, namely a city in question from the utterance (3) and the background of the utterance (4-8), which is none other than the place or city called *Zootopia*. The reference to this symbol refers to the same utterance as mentioned. The *Zootopia* symbol means peace and the realization of dreams.

Context 1: This conversation happened when Judy Hopps was holding a drama performance at Bunnyburrow.

(1) Judy Hopps: You can make the world a better place. I am going to be a police officer!

(2) Gideon Gray: Bunny cop. That is the most stupidest thing I've ever heard.

(3) Judy Hopps: It may seem impossible to small minds. I'm looking at you, Gideon Gray. But, just miles away stands for great city of Zootopia!

Where did our first joining together in piece and declared that anyone can be anything!

Thank you and good night! (00:02:31)

Based on the utterances (3), it can be seen that the city of Zootopia is a peaceful place, which means a place where predators and prey can live side by side with each other, not prey on each other as they once did when the animals did not yet develop. In addition, the city is also described as a dream place that can realize the dreams of all animals that come to that place, this is clearly illustrated through the expression of Judy Hopps who is full of hope and happiness when telling the sentence from utterance (3) above loudly.

Context 2: Judy is in a hurry to find Mr. Otterton, who has gone missing, in a group of naturalists.

(4) Judy Hopps: Oh, thank you so much, I'd appreciate that more than you can imagine. It would be such a big-- You are naked!

(5) Yax: Huh? Oh for sure, we're a naturalist club.

(6) Nick: **Yeah, in Zootopia anyone can be anything. These guys ... they are naked.** (00:38:12)

Furthermore, the realization of dreams referred here is a manifestation of dreams in terms of work and ways or lifestyle. Although the animals in this film are described as developing (can socialize and have a modern lifestyle), but in Zootopia there are animals that still maintain their way of life as they were before they

developed, as those in the *Naturalist Animal Associations* who choose not to wear clothes in their daily lives. This shows that *Zootopia* is a peaceful place because all animals can live side by side despite their differences.

Context 3: Judy is in the DMV to track down the license plate of Mr. Otterton.

(7) Judy Hopps: I hope we are really fighting the clock and every minute counts. Wait. They're all sloths?! You said this was going to be quick!

(8) Nick: **What? Are you a sloth, he can't be fast? I thought in Zootopia anyone could be anything.** (00:40:50)

In addition, the meaning of dream embodiment from the Zootopia symbol is further clarified from utterance (8), which illustrates that slow lorises or sloths can get out of their stereotypes as animals that have slow movements, but are able to work at the DMV (Department of Mammals Vehicles) in order to serve the needs of the Zootopia people who basically must have the ability to serve quickly. In other words, in Zootopia, all animals can realize their dreams to work as anything beyond the stereotypes inherent in them.

From the description above it can be seen that the symbol of Zootopia has the meaning of a city or a place that is very peaceful and the manifestation of dreams. In addition, the meaning behind the symbol also conveyed the message that everyone must try to dream big beyond their limitations because of a person's ability is not limited by its shortcomings. This symbol encourages the audience to have an open mind. The mindset of most people who always have the notion of limiting their dreams, is far from what is presented in this film. Everyone can achieve and be whatever they want and dream of having strong determination and effort. The Zootopia symbol voiced courage for the audience to be able to change this mindset.

Personal symbols referring to characters

Mr. Big

Mr. Big is a symbol that is categorized as a personal symbol that refers to a character who is the object of speech from utterances (9-14). The reference refers to the words and sentences that explain the reference itself. Based on his reference, Mr. Big has the meaning of prejudice.

Context 4: Judy and Nick are taken to Mr. Big's residence by a flock of polar bears that are Mr. Big's subordinates because they have rummaged their boss's car without permission. Mr. Big is a feared criminal boss in Tundratown.
(9) Judy Hopps: **Is that Mr. Big?**
(10) Nick Wilde: No.
(11) Judy Hopps: **What about him? Is that him?**
(12) Nick Wilde: No.
(13) Judy Hopps: **That's gotta be him.**
(14) Nick Wilde: Stop talking stop talking stop talking. Mr. Big, sir, this is a simple misunder, Mr. Big, sir, this is a simple misunderstanding. (00:47:50)

From the words above, described by the character Judy Hopps, constantly assumed that the polar bear that came out one by one through the door was Mr. Big. This was seen when Judy Hopps kept asking Nick about Mr. Big (utterances 9 and 11). This happened because when Judy heard someone named Mr. Big, which if interpreted means "someone big", coupled with the statement that he is a feared criminal boss in Tundratown, the figure pictured in her mind is Mr. Big has a big and creepy body. So she kept thinking that Mr. Big is a polar bear that appears one by one through the door at Mr. Big's residence. Judy also looks very sure of what she thinks about Mr. Big when she saw the biggest and most creepy white bear emerging from the door. She said a sentence that really showed her conviction, namely the

sentence in the utterance (13) "That's gotta be him ". When Judy said the words, Nick told her to be quiet because the figure of Mr. Big is actually not the biggest bear thought by Judy Hopps, but an animal that is sitting in the bear's biggest hand that is none other than a rodent, a mouse. Judy looked shocked and strange with what she saw, because the figure of Mr. Big is far from what she imagined.

Examinations and supporting contexts that have been described are the basis for determining the meaning of prejudice from Mr. Big. Again, the symbol teaches the audience not to be prejudiced in evaluating something from his name or from what is heard, even though in general people assume that the name defines the owner. Apart from that, as human beings, they must be open-minded about everything even though they have their own beliefs about something.

Personal symbols referring to objects

Midnicampum Holicithias

Midnicampum Holicithias belongs to a personal symbol. This symbol refers to an object that is the flower, that is the object of the conversation from the utterance (15-23), which is none other than the *Midnicampum Holicithias* type flower. The reference refers to words and sentences from the utterances that describe the reference itself. This *Midnicampum Holicithias* symbol is a symbol that means dangerous.

Context 5: During the day, when Judy started her activities at Bunnyborrow, she talked with her parents and also Gideon Gray, a fox who was a childhood friend of Judy, about the beautiful purple flowers that lay wide in front of their stalls.

(15) Stu Hopps: Hey kids! Don't you run through that midnicampum holicithias!
(16) Rabbit Kid: Whoa, whoa, whoa!
(17) Gideon Gray: Now there's a 4-dollar word, Mr. H. My family is always just called them night howlers.
(18) Stu Hopps: Oh, Gid's talking about those flowers, Judy. I use to to keep bugs off the

produce. But I don't like the ones going on on account of what happened to your Uncle Terry.

(19) Bonnie Hopps: **Yeah, Terry ate one whole when we were kids and went completely nuts.**

(20) Stu Hopps: **He is the dickens out of your mother.**

(21) Judy Hopps: **A bunny can go savage ...**

(22) Bonnie Hopps: **Savage? Well, that's a strong word. But it did hurt like the devil.**

(23) Stu Hopps: **Well sure it did. There's a sizable divot in your arm. I'm calling that savage.** (01:18:35)

The meaning dangerous here is that the type of flower *Midnicampum Holicithis* can make anyone who eats it lose control of himself which then makes him capable of hurting anyone that comes in path, regardless of whether it is an object, his own family or another animal. This is illustrated by the statement above. In utterances (18-20) it was explained that Terry, uncle of Judy Hopps had bitten his mother's hand, namely Bonnie Hoops for being savage and losing control after eating *Midnicampum Holicithias*. Not only that, Terry's behavior is likened to a demon, because it is very scary. This description supports the meaning of the *Midnicampun Holicithias* symbol.

The *Midnicampum Holicithias* symbol delivers a message that not all objects that look beautiful have a wonderful effect or give effect on a person, it can even be something beautiful that can endanger life. In other words, we are encouraged not to be fooled by something based on what is seen from the outside. In addition, the labeling and prejudice that society has known about someone or an object so far, in this context that interest is not entirely true. If someone hears or reads the word flower, it will bear something beautiful, but in this film there is a type of flower that looks beautiful but turns out to be toxic and very dangerous. Therefore, the symbol *Midnicampum Holicithias* delivers the message that human beings should have more knowledge

about various kinds of things, so that when human beings are knowledgeable, their minds will become more open and not just assessing or stereotyping something that is not true or uncertain.

Personal symbols referring to events and circumstances

Ears

Ears in this film are symbols that refer to a condition, which is a pair of drooping rabbit ears and are categorized as personal symbols. The reference to this symbol refers to words and sentences that describe the reference. This symbol has the meaning of bad mood which is determined based on the description of the utterance below.

Context 6: Judy, who has just finished serving carrot buyers at Bunnyburrow, is reading a newspaper about the chaos that happened at Zootopia with a sad look on her face, then Judy's parents approach her.

(24) Stu Hopps: Hey there, Jude-- Jude the dude, remember that one? How do we do it?

(25) Judy Hopps: I'm fine.

(26) Bonnie Hopps: **You are not fine. Your ears are droopy.**

(27) Judy Hopps: **Why did I think I could make a difference?**

(28) Stu Hopps: Because you're a trier, that's why.

(29) Bonnie Hopps: You've always been a trier.

(30) Judy Hopps: **Oh, I tried. And it is made life so bad for so many innocent predators.** (01:17:20)

The rabbit ears that drooped as experienced by Judy Hopps is a sign that the rabbit is in a bad state, moody, anxious, sad, or frightened. Without saying anything, other characters in this film, such as the characters Bonnie and Stu Hopps, who are the parents of Judy, can easily figure out the mood of their child just by looking at the drooping ears. They also asked about

Judy's condition and in utterances (25) Judy said that she was fine but with a facial expression that looked the opposite. From there, it is shown that Judy is not in a good condition, as indicated by utterances (26) through Bonnie Hopps speech, and that is finally justified by Judy's own statement, telling the guilty feelings she has that makes her sad, which is seen from utterances (27 and 30). So that the symbol of the ears that refers to the drooping rabbit's ears signifies as a bad mood.

The ears symbol also teaches the audience to be sensitive and caring about the situation of others. This is related to prejudice, but in a positive way. If you see someone with a sign that shows that they are not in a good condition, then there is no harm in being prejudiced positively as a form of caring, which can be realized by asking for concrete actions to help those who are in trouble. Because basically the words "I am fine" can mean the opposite if it is not in accordance with the physical condition or the expression that is seen and the tone that is raised. Therefore, by paying attention to the changes or circumstances of others, we can become high social spirit human beings that care for others.

Conclusion

Based on data analysis, the result shows one type of symbol is found in the film *Zootopia*, which is the personal symbol. It is a form of philosophy or the results of the thoughts of filmmakers. Among them are, personal symbols that refer to background, personal symbols that refer to figures, personal symbols that refer to objects, and personal symbols that refer to events and circumstances.

The other result is that the relationship between the symbol and the meaning in *Zootopia* lies in its reference. The words and sentences from the utterances spoken by the characters who describe the reference determine the meaning of

the symbols in this film. In addition, the context of each utterance supports and strengthens the meaning of symbols. The whole meaning of the symbols in this film shows about the dynamics of life in a society, starting from perspective, motivation, to problems that still occur in social life.

The use of symbols in *Zootopia* can be said intentionally to help express the content and message that the filmmaker wants to convey to the audience. Each symbol and meaning behind it, implied a constructive moral message. The moral message in *Zootopia* is in the form of stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and so forth which are intended to change the mindset of the audience to be more open and positive.

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