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FILM ANNOTATIONS AS AN OBJECT OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In this paper discourse is viewed as a complex of linguistic, psychological, and social phenomena which is subject to both the rules of grammar and the more general rules of speech organization, interpretation, and coherence. The author analyses film discourse as one of the discourse types. Film discourse can be defined as a set of verbal and non-verbal components of film related narrative and is the result of the expansion of the film text concept. While both film text and film discourse include linguistic characteristics, film discourse additionally focuses on extralinguistic factors, such as cultural and historical background, knowledge of the target audience, the setting of the film, as well as non-verbal means (images, gestures, facial expressions). The study researches into film annotation as an important concept within film discourse. The main types of annotations which film discourse can be compressed into are treatment, synopsis, logline, tagline, and trailer. This paper provides a framework for the analysis and interpretation of film annotations from a linguistic perspective. Its aim is to give a detailed description of how content and structure of film annotations shape the perception of films and attract their audiences. It also intends to expand knowledge on the use of various resources and components in film annotations. The ways the components work together in constructing meaning and influencing the audience are analysed as well. Various examples of film annotations are provided to support the conclusions obtained from the conducted research.

Keywords: Film discourse, treatment, synopsis, logline, tagline, trailer.

1. Introduction

In modern linguistics, discourse is defined as a complex of linguistic, psychological, and social phenomena which is subject to both the rules of grammar and the more general rules of speech organization, interpretation, and coherence. Linguistic analysis of discourse focuses on text but goes beyond its boundaries into the interdisciplinary field of linguistics, philosophy, psychology, pragmatics, rhetoric, interpretation, and sociology.

1.1. Film Discourse within Film Studies

Recently, considerable attention has been given to film studies. Due to its significant impact on society, the film industry is the subject of scientific and practical interest of specialists in various fields: art historians, film critics, philosophers, literary critics, cultural scientists, sociologists, etc. (Buckland, 2016). Linguists put a special focus on the aspects of film studies related to film discourse.

Film discourse is the result of the expansion of the film text concept. While both film text and film discourse include linguistic characteristics, film discourse additionally focuses on extralinguistic factors, such as cultural and historical background, knowledge of the target audience, the setting of the film, as well as non-verbal means like images, gestures, facial expressions, etc. (Wildfeuer & Bateman, 2016).

Film discourse is not to be mistaken for cinematic discourse, which, according to Dynel (2011), conflates an array of cinematographic techniques, which are studied primarily outside linguistics. Janney (2012) in his work supports this idea, highlighting that cinematic discourse is not the linguistic but the audiovisual aspect of film narration. Thus, cinematic discourse can include montage, sound design, cinematography and camera work. In this research the focus is on film discourse with its linguistic and extralinguistic aspects.

1.2. Approaches to Film Discourse Analysis

Film discourse analysis is based on critically evaluating words, phrases, and images. Film discourse is analysed as a multimodal text, bringing together the fields of narratology, philosophy, cultural studies, and other spheres. Among researchers studying film discourse from a linguistic point of view, one can distinguish various approaches. Linguists research into the concepts of film discourse and film text, the types of film discourse and their classification, the functions of film discourse. Many focus on art history and semiotics of film narrative. Other issues of interest are the genre typology of film discourse, the analysis of film dialogue as a linguistic component of the film, etc. (Jones, 2018; Johnstone, 2018; Kusse, 2016; Lyul'cheva, 2017).

Film discourse studies are in many cases based on authentic materials coming from the film's country of origin. Since films are also released outside their country of origin, film discourse translation and linguistic and cultural aspects of film discourse present interest for research. When released outside its country of origin, a film needs to be localized, and its elements are to be translated and adapted to the culture of the target audience. Foreign versions of film related narrative, their structural, semantic, and pragmatic features can be used as representative materials in studying film discourse adaptation and translation (Anissimov, Borissova, & Konson, 2019; Koryachkina, 2017; O'Connor & Jackson, 2016).

1.3. The Film Annotation Concept

A film annotation is an important concept within film discourse. The process of annotating is based on converting a large volume of information into a shorter piece, the purpose of which is to obtain a generalized characteristic of the text and reveal its logical structure and the most significant aspects of the content (Karpilovich, 2007). Studies have proven the existence of a universal superstructure of annotation texts, as well as culturally specific characteristics concerning their obligatory elements, length, sequence, etc. (Silkina, 2019).

Research shows that film discourse can be compressed into various types of annotations: treatment, synopsis, logline, tagline, and trailer.

2. Problem Statement

Recently, significant attention of researchers has been given to film studies. Rapid development of the film industry worldwide creates a demand for a deeper understanding of film discourse, one of the aspects of which is how film annotations are designed and function. However, a linguistic literature overview shows that the issues of feature film annotations have not yet been consistently studied. Their typology and characteristics can present both theoretical and practical interest. The materials and findings of the present study will have the potential of being used in the film industry and film distribution, as well as in teaching linguistic courses.

3. Research Questions

The research aims at finding answers to the following questions:

1. What are the main components of different types of film annotations?
2. How do the components work together in constructing meaning?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the structure of film annotation types?
4. How do annotation types compare in their content?
5. What impact do content and structure of film annotations have on shaping the perception of films and influencing the target audience?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the work is to study types of film annotations and identify the similarities and differences of their structural, content and functional features.

The analysis is based on the English language film annotations of 50 feature films produced in the USA and released in 2018-2019. The practical material for analysis has been taken from the IMDB online film database (http://www.imdb.com/). Out of the analysed 50 films, three films are used to provide examples: *Green Book*, directed by Peter Farrelly and released in the USA in 2018, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a 2018 American film directed by Bryan Singer, and *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*, Quentin Tarantino's work released in 2019. These films have been selected out of the research pool due to their high popularity with the audience and box office success.

5.   Research Methods

The methods used in the research are contextual analysis, content analysis, structural and semantic analysis, the method of quantitative data processing, the method of generalization and interpretation, comparative analysis.

6.   Findings

The starting point of the analysis was to identify the key components of film annotations. Graeme Shimmin, a British writer, has introduced the "Killogator", a special formula used to capture the core of a story and annotate it. This formula includes six components: the setting (place and time of events), the protagonist, the antagonist, the problem, goal, and/or event (Shimmin, n.d.). Analysis shows that these components appear in different film annotation types, so this research will be referring to the above mentioned formula. Different types of annotations are characterized by a specific set of components, as well as typical size, content and other features. Their analysis and interpretation are presented below.

6.1.   Features of a Treatment as a Type of Film Annotation

A treatment is the first type of film annotation described in this paper. Statistical analysis of the selected 50 films shows that the standard size of a treatment is between 1500 and 2000 words. The treatment of the film *Green Book*, for example, includes 1779 words, the treatment of *Bohemian Rhapsody* consists of 1569 words, and the treatment of *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* has 1660 words. This considerable number of words allows to include in a treatment detailed descriptions of events, locations, scenes. A treatment also describes problematic situations happening throughout the film and their resolutions: "Tony is called to a disturbance at a local YMCA where Don and another local white man have been arrested – apparently the gym manager caught them in a fistfight", "Tony bribes the police officers to let Don go" (Green Book); "Freddie's behaviour gets worse as he shows up to rehearsals late and almost fights with Roger", "He apologizes to the guys for his behaviour and abandoning them" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "During the take, Rick forgets his lines due to being drunk. He goes to his trailer and has a meltdown", "Rick improvises his slimy villain character and (…) he is praised by both the director and Trudi" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

An important feature of a treatment is that it doesn't give opinions or evaluations, only focusing on the facts, which can be seen in the following examples: "As they check into their hotel, Don offers Tony a raise and a promotion. Tony refuses to accept, and Don reveals he speaks Italian" (Green Book); "At home, Freddie proposes to Mary, who accepts" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "He then comes out with his flamethrower and torches Sadie, who burns to death in his pool" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

A treatment presents the plot in the same sequence as it is presented in the film itself. The main goal of a treatment is not to intrigue or interest the viewer, but to form a complete picture of the film and all of its scenes. Thus, the distinguishing feature of a treatment is the disclosure of the film's central conflict resolution and the denouement. The following fragments of the three films under consideration can serve as examples: "Don enters, and tells Tony he'll do the show if Tony wants, knowing Tony won't get paid unless they finish the tour. But Tony sticks with Don, and they bail on the gig despite the

screams of the concierge" (Green Book); "Freddie Mercury died in 1991 from AIDS-related pneumonia at age 45. He was in a relationship with Jim Hutton for the rest of his life, and he remained good friends with Mary Austin until his death" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "Paramedics and police arrive at the scene. Cliff is taken to the hospital for his injuries, while Francesca is freaked out by the ordeal. After Rick says bye to Cliff, he sees Jay calling to him from Sharon's gate" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

A treatment also contains the description of the character(s) of the film. Since this type of annotation focuses on events, character description is mostly indirect and provided mainly through their actions. In the *Green Book* treatment the following characterization can be found: "He pays the coat check girl to take a rich patron's prized hat so he can 'find' it and return it to him for a very big tip". This description shows what sort of personality Tony has through the things he does – a coy con man who is ready to cross the line of morality to make money. The treatment of *Bohemian Rhapsody* presents the main character in the following way: "Freddie invites the band, but he starts to behave all crass and rudely toward them, prompting them to leave. After the party, Freddie gropes a waiter". So, the negative sides of the character's personality can be understood from his behaviour. One of the characters of *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* Sadie is involved in the following scene: "At the bottom of the hill, the four recognize Rick from TV, and Sadie suggests that they kill him and whoever else is in his house". Her actions show that she is a ruthless, cruel, cold-hearted person.

A treatment often includes the names of the actors starring in the film. The actor's name is given in brackets after the first mentioning of their character in the treatment, as seen in the following examples: "Dr. Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali) is not a medical doctor, but a concert pianist" (Green Book); "After the show, members Brian May (Gwilym Lee) and Roger Taylor (Ben Hardy) are told by their front man Tim Staffell (Jack Roth) that he wants out of the band to pursue bigger opportunities" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "It features action star Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio) in the lead role as Jake Cahill, a renegade bounty hunter" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

6.2. Features of a Synopsis as a Type of Film Annotation

The next type of film annotation to be analysed is a synopsis, which is a brief successive presentation of the plot. A synopsis contains an average of 60-150 words in 4-8 sentences. The word count of the *Green Book* synopsis is 148, the synopsis of the *Bohemian Rhapsody* has 132 words, and the *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* synopsis includes 163 words. Each of these synopses is around 8-9% of the size of the corresponding treatment, which explains why the synopsis includes only two mandatory components. The first one is the protagonist, or the main character of the film, often with an indication of their name, profession, and/or social status. For example, "Tony 'Lip' Vallelonga, a tough bouncer" (Green Book); "extraordinary lead singer Freddie Mercury" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "the once-young-and-popular action star Rick Dalton, his sympathetic confidant and former stunt double Cliff Booth" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

The second mandatory component of a synopsis is the goal, the problem, or the main event of the film. The choice can depend on the genre of the film or the preferences of the synopsis writers. The synopsis of the *Green Book* focuses mainly on the problems the characters face: "The disparate pair witness and endure America's appalling injustices". The *Bohemian Rhapsody* synopsis is an example of

combining two of the aforementioned components, the problem ("bravely facing a recent AIDS diagnosis") and the event ("one of the greatest performances in the history of rock music"). The *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* synopsis shows the problem: "their fates, and their very lives, are on a collision course with a certain Charles Manson, and his army of ferociously zealous believers".

A synopsis hints at the denouement without directly revealing it: "They would nurture a friendship and understanding that would change both their lives" (Green Book); "Queen cements a legacy that continues to inspire outsiders, dreamers and music lovers to this day" (Bohemian Rhapsody). The time and place of events can also be mentioned in the synopsis, like in *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*: "in an ever-changing 1969 Los Angeles". References to famous people and films relevant to the plot are also included in the synopsis of *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*: "the young director fresh off the triumphant success of Rosemary's Baby (1968), Roman Polanski, and the rising star of The Wrecking Crew (1968), Sharon Tate". Other details which have been identified in the synopses of the 50 analysed films are the antagonist (the opponent of the protagonist), names of leading actors, book authors, directors, titles, links to other books, etc.

6.3. Features of a Logline as a Type of Film Annotation

Another type of film annotation under consideration is a logline. It is aimed at expressing the main storyline of the film in 1-2 sentences and 20-30 words. The *Green Book* logline does so in 22 words, the *Bohemian Rhapsody* logline uses 24 words, and the *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* logline includes 30 words. So, a logline is around one sixth of a synopsis in size, which creates the necessity to make the film description even more concise. The protagonist is always mentioned, but without including their name. Instead, their profession, social status, descriptive adjectives are actively used, which helps provide maximum information using minimum words. For example: "a working-class Italian-American bouncer; an African-American classical pianist" (Green Book); "a faded television actor and his stunt double" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood). However, in some cases mentioning the name of the protagonist can be justified if the person is well-known to the public, and the name becomes a description itself, like in the logline of *Bohemian Rhapsody*: "the legendary British rock band Queen and lead singer Freddie Mercury". The goal / problem / event element is also present: "a tour of venues" (Green Book); "their famous performance at Live Aid" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "strive to achieve fame and success in the film industry" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

Mentioning of the time and place of events in the logline has to be justified by a significant influence on the plot. For example, the *Green Book* logline identifies the time and place of events ("the 1960s American South") to highlight the issues of racial segregation crucial for the understanding of the film. The logline of the *Bohemian Rhapsody* includes the year of 1985 to mark the time of the band's success. The *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* logline shapes the setting of the film by mentioning the time and place of events: "the final years of Hollywood's Golden Age in 1969 Los Angeles". Analysis of the 50 film loglines shows that additional information, such as the antagonist, authors of books, directors, titles, names of lead actors, links to other films, is rarely given. Conflict resolution is not provided in the logline in order to create intrigue, suspense or tension, thus making the reader more involved and interested in watching the film.

The three types of film annotations described above (treatment, synopsis, logline) share some grammatical features. Verbs are mainly used in the historical present tense to create an effect of immediacy and presence. The use of verbs and pronouns in the third person is widespread due to the descriptive character of these types of annotations: "From outside he watches Don play the piano and is impressed with how brilliant he is" (Green Book); "He comes out to Mary as bisexual, but she tells him she thinks he's gay. She starts to cry as she is tired of all of Freddie's excuses, and she breaks up with him" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "He happens to spot Manson as he leaves, and he smiles and waves at Cliff" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood). Treatments, synopses and loglines are aimed at describing the plot development of the film, so verbs denoting actions are widely used: closes, come over, repair, gives, throws out, goes, calls, write (Green Book); attends, perform, looks for, meets, works, approaches, sings (Bohemian Rhapsody); takes out, smoke, drives, arrive, comes out, leave, appears, kill, gives, break in, sics, chomps into, run up, smashes into (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

6.4. Features of a Tagline as a Type of Film Annotation

The shortest type of film annotation is a tagline. It usually consists of 5-15 words in 1-2 sentences. The *Green Book* tagline has 5 words, the *Bohemian Rhapsody* tagline is made up of 11 words, the tagline of *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* includes 6 words. Taglines are almost entirely aimed at creating intrigue, attracting the attention of the viewers and motivating them to watch the film, and only then are they aimed at providing information about the film. In most cases taglines only hint at the content of the film without providing any specific information or details. The tagline of the *Green Book* film "Inspired by a True Friendship" only tells the reader that this film is based on a true story about real people, and that it shows the development of their friendship. The tagline of *Bohemian Rhapsody* "The only thing more extraordinary than their music is his story" shows that the central theme of the film is music, that the main character is a man ("his") who plays in a band ("their music"), and that this band has a unique style and story. Thus, the reader has to gather all the given clues and use them to imagine what the film could be about.

The tagline of *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* is "The 9th film by Quentin Tarantino". Analysis of the taglines of other films by the famous director shows that this tagline formula has been used four times. The following taglines have been found in other Quentin Tarantino films: "The 8th film by Quentin Tarantino" (The Hateful Eight), "The 5th film by Quentin Tarantino" (Kill Bill: Vol. 2), "The Fourth Film by Quentin Tarantino" (Kill Bill: Vol. 1). So, this tagline structure is typical of Tarantino's films. Reference to the film director in the tagline was used even in his early films. For example, his second film *Pulp Fiction* has the following tagline: "From the creators of 'True Romance' & 'Reservoir Dogs' ". This tagline includes reference to two films directed and written by Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary. At that time Tarantino's name was still not as recognizable and well-known as today, so the titles of films were used instead.

However, the interpretation of the tagline of *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* isn't limited to its reference to the director since it has caused a big debate among film fans all around the world. Marking Tarantino's most recent film as his ninth one raises some questions as Quentin Tarantino has already directed ten feature films: 1. Reservoir Dogs (1992); 2. Pulp Fiction (1994); 3. Jackie Brown (1997); 4.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (2003); 5. Kill Bill: Vol. 2 (2004); 6. Death Proof (2007); 7. Inglourious Basterds (2009); 8. Django Unchained (2012); 9. The Hateful Eight (2015); 10. Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood (2019). So, the film count comes up to ten not nine. Quentin Tarantino recently appeared as a guest on a podcast by CinemaBlend, a film, TV show and streaming hub. In this podcast, he was asked to comment on the debate about his film count. According to the director, *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* is in fact the ninth film as the two parts of *Kill Bill* are seen by him as one collective film: "…we released it as two movies, alright (…) but I made it as one movie, and I wrote it as one movie" (CinemaBlend, 2019).

So, the *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* tagline is a good example of how a tagline, being simple and direct on the surface, may contain clues which, if deciphered and interpreted properly, can give a huge amount of relevant background information about the film and its director.

6.5. Features of a Trailer as a Type of Film Annotation

One more type of film annotation analysed in the study is a trailer, which stands separately from the other four. While a treatment, a synopsis, a logline, and a tagline as film annotations are based on written text, a trailer employs camera work, scene selection, montage, and sound editing to narrate cinematic stories to viewers. A trailer announces the genre of the film and its main themes, introduces the main characters and the central conflict (problem, goal, or event) while leaving out its resolution.

An important feature of a trailer is its focus on dialogue and direct speech, unlike other types of annotations, which mostly employ third person narration. Here are some examples: "I am not a medical doctor, I'm a musician, I'm about to embark on a concert tour in the deep South" (Green Book); "Roger, there's only room in this band for one hysterical queen", "You're a legend, Fred" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "I'm Rick Dalton, it's my pleasure, Mr. Schwarz" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

Direct speech in a trailer plays a significant role in presenting the characters of the film. The vocabulary and grammatical structures they use can say a lot about their social, educational, and professional background. For example, Don, the pianist from *Green Book*, uses elevated style as he belongs to high bohemian society: "It is my feeling that your diction could use some finessing"; "This gentleman says I'm not permitted to dine here". Tony, the working-class driver, on the contrary, makes language mistakes, demonstrates simplified language patterns and very basic vocabulary: "Tell me that don't smell good"; "Ooh, I'm gonna get grease on my blanky".

So, a trailer can be regarded as a sequence of the most relevant frames and scenes from the film. In some cases textual commentary shots are added to provide additional information which cannot be found in the film itself, such as the names of the lead actors, the production company, the film director, or the release time: "Academy Award Nominee Viggo Mortensen", "Academy Award Winner Mahershala Ali" (Green Book); "From 20th Century Fox and Regency Enterprises", "This fall. November, 2nd" (Bohemian Rhapsody); "This July", "Leonardo DiCaprio, Brad Pitt, Margot Robbie, Kurt Russel, Timothy Olyphant, Dakota Fanning, Luke Perry" (Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood).

The trailers of the three films under consideration are two minutes thirty seconds long. While the trailer of the *Green Book* contains 396 words, the trailer of the *Bohemian Rhapsody* has only 187 words, which is almost half. This can be explained by the fact that *Bohemian Rhapsody* is a film devoted to the famous rock band Queen, so the trailer includes a lot of songs as reference. The trailer of *Once Upon a*

Time… in Hollywood includes 235 words, and the usage of fewer words here is explained by the fact that many shots in the trailer don't include narration. Instead, different places and scenes characteristic of the Hollywood's Golden Age period are shown with 1960s music in the background, which serves as an illustration of the film setting. So, the standard duration of a trailer is around two-three minutes, but there is no standard number of the words used as that depends on the genre, theme, setting, etc.

The *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* trailer additionally includes references to other films by Tarantino. For example, there is a scene involving a flamethrower, which is a reference to Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds*. Many actors appearing in *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood* appeared in other films by Tarantino, which is a signature move of the director, making his films more recognizable.

7. Conclusion

7.1. General Results

In the study five types of film annotations (treatment, synopsis, logline, tagline, trailer) have been described, analysed and compared. All types of annotations presented in the research have one common feature: they all provide information about the topic of the film. All annotation types except for the tagline contain information about the main characters and the main problem, goal, or event. Treatments, synopses, and loglines share several grammatical features. At the same time, various types of annotations have their own structural and semantic characteristics. Important features of the treatment are a detailed presentation of the plot and direct disclosure of the denouement, which is not typical of other types of film annotations. The synopsis is an intermediate type of annotation between the detailed treatment and the short logline. A distinctive feature of the tagline is its use of imagery and indirectness to create intrigue and draw potential viewers to the film. The key characteristics of the trailer are the prevailing dialogical nature of presentation and the usage of visual and sound effects unavailable to other types of film annotations.

7.2. Study Relevance and Perspectives

This research contributes to the understanding of how content and structure of different types of film annotations can be used to present films and attract their target audiences. The scientific value of the study lies in the fact that its results and conclusions can help identify the typology and linguistic characteristics of various film annotations. The practical significance of the study is determined by the intensive development of the film industry both worldwide and in the Republic of Belarus, which creates an increasing need for comprehending how film annotations are designed and function.

The results of the research are relevant for discourse studies, and film discourse studies in particular. The materials and findings have the potential of being used in teaching university courses in lexicology, mass media language, translation, typology of foreign and native languages, etc. In addition, the conclusions obtained from the conducted research can be applied in the Belarusian film industry and film distribution.

The perspective of the research is the comparative study of the Russian language versions of the analysed film annotations and the English originals, with the focus on structure, content and culture specific characteristics.

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