

Semiotic Theory Approach to Pragmatic Analysis in The Addams Family (2019) Animated Film

Nurrahma Fadhila Salam

The Faculty of Art and Design, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara
nurrahma.fadhila@student.umn.ac.id

Rr. Mega Iranti Kusumawardhani

The Faculty of Art and Design, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara
rr.mega@lecturer.umn.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Depending on the communicator, language can give a wide range of meanings and significance. The Addams Family (2019) is an animation film with a unique communication style for conveying messages and information to the audience. Each of the characters' conversations has several layers, so the audiences have to interpret the messages from various points of view. The authors tried to connect the characters' conversations from the film with the pragmatic theory to decode the meaning. In addition to pragmatic theory, a semiotic approach to denotative and connotative meanings was applied as well. Authors utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to calculate, observe and explore a deeper meaning of language. The result is a Pragmatic Analysis from the film characters, as shown in The Addams Family (2019) animated film version.

Keywords: *The Addams Family, Animation, Pragmatic, Semiotics.*

INTRODUCTION

Film and animation are rich media in conveying information through their characters (Niatri in Nawangsih, 2019). As it communicates meaning, animated films can be dissected not only from the production process point of view, but also from how they create meaning to the audiences (Kusumawardhani & Daulay, 2022). Characters in Film and animation communicate using various strategies to present diverse contexts to audiences. Chair in Widayanti 2019 stated that in defining meanings and intentions, Pragmatics, as one of the existing branches of communication science, is a tool to connect communication structures in the context of meaning that can be analyzed in different situations and contexts.

The film characters' use of language becomes a research subject in Semiotics; in terms of denotation meaning and connotation meaning. Denotation meaning stands for its literal meaning, while connotation meaning gives an additional context, such as emotion, feeling, or even image, to a meaning. In the animated Film, the combination of Pragmatics and Semiotics in the characters' language style will give specific interpretations or intentions that depend on various contexts, such as scenes, characters' three dimensional, body language, and facial expressions.

The Addams Family (2019) is an animated film by Universal Pictures that was released in October 2019. The Film portrays the story of the Addams family—a fictional family created by Charles Addams—who transfers to New Jersey to find a quiet life; however, they end up living in a modern society that is very different from their lifestyle. Some research

articles studied the uniqueness of the Addams family, especially their use of language. In his article, Lubab, S. M. (2021) studied how this family express their refusal or objection using a different strategy from ordinary people. Obeso, K. D. (2019) studied the characters' traits from the Addams family members using a psychoanalytic approach. There are many versions of The Addams Family films; the authors will focus on The Addams Family (2019), the film version that gives a more precise use of dialogue and point of view from each of the Addams family members and how they interact with each other, and to their environment. This article tries to analyze the following inquiries:

1. Pragmatics in the dialogue style of The Addams Family (2019) members; Gomez Addams, Morticia Addams, Fester Addams, Wednesday Addams, and Pugsley Addams. There is plenty of research about Pragmatics in Film. The authors studied research from Papilaya (2016), which analyzed Pragmatics in Film in the use of language in pointing out a character as first, second, and third persons.
2. Denotation and connotation meaning of the dialogue style of the Addams family members. The study of denotation and connotation meanings has been part of the Semiotics and Linguistics study rather than the Film study. However, Mudjiono (2011) in his article emphasized the importance of Semiotics study in Film as a part of comprehending how the film (and animation) narration is related to the audience. Semiotics study in Film has been done plentifully as well in Rahma (2014), Azzirohman (2020), Aditia (2021), Nawangsih (2021), and Andrian (2022).
3. The use of each character's body gestures and facial expressions to suit the context. Kendon (2015) implied that gesture study is essential to comprehend the layers of meaning in the person or character's use of language. Using Kendon's research, the authors included gestures and facial expressions in the considerations. There were some contradictions in including gestures and facial expressions in an animated film; animation lacks believability in accurately visualizing gestures and facial expressions. However, the study from Nayak and Turk (2005) has confirmed that the existing animation technology has given more possibility for audiences to be able to connect gestures and facial expressions with characters' emotional states and feeling.

METHODOLOGY

During the initial research stage, the authors observed all The Addams Family film versions to discover the uniqueness that could be brought as a topic. Ricciardelli (2020) stated that selecting and exploring films is a form of research that should be prepared to observe and comprehend how a film and a film character is portrayed. Using some research papers, the authors studied how Pragmatics analysis is applied in Film. Gumono (2017) analyzed a film's structure using Pragmatics, while Panji, et.al (2022) described a variety of idioms that were utilized by the characters from The Addams Family. In Widayanti (2019), the speech of the act of Disney's animated films was analyzed and connected with how it is imitated by children in real situations.

After the topic was selected, the authors tried to gather data from all the film versions to define the universe of The Addams Family. After the universe of The Addams Family was defined, the authors began to create a tabulation of the characters, and started to gather and compare the pragmatic, denotative, and connotative meanings from each character's dialogue style using The Addams Family 2019 version. The next stage was to analyze the dialogue style of all characters to comprehend the whole context.

The authors chose to present the outcome of the gathered data by mapping The Addams Family Tree. The family tree below shows that Gomez's mother, Eudora Addams, is

a witch, and she has two sons, Fester and Gomez Addams. On Morticia's side, her parents were Hester Frump (deceased) and Grandpa Frump (deceased), who was also associated with magic and witch power. This information concludes that the Addams' family members are not pure humans in general, which makes their descendants distinctive from other human beings.

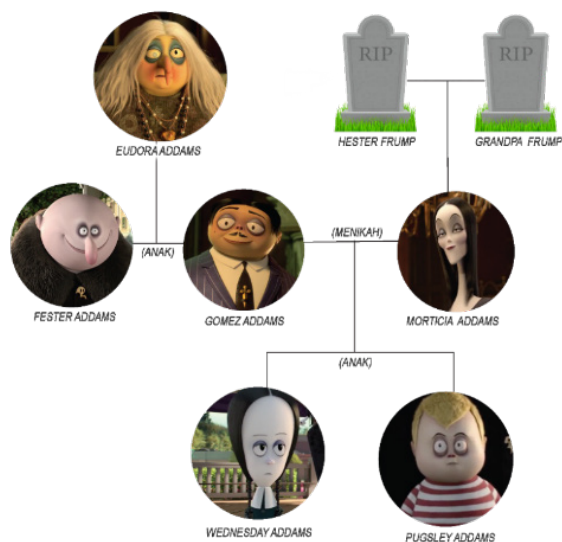


Image 1. Addams's Family Tree. (Personal Source)

To quantify each character's dialogue style, the authors used a tabulation to show the number of dialogues on members of the Addams family with layers of meaning. There were 32 dialogues with layers of meanings found in the film from each Addams family; Gomez Addams, Morticia Addams, Fester Addams, Wednesday Addams, and Pugsley Addams. To describe the Pragmatic and Semiotic in each character, the authors selected a sample of dialogues that most represent the case and will be elaborated on in the Result and Discussions section. The following table records the findings of those total 32 dialogues:

Table 1 Distribution of 32 Dialogues with Layers of Meaning in The Addams Family (2019). (Personal Source)

No	Character's Name	Status in the Family	Total
1.	Gomez Addams	Father	8
2.	Morticia Addams	Mother	10
3.	Fester Addams	Uncle	4
4.	Wednesday Addams	Daughter	8
5.	Pugsley Addams	Son	2

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Gomez Addams

Context: Margaux arrived at the Addams family residence in the morning.

Duration: 00:32:32 – 00:32:40

Margaux Needler: "Good morning! I hope this isn't a bad time."

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Gomez Addams: “**The worst! Do come in**”.

Layers of meaning:

Perceiving from the literal meaning (denotation) of Barthes’ semiotics, Gomez’s response was a form of disapproval for Margaux’s arrival at the Addams family residence since she came at the unanticipated time. However, when perceived from the film context, the sentence “worst” uttered by Gomez was the opposite; Margaux’s arrival was anticipated. In this scene, the denotation meaning becomes connotation meaning since it has additional context.



Image 2. Gomez Addams’ Body Gesture. (Source: The Addams Family (2019))

The word “the worst (time)” implies how Gomez disagreed with Margaux’s visit, which inconveniences him. Perceiving from a Pragmatics point of view, a disclosure can be assumed otherwise. The word “worst” became a reverse vocabulary that Gomez applied to imply “the best; or the most suitable (time).” Perceiving from his body gestures, movements, and expressions, Gomez was smiling while waving his arms as a sign of welcoming; the movement presumably is a form of expression to welcome Margaux as she came at the right time.

2. Morticia Addams

Context: Morticia reads out letters from the guests who were invited to the Mazurka ceremony

Duration: 00:17:17 – 00:17:24

Morticia Addams: “**Gomez, everyone that we’ve invited to the Mazurka has threatened to come**”.

Gomez Addams: “I know. **Isn’t it wonderful?**”

Layers of Meaning:

The word “threatening” has a negative form of expression; it can be interpreted that the guests of the Addams family sent a negative reply. In pragmatics, a statement will produce different meanings if it is seen from a different context of a relationship. Otherwise, the response from Gomez indicated an inverse situation, and we may assume both of them did not feel threatened at all, instead were excited about it.



Image 3. Gomez Addams's Response. (Source: The Addams Family (2019))

Through Gomez's different response, Morticia's words also implied different meanings. The word "threatened to come" becomes a cheerful expression and is interpreted as the guests being excited about the Mazurka ceremony.

3. Fester Addams

Context: The Addams family met Margaux who offered them a house renovation service.

Duration: 00:30:00 – 00:30:08

Margaux: "... I can beautify that old house of yours so fast, it **will make your head spin**."

Fester Addams: "*I don't want to brag, but mine already does that. Look*".

Layers of Meaning:

Margaux offered the Addams family a quick home renovation and implied that it would not take long by adding, "It makes your head spin." Margaux persuaded the family to agree to her offers. However, Fester's response was unusual. Fester took Margaux's words literally and spanned his head, which caused Margaux reacted uncomfortably.



Image 4. Fester Addams and Margaux's Response. (Source: The Addams Family (2019))

From Pragmatic perspective, the context and language will produce meaning depending on how the language is understood and translated. Due to the difference in cultural background and the use of language style between Fester and Margaux, Fester's refusal strategy of taking her words literally was misunderstood. It confused Margaux, which resulted in disconnected interaction.

4. Wednesday Addams

Context: Wednesday offered some help and advice to her brother, Pugsley, who was rehearsing for the Mazurka ceremony.

Duration: 00:22:42 – 00:22:52

Pugsley: "You're going to help me? Why?"

Wednesday: "Because you are my brother. **And I...love...you**".

Layers of Meaning:

The word "love" is interpreted positively in a denotation way. It means Wednesday is affectionate to her brother, Pugsley. Nonetheless, the vibes when Wednesday implied her words were far from positive vibes. Wednesday's eyes were wide open, and her pupils turned smaller while she smiled cynically.

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Image 5. Wednesday Addams's Expression. (Source: The Addams Family (2019))

Wednesday's words, contrasting her facial expressions and gestures, will confuse others. Otherwise, Pugsley, who knew her personally, knew how to respond and acted normally as Wednesday did those words, gestures, and expressions repetitively previously. Despite her facial expressions, Wednesday Addams implied denotation meaning in her words that Wednesday cared and was willing to help Pugsley.



Image 6. Pugsley Addams's Response. (Source: The Addams Family (2019))

Both Wednesday and Pugsley existed in the same family, understood each other personally, and understood each other's uniqueness to comprehend each other's language style.

A different context performed when Wednesday Addams met her new friends, Layla and Kayla, and Parker Neddler, who invited her to go to the city mall.

Duration: 00:44:47 – 00:45:00

Layla and Kayla: "It is an honor and a privilege to watch your work".

Parker Neddler: "Hey, **do you want to go to the mall?**".

Wednesday Addams: "Why not? **I have not seen a good mauling in ages.**"

Layers of Meaning:

Parker invited Wednesday to go to the city mall. For common sense, a mall is where people socialize while shopping or having something to eat for entertainment. However, Parker's invitation was comprehended with a different concept of 'mall' for Wednesday. She punned

'mall' as 'maul,' which changed the context entirely to what she responded afterward; 'mall' as a common place for socializing becomes 'maul' as a violent action to attack or to injure others.



Image 7. Wednesday with Her Friends
(Source: The Addams Family (2019))

To Parker's responses, her facial expressions and gestures displayed a normal reaction since Parker understood Wednesday's family background and behavior personally. She knew that Wednesday had a different way of expressing her thoughts and responses and had a family background far from ordinary. To explain Wednesday and Parker's communication context in the discussed scene, they have different cultural and family backgrounds; however, during their interactions, they have exceptionally built certain understandings of each other. Even though Parker and Wednesday communicated in a different context, lead to different meanings, they can comprehend each other's considerations. As a result, they have a unique style of communication that only works with common sense if it is perceived as a whole context.

5. Pugsley Addams

Context: Wednesday said goodbye to Pugsley as she ran away from home.

Duration: 00:57:00 – 00:57:06

Wednesday: "Good luck with your Mazurka".

Pugsley: "Wait! You're leaving? **Who's gonna torment me every day?**".

Layers of Meaning:

The word "torment" implies an adverse action, an intentional act to injure or harm others in purpose. When the dialogue is interpreted denotatively, it implies that Wednesday Addams purposely annoyed and injured her brother, Pugsley, on a daily basis.



Image 8. Pugsley Addams's Expression
(Source: The Addams Family (2019))

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However, the negative impression of the word “torment” contrasts with the facial expressions and gestures that Pugsley Addams revealed in the film scene. His facial expression was gloomy as he found out that his tormenter would be gone, which gave room for the audience to comprehend the layer of connotative meaning behind his words. The word “torment” turned out to be an adequate expression to Wednesday, Pugsley’s sibling that, despite her actions, is endearment to him.

CONCLUSION

Based on the displayed findings, the Addams family’s language style is unique in terms of structure and speech. The Addams family uses words, facial expressions, and gestures to reverse the meaning of their speeches from connotative to denotative or vice versa. Other characters in the film might understand or misunderstand the Addams family members, depending on how close they are to those family members. The film audiences need to observe the dialogue, the characters’ gestures, facial expressions, and the whole context of the film to comprehend the whole context of the story.

Further, the uniqueness of the Addams family does not occur for itself. The Addams members’ family tree indicates that they are an unusual family associated with non-human characters. Those conditions eventually created individual differences in the family background, cultures, and communication methods carried out long before. Gomez and Morticia Addams have a unique practice of implying good intentions through negative words. Fester Addams turns the connotative words into literal acts, which confuses other characters. Wednesday, Addams misleads gestures and facial expressions and deforms her speech from its context to alter the whole context of her statement. Pugsley uses negative words to express positive implications.

This research is limited in scope and sequence; it provides room for further research. The cultural background of the Addams family, which affect the characters’ use of language, the psychological impact of each character, and how they adapt to comprehend the ‘regular’ language usages, are some topics that can be carried out in the future.

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