



The Representation of Social Anxiety Disorder in The Character of Shoya Ishida

(A Syntagmatic Analysis of Christian Metz in the Japanese Animated Film A Silent Voice)

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ABSTRACT

Visual art in film functions as a medium of communication and an informative medium, in addition to its cinematic aesthetic and entertainment value. *A Silent Voice* (in Japanese: *Koe no Katachi*) is a film directed by Naoko Yamada and written by Reiko Yoshida, featuring character designs by Futoshi Nishiya and music by Kensuke Ushio. Released between 2016 and 2017, this film was recognized as the most outstanding anime work in 2017. *A Silent Voice* chronicles the journey of Shoya Ishida, a young man who initially engages in bullying behavior but subsequently becomes a victim of bullying. This study aims to analyze the syntagmatic elements of the film and describe the representation of social anxiety disorder in the character of Shoya Ishida as a victim of bullying. To this end, researchers employed the syntagmatic semiotic method of Christian Metz's model to analyze the cinematographic elements systematically arranged to convey the message or meaning of the story presented in the film. The results of the research indicate that Shoya Ishida represents social anxiety disorder. Ishida's social anxiety disorder behavior is explained in the film as a result of the trauma he experienced when he was ostracized and ridiculed by his friends at school for bullying his deaf classmate. The character's social anxiety manifesting in public spaces hinders his ability to socialize, leading to contemplation of self-harm. The film employs the autonomous shot technique, a single shot that captures the essence of a scene, in numerous instances, particularly in scenes depicting Ishida's internal struggles. The film employs two types of inserts: Subjective Insert and Explanatory Insert, which aims to elucidate a moment or detail in the film and thereby conveying Ishida's experience to the audience.

Keywords: Film, Social Anxiety Disorder, Christian Metz's model

INTRODUCTION

Film is regarded as a medium with the capacity to reach a substantial audience in a brief period. Cinema has the ability to depict existing reality (representation) and concurrently generate a reality that is perceived by the audience (construction). In accordance with its inherent characteristics, films are categorized into four distinct genres: story films, news films, documentary films, and animated films (cartoons). Animated films, as a product of visual communication design, emerge from the processing of hand drawings arranged into a unit to create a moving image. Similar to the production of realistic films, animated films with compelling narratives and intriguing character development can serve as effective media for conveying messages and raising awareness about life issues.

Japan is a leading producer of animated films, commonly referred to as "anime," which have gained significant international popularity. In contrast to the child-oriented productions characteristic of Disney and Pixar, Japanese anime typically features more intricate and sophisticated narratives that often resonate more profoundly with adult audiences. Akin to films in general, anime can also function as a medium for conveying messages, encompassing criticism, social issues, culture, and opinions, among other subjects. In addition to fantasy elements, anime incorporates numerous aspects of traditional Japanese culture, elements of Japanese popular culture, and the daily life of Japanese society, along with social issues that are prevalent in Japan. One such social issue that is addressed in anime is bullying.

Bullying is a pervasive social issue with far-reaching consequences for its victims. A notable anime that addresses this issue is *A Silent Voice* (Koe no Katachi in Japanese), directed by Naoko Yamada and written by Reiko Yoshida. The film, produced by Kyoto Animation, features character designs by Futoshi Nishiya and music by Kensuke Ushio. The film was released in Japan on September 17, 2016 and subsequently screened internationally from February to June 2017. It ranked second at the Japanese box office upon release and grossed \$19.56 million in Japan and \$2,936,334 in other territories, for a worldwide total of over \$22 million. The film's achievements include the Best Animation of the

Year (2017) accolade, bestowed upon it at the 26th Japan Film Critics Awards. Additionally, the film's director, Naoko Yamada, received commendations for her work.

The anime film *A Silent Voice* chronicles the narrative of Shoya Ishida, a young man grappling with suicidal tendencies. His decision to take his own life by jumping from a bridge is driven by a profound sense of despair, stemming from the challenges he has faced throughout his life. However, at the final moment before taking this action, Ishida is suddenly awakened by the sound of fireworks. This auditory stimulus triggers a recollection of his experiences during his elementary school years, particularly the events that have contributed to his present state of desolation. In elementary school, Ishida exhibited a tendency towards mischief, particularly towards a new student, Shouko Nishimiya, who suffered from hearing and speech impairments. Ishida's behavior, while seemingly disruptive to others, was not necessarily an indication of a malicious intent. His cheerful disposition and popularity among his peers, despite his bullying behavior, are noteworthy. Shouko Nishimiya, a visually plain female student, is unable to speak or hear, and therefore uses hearing aids and books as communication aids. Despite her disability, she endeavors to live a normal life and establish relationships with her classmates.

In the classroom, Nishimiya was a victim of bullying perpetrated by Ishida and his accomplices. The nature of this bullying included the deliberate destruction of Nishimiya's educational materials and the destruction of her hearing aids, which were of a high monetary value. The repeated occurrence of these incidents led to concern on the part of Nishimiya's parents. They reported the matter to the school administration in an effort to hold Ishida and his accomplices accountable for their actions. As a result of these reports, Ishida's mother was called to the school to address her son's delinquent behavior. Consequently, Ishida was ostracized by his peers for his actions, and was accused of orchestrating Nishimiya's retaliation. The incident rapidly disseminated, resulting in Shoya's complete social isolation from elementary to junior high school. He grappled with profound feelings of guilt. During middle school, Ishida became a reclusive individual, refusing to engage in social interactions. Overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and anxiety, Ishida began to mark the faces of

those around him with Xs, a gesture of his refusal to look them in the eye. Subsequently, Ishida and Nishimiya encountered each other once again during their high school years, leading to the rekindling of their relationship.

This research employs semiotic analysis, a scientific approach that examines signs and the process by which humans create meaning. It is important to note that the concept of meaning in this context differs from the conventional understanding of communication. In this sense, meaning refers to the capacity of objects to convey information and to constitute a structured system of signs, rather than merely facilitating communication. A seminal figure in the realm of cinematographic semiotics is the French philosopher Christian Metz, who contributed to the field at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS). Metz's seminal contributions to semiotics have been widely acknowledged as surpassing the scope and depth of earlier cinematographic theories (Sobur, 2013: 131).

Christian Metz's seminal work, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (1974), *Language and Cinema* (1974), and *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (1982). These three writings are regarded as the most significant contributions to the field, as they continue to be reference points for film scholars (Udasromo, 2020: 153). Therefore, in analyzing the cinematographic elements of the animated film *A Silent Voice*, the researcher employs Christian Metz's syntagmatic analysis as a methodological framework. Metz's approach involves the systematic division of the components and elements in the film that are utilized to examine meaning. This division is accomplished through the application of eight primary types of syntagmatic analysis, which Metz collectively refers to as the "large syntagmatic category." Additionally, the researcher will elucidate the manner in which the film *A Silent Voice* portrays the behavior associated with social anxiety disorder (SAD), more commonly referred to as social anxiety disorder in Shoya Ishida's character.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing Christian Metz's semiotic analysis method as the analytical framework. Metz introduced eight

primary types of syntagmatic analysis, categorizing them into the large syntagmatic category. These categories include the autonomous shot, the parallel syntagma, the bracket syntagma, the descriptive syntagma, the alternate syntagma, the scene, the episodic sequence, and the ordinary sequence. In the context of film analysis, syntagmatics is employed to examine the systematic arrangement of cinematic elements, with the objective of elucidating the message or meaning conveyed by the film.

In this study, the scenes of the film that become the main focus, specifically Shoya Ishida as a bully victim, will be grouped into the eight main types of syntagmatic analysis according to how the scene is displayed. Each movie scene displays a story or message through various cinematic elements that will later be grouped into these eight types. The different groupings are adjusted to each definition of the eight types of syntagmatic analysis. It is important to note that not every movie scene will be classified into all eight types, as some may be more indicative of specific types than others.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A close examination of the research data reveals that the film *A Silent Voice* chronicles the protagonist's journey of self-discovery. The narrative, spanning from elementary school to high school, is depicted through a relatively protracted plot. The central characters, Ishida Shoyo and Nishimiya Shouko, are the focal points of the film. The film also features six other actors, including Yuzuru Nishimiya's sister, Nagatsuka; Nao; Kawai; Sahara; and Mashiba. The film presents two conflicts: the bullying of Nishimiya by Ishida and his friends due to her disability (deafness). The second conflict is characterized by a shift in roles, wherein Ishida becomes the subject of bullying and ostracism by his peers due to his perceived involvement in mistreating Nishimiya.

Segment 10 – Segment 18 (07.54 – 15.45)

Figure 1. Segment 10- segment 18

Bullying, also known as "merisak" in Indonesian, is a pernicious phenomenon that engenders feelings of distress, insult, persecution, and profound psychological harm, even leading to physical harm. This dehumanizing behavior manifests in various settings, including the family, school, workplace, and public spaces. In the film, Nishimiya is depicted as a character who is characterized by a perceived state of helplessness, weakness, shyness, and a lack of conspicuousness. This depiction is rooted in the fact that Nishimiya is a deaf individual, which imposes limitations on her ability to communicate effectively.

Consequently, Nishimiya faces bullying during his elementary school years alongside Ishida, Nao, and Kawai, which significantly disrupts his life. However, a thorough examination of the film reveals that the bullying experienced by Nishimiya's character is not solely attributed to his disabilities. In the film *A Silent Voice*, the bullying experienced by Nishimiya occurred during her elementary school years, a period in which children lacked the emotional intelligence to effectively express their circumstances. Researchers have identified that the dynamics between Ishida, Nishimiya, and Nao were influenced by the negligence of parents and educators in providing adequate support and guidance to children and students.

Segment 19 – Segment 28 (00.50 - 29.45)



Figure 2. Segment 19 – Segment 28

The narrative continues to recount the events that transpire in Ishida's life following his exposure to social sanctions and bullying in the educational institution subsequent to his bullying of Nishimiya. Notably, Ishida's role undergoes a transformation, transitioning from that of a perpetrator to a victim. He perceives the experiences he endured as unjust and feels a sense of betrayal from his peers. Furthermore, he perceives a prevailing sentiment of disdain and misunderstanding from the larger community. In the course of these events, Ishida comes to empathize with the experiences of Nishimiya. The text conveys the experience of being ostracized, disregarded, bullied, and insulted, ultimately resulting in a profound sense of social isolation. Contrary to Nishimiya's character, who was subjected to bullying due to her personal attributes, Ishida's victimization was rooted in his actions towards Nishimiya.

Segment 29 – Segment 69 (29.50 - 121.35)



Figure 3. Segment 29 – Segment 69

In this segment, the narrative focuses on Ishida's endeavor to reconcile with Nishimiya. Additionally, this series of segments portrays Ishida's internal conflict with his social anxiety disorder (SAD). In its most acute form, SAD manifests as an incapacity to raise one's head, accompanied by dizziness and nausea when confronted with social situations. This discomfort is attributed to the lingering effects of a past trauma, which often subjects Ishida to stigmatizing gazes and prejudicial assessments, portraying him as a paragon of societal ills. However, Ishida's journey is not without support. His friends provide him with the fortitude to confront his fears and face the audience.

Segment 58 - Segmen t70 (94.40-123.50)



Figure 4. Segment 58 - Segment 70

The film positions Nishimiya and Ishida at the zenith of the conflict, a position they previously held at the inception of the narrative. Ishida contemplates suicide due to the belief that his existence is devoid of purpose, while Nishimiya resolves to end his life, driven by a sense of exhaustion from being a source of burden to those around him. His deteriorating hearing capacity further compels him to seek the conclusion of his life. Consequently, Ishida's act of self-sacrifice, wherein he becomes the victim, serves a pivotal role in facilitating Nishimiya's realization that Ishida, too, was grappling with significant personal challenges. This revelation prompts Nishimiya to adopt a new perspective, one that inspires him to muster the strength to confront and overcome his difficulties.

The narrative culminates with Ishida's decision to open his ears, allowing him to perceive the discourse among the onlookers. Concurrently, the cross labels that had been observed by Ishida as he surveyed the individuals one by one dislodge, unveiling the countenances of all present. This development signifies Ishida's triumph over his social anxiety disorder. Throughout the film, Ishida's recuperation is propelled by his acknowledgment of forgiveness and the expressions of remorse offered by his peers who had formerly bullied him. The narrative serves to underscore the importance of acceptance in addressing social

anxiety, particularly by highlighting the profound impact of rejection on Ishida's emotional well-being.

Semiotics of A Silent Voice through Cinematographic Signs

Cinema serves as a conduit for filmmakers' creative ideas, offering a diverse array of narratives that encompass both factual and fictional accounts. Beyond its artistic value, film also encompasses informative, persuasive, and entertainment values (Mudjiono, 2011: 137). These values serve as the foundation for a compelling narrative and can impart moral messages.

A thorough review of the extant research data, employing codes and symbols derived from the tenets of Christian Metz's cinematography, reveals that the animated film *A Silent Voice*, spanning approximately two hours and ten minutes, chronicles the journey of a protagonist in pursuit of his identity. The narrative unfolds over a considerable time span, beginning in elementary school and culminating in high school. The focal character in this film is Ishida Shoyo.

Metz's theory posits that a shot functions more as an expression than a word, though it does not always manifest in this manner. A fundamental tenet of film semiotics is the necessity for films to be genuinely comprehensible. The employment of iconic analogies, while potentially elucidating, does not invariably suffice to explicate the intricacies of a film's discourse. A more profound comprehension is enabled by the utilization of "The Large Syntagmatic Category." This movie structure language consists of eight groupings, as follows: the autonomous shot (establishing shot, insert), the parallel syntagm, the bracketing syntagm, the descriptive syntagm, the alternating syntagm, the scene, the episodic sequence, and the ordinary sequence.

A content analysis of the film *A Silent Voice* reveals that researchers have divided it into 71 segments. These segments are examined using Metz's basic components and elements to identify the meaning of the film, which presents the story of a bully turning into a bully victim. The analysis reveals that the film contains four types of non-diegetic inserts, which are shown in the movie through the element of the autonomous shot. This non-diegetic insert involves the inclusion of a shot that is not part of the movie's narrative, existing independently of the temporal and spatial elements of the story. In this case, the pond is

populated by Koi fish, some of which are black, while a single colored fish stands out. Koi fish, also known as carp fish, are a type of freshwater fish that are closely associated with Asian cultures, particularly those of Japan and China. The Koi fish, a Japanese species, has gained prominence in China, where it is often depicted in a manner that symbolizes the resilience and fortitude of the characters Nishimiya and Ishida in the context of a fast-paced world. According to feng shui beliefs, the Koi fish represents strength and courage in the face of life's challenges.

Furthermore, other types of inserts include subjective inserts, which employ a first-person perspective; displaced diegetic inserts, which incorporate additional shots set in different spatial and temporal locations; and explanatory inserts, which provide additional shots to clarify a particular cinematic event. In *A Silent Voice*, these three types of inserts are employed to present a comprehensive segment in a coherent and organized manner. The subjective insert is prominently featured in the film, offering a first-person perspective of Ishida's experiences with anxiety in public spaces. The film employs frequent use of Ishida's point of view to facilitate audience visualization, allowing viewers to empathize with his character. The Displaced Diegetic and Explanatory Insert elements employ a forward and backward storyline, utilizing flashbacks to clarify the events in the character's present. However, the film's extensive use of time and space displacement can, at times, result in a sense of confusion for the viewer. This is due to the absence of pauses or explanatory intertitles when the film transitions between flashbacks and scenes set in the future.

The second element in Metz's syntagmatic analysis is Parallel Syntagma, which is defined as an acronymic syntagma that consists of a combination of several different shots and has no relationship in space and time. This syntagma has a symbolic meaning with contrasting depictions. In the film *A Silent Voice*, this contrasting depiction is exemplified by the segment depicting Ishida's character, Ishida, as an antisocial individual amidst his social peers, who are preoccupied with playing and fostering relationships with each other. Ishida's perpetual solitude in class juxtaposed with his friends' dynamic interactions and conversations is a poignant illustration of this contrast. The third element is the Bracket Syntagma, which aims to present fragments of images in the film. This

syntagma offers a concise synopsis of the narrative's crux, typically manifesting at the inception of a story. However, in the context of *A Silent Voice*, it is employed to succinctly delineate the metamorphosis of Ishida's character, who, initially portrayed as a cheerful and socially adept child, undergoes a transformation into an antisocial and isolated state, driven by the desire to end his life.

The fourth element is Descriptive Syntagma, which is a chronological syntagma that lists the events in one screen and setting directly. In this element, the segments in the movie show the bullying that Ishida inflicted on Nishimiya and the bullying that Ishida experienced after Nishimiya's departure from school. The segment briefly shows the actions taken against Nishimiya and Ishida. This segment employs a visual approach to exposition, utilizing a single shot to illustrate an event, without the need for explanatory text. In the fifth element, Alternate Syntagma, a chronological syntagma comprising multiple shots, presents moments from two distinct scenes, which are temporally and topically related. In this film, this element is manifested in each segment with a substantial plot, occurring within the same timeframe and setting. In the film, this element is illustrated through the segment depicting Ishida and his friends spending time together at a playground on a summer holiday.

The sixth element, the scene, is employed to depict particular events through the medium of setting, actions, and places. The scene is represented in the film through a back-and-forth setting, wherein multiple segments, constituting past scenes, transition back to the present. Additionally, the scene setting, encompassing space and time, is adeptly illustrated in the film, with a judicious use of color to visually represent temporal shifts. In addition, the scene's setting is often accompanied by the use of symbols, which aid the viewer in comprehending the temporal progression of the narrative. The seventh element is the episodic element, which serves to condense the temporal and chronological sequences of the narrative. In this film, the visualization is shown in a segment that contains a point of view of Ishida's character when he remembers the past and explains the cause of his change in attitude. Episodic elements are widely applied in movies to shorten the storyline, especially in films with a back-and-forth plot, as they help to explain the cause and effect relationship.

The Ordinary Sequence element is the final component of this analysis. Similar to Episodic, this sequence emphasizes continuous action, utilizing the ordinary sequence to visually represent Ishida's bullying actions and experiences. The film's approach to bullying is notable for its coherent presentation, emphasizing both the actions taken by Ishida against Nishimiya and the subsequent experiences of both characters. Leveraging Metz's eight fundamental syntagmatic elements, researchers can comprehend each shot, scene, and sequence of the film's narrative, facilitating a systematic exploration of the visualizations depicted in the film. This approach enables the discernment of the film's overarching meaning. The arrangement of cinematographic elements in *A Silent Voice*, an animated film, is meticulously designed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the narrative as a whole. The frequency with which time settings are employed within the film facilitates syntagmatic analysis, thereby enabling researchers to discern the manner in which the film accentuates its message in each segment of the narrative.

Representation of Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)

Through the analysis process that researchers have done using Christian Metz's semiotics to show how the film explains a bullying behavior can occur, what is the background of bullying behavior and how a point of view of the identity of a bully or a victim of bullying. This film presents two different points of view through characters through one character, namely, Ishida who is the perpetrator and victim of bullying. Ishida is the main male character who in the film experiences a drastic change in character in the development of the story. If seen through the title of the film *A Silent Voice* has the meaning of a silent voice (silent voice) seems to be aimed at the character Nishimiya who does not have good hearing so that she communicates more using sign language than by speaking.

However, if you look further into the film, the character Ishida has a mental disorder that causes him to be anti-social to the point of ignoring the world around him, so the meaning of the title can also refer to Ishida's life who has no friends. Unlike the character Nishimiya who is bullied because of her shortcomings, Ishida experiences bullying because of his actions towards

Nishimiya. But more than that, based on the content of the film, when the school asked for responsibility for what happened to Nishimiya, the other students did not want to get involved in the problem. Then, because Ishida actually did the physical bullying so that it left visible marks. So the one who can be clearly blamed is Ishida. Other students such as Nao, Kawai, Shimada cannot be blamed because there is no evidence that they did it in real terms. They did the bullying psychologically by being spectators and throwing out sarcastic words that insulted them personally.

The trauma experienced by Ishida is depicted worse than Nishimiya in the film. Ishida has anxiety and antisocial disorders. Ishida always lowers his gaze and does not dare to look at the person he is talking to. He is afraid of the views given by people as if judging him. This behavior is known as social phobia or Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), which was coined by Janet in 1903 (Heimberg in Erwina, 2013:10) to describe people who feel afraid and anxious when observed by others when talking, playing a musical instrument, or writing. Based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder -Fifth Edition- (DSM-5) (APA, 2013:203) explains that SAD is a behavior characterized by great fear and anxiety when in a social situation where the individual is observed by others.

What distinguishes SAD from normal anxiety and other anxiety disorders is that SAD sufferers always feel fear and anxiety when in social situations because they are afraid of embarrassing themselves in the situation and being judged negatively by others. Ishida's fear and anxiety are shown in the film through the depiction of other people in Ishida's point of view who have no faces or have crosses on the faces of people around Ishida. Point of view shots are always used in the film to show the feelings and experiences of the characters, so that the audience can feel Ishida's SAD behavior when in public. Based on research conducted by Dr. Nathan (et al., 2006), found increased activity in the part of the brain called the amygdala (the part of the brain that controls emotions and sends stimuli to other parts of the brain that regulate breathing and heart rate) when SAD individuals see negative facial expressions of others and threatening situations.

The reactions that occur in the brain are manifested in the body of SAD sufferers and show symptoms of anxiety in the body such as sweating, blushing,

trembling, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, crying, nausea, and stomach ache. This reaction is shown in the film when Ishida (segment 53 minutes to 79.10-80.40) becomes the center of attention of his classmates and is cornered because his classmates blame Ishida as the bully in Elementary School. The film shows two different points of view, namely the audience's point of view seeing Ishida become the center of attention in class and Ishida's point of view seeing Kawaii's actions that corner him. Ishida looks panicked and tries to stop Kawaii from attracting the attention of students in class, but his efforts fail. Therefore, Ishida with a shaking body feels like vomiting and runs unsteadily out of class.

This trauma he got when Ishida was bullied in Elementary School and rejected until he was in Junior High School. Victims of bullying are people who are weak, antisocial, too attention-grabbing either because of their shortcomings or advantages, because they are easily bullied. In addition, through the character of Ishida, the film also represents that the victim of bullying is a person who was previously a perpetrator of bullying. When people cannot accept the nature and personality of someone who does not conform to the values and norms in a group, then he will be ostracized. Then, the victim of bullying who is a process originating from the perpetrator is depicted in the film as having the opportunity to improve his life. At a time when various media show cases of bullying negatively with acts of revenge. This film conveys a positive message that enthusiasm and effort within oneself are important to be able to change oneself because an identity is only a construction that society forms (Basrowi and Sukidin, 2002: 194).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions that the researcher has conducted, this study concludes that the representation of social anxiety disorder behavior displayed by a child victim of bullying in the film *A Silent Voice*, namely Shoya Ishida. The identity of the first bullying victim is in the character of Nishimiya who is shown as a deaf child with a kind, introverted, quiet, forgiving and weak nature when bullied. Furthermore, the construction of the identity of the bullying

victim is also shown in the character of Ishida who is the perpetrator of Nishimiya's bullying.

Ishida's identity, which was initially strong as a child who has the power to influence others, changed after being punished by the school for bullying that he did to Nishimiya, a disabled child. Ishida's friends did not want to be involved in the bullying case and were punished by the school, they turned against Ishida. Ishida began to live his life being shunned and ostracized until it caused trauma to him in the form of social anxiety or social anxiety disorder. Ishida also displays a defensive attitude through his point of view that puts facial labels on his conversation partners and the people around him so that he does not know what expressions they give him. It can be seen that SAD is a condition that is not the same as ordinary anxiety, this can be seen from the frequency of SAD which always appears and lasts for a long time.

SAD can interfere with the function of life for individuals who suffer from it because SAD causes individuals to be unable to interact and communicate normally with others, thereby reducing the social abilities possessed by the individual. This seems to be well represented by the film through the character of Ishida who has no friends since being bullied. Through the character of Ishida, the film represents that perpetrators can also turn into victims. But not in a negative context, this film represents that both perpetrators and victims of bullying have the same opportunity to become better and change. Through the Metz semiotic method, the film *A Silent Voice* presents each scene with a concise and dense plot. Several segments feature flashbacks supported by the provision of cinematographic effects to explain the film's setting. Furthermore, the character's point of view is often used in films, which makes the audience feel the same position and emotions as the main character in the film.

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