

## Storytelling, Communication and Film in ELT A Prototype for Developing Discursive Analytical Skills

Suncana Tuksar<sup>1</sup>, Mauro Dujmovic<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dr. sc. Suncana Tuksar, Higher lecturer, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Interdisciplinary, Italian and Cultural Studies

<sup>2</sup>Dr. sc. Mauro Dujmovic, Associate professor, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Economics and Tourism „Mijo Mirkovic“

Email: <sup>1</sup>stuksar@unipu.hr., <sup>2</sup>mdujmov@unipu.hr.

### Abstract:

Two films, *The Joy Luck Club* (Wayne Wang, 1993) and *The Visitor* (Tom McCarthy, 2007), establish their performative potential within the realm of postclassical narratology and the politics of identity. Their discursive practice is examined as a symptom of society (i.e. multiculturalism), and a reflection of culture (i.e. identity). Regarding EL students' attitudes towards films, a preliminary survey has been conducted at Juraj Dobrila University of Pula (2020/21); Films are mainly watched for entertainment; Hence this paper aims to contextualize film representations in shaping the Western viewer's cultural experience. While the discourse-driven analysis provides useful insights about questioning the myth of American Creed, the storytelling strategies assist in clarifying the character-based relations to the identity stereotypes. The research results present the context and language-based means of cognition through visual and verbal binary oppositions, which are engaging and potentially applicable in work with students in English language teaching. Film representations are phenomenologically encompassed in the prototypical communicative strata as relevant tools for developing critical visual analytical skills. It assists in utilizing films as tools not only in second language acquisition, e. g. ELT, but also in accessing cultural nuances through language learning.

**Keywords:** storytelling, film multiculturalism, stereotypes, postclassical narratology, myth, analytical tools, communication, stratification

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Redefining the relationship between narratives and the audience is closely related to postclassical narratology, with cultural representations being absolutely central to the narrative. Respectfully, this paper compares and contrasts two films: *The Joy Luck Club* (Wayne Wang, 1993) and *The Visitor* (Tom McCarthy, 2007). The contemporary multiculturalism challenges the American identity, i.e. Creed. There is a general tendency in postclassical narratology to abandon the exclusivity of the established literary circles and linguistic systemic concepts, as

the issues of different media texts clearly take up a very prominent position. What this means is that a new approach advocates for the input of cultural reflection into the narrative and further investigates previously determined paradigm, whereas the new methodologies do not lose sight of already established narratological forms, but rather push the boundaries further towards new applicability scopes. In the light of this principle, narratives in general and film representations in particular are perceived as a symbolic practice which reflects society and culture. Due to the fact that the

interdisciplinary approach activates the meta-languages in the interpretative discursive practice of a narrative, film text discursively contextualizes different meanings, for instance cultural, social, linguistic, semiotic, cognitive, etc.

The approach to establishing the prototypical model through the content analysis provides the selection of film texts in the preliminary process, whereas the identity analysis is applied for deeper examination of film representations within the realm of multiculturalism and according to the character relationships. Subsequently, the research resulted in a developed unique communicative model, which makes the analytical tools in the approach to the visual and verbal film interpretation. The methodological approach relies on the communication stratification rather than on film and language pedagogy. Hereby the classical storytelling traits focus on the medium-oriented narrative, which largely depends on the postclassical determination of politics of identity. This paper provides the framework due to the film representations, which respond to demands of causality of action of film characters. Descriptive and interpretative level of film texts identifies some important visual and verbal signifiers of the identity.

Typically, a language foregrounds certain meta-functions according to general narratological preferences, whereas the film text contextualizes different meanings, realized by linguistic tools – lexical and grammatical units – thus expressing certain cultural functions. Moreover, the rhetoric and the pragmatics of the narrative becomes subjected to analysis beyond categories of classical storytelling and myth, and is interpreted as a discursive construct. As such, analogues linguistic cultural-theoretical connotations are put forward in a certain context, as seen in the paradigmatic book *Reading Images*, by Kress and van Leeuwen. This research shows that extracting the binary oppositions of verbal and visual

representations equally meets linguistic and narratological needs of examination process. Therefore, the interpretative discourse analyses on two communicative platforms brings about the following: a) linguistic and narratological binary system, i.e. should/shouldn't, and b) binarity in cultural-theoretical concepts, for example stereotypes.

Raising awareness by the usage of culturally shaped analytical structure serves as a valuable resource for exploring the media-oriented text. What is more, the meta-reflexive nature of film representations assumes the codependency of film texts and the Western viewer's ideological and ethical experience. Bordwell and Thompson have provided for the methodological framework. For this reason, a preliminary survey has been conducted at Juraj Dobrila University of Pula (2020/2021) in order to test the hypothesis regarding students' opinion of film as relevant media text which serves not only for entertainment but also language and culture communication. In the end, the film analysis resulted in the communicative stratification model, which provides the prototypical unique tools for the application of analytical skills not only in English language teaching, but in different classroom contexts, such as teaching history, culture, etc. Regarding such symbolic performativity, the film contributes to developing the analytical tools in ELT for critical thinking of the 21st century.

## 2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Film Text and the Approach to Narrative

In the 1990s and early 2000s postclassical methodology (1) settled in the realm of a new definition of a "story" by abandoning the established literary paradigm and moving towards a "narrative" as a continuum of multiplied and multimodal story-worlds [7]; [14].

Narrative discourse in Chatman's model can come in different shapes – narratorial discourse, filmic sequences, and so on. Chatman's definition of narrativity reposes on the dynamic interrelation of the two levels of story (plot) and discourse (medial representation). Such orientation reflects various linguistics and sociolinguistics approaches [13]; [24]; [1], film and narratology [5]; [6], and postcolonial narratology [12] [14]. It will obviously be impossible to name all those relevant authors and scholars or to do justice to the diversity and originality of narratological work written in the past 40 to 50 years. In respect to this, Fludernik outlines the subdisciplines, which are most frequently mentioned, for example recent works concentrating on postcolonial (readings of) narrative [9]. She sees major aspects of narrative theory in its various phases since Roland Barthes [1], however, it is biased in favor of the example of instructive way of Genette, who takes categories and turns them into a hierarchy of binaries and focalization and where binary opposition does not do the job, three or four categories must be offered [9]. A passion for typology and classification also characterizes much of the early narratological work of Gerald Prince. Narratology profits from engagements with postcolonial realizations, as a postcolonial lens to look into a narrative basically adopts and relies on the (post)classical narratology but would enrich it. The approach to a narrative is not merely bound to show [20]:

*(...) how concepts of identity and alterity or categories such as ethnicity, race, etc. are constructed, perpetuated or subverted in narrative texts (...) Rather, it is sensitive to matters commonly, if not uncontroversially, associated with the postcolonial (e.g., hybridity, migrancy, otherness, fragmentation, diversity, power relations); it envisages their possible narratological correspondents; and it incorporates them.*

Drawing from broader structuralist revolution, Herman emphasizes precedents set by theorists such as the early Barthes, “who had characterized diverse forms of cultural expression (advertisements, photographs, museum exhibits, wrestling matches, etc.) as rule-governed signifying practices or ‘languages’ in their own right” [14]. On the other hand, Chatman presents the two fundamental levels of narrative – story (what the narrative is about) and discourse (the text), which serves to reformulate the question of what constitutes a narrative by extending the definition to cover a variety of narrative media, especially film. As for the storytelling and film, borrowing from Tomashevsky, who in the 1920s published his study *Theory of Literature (Poetics)*, many authors agree on the classic canon as the most understandable one. In Croatia Turković and Peterlić follow the trail of classical narratology as being the most understandable one, for example in depicting characters and their relationships, whereas on the international level Bordwell and Thompson respectfully apply this organization structure to film analyses [26]; [19]; [6] (2). However, as explained by Ryan, what that really means for film is that despite the effectively distinguished characters inside a story according to classical approach, narratives move from text to context – the performative act of the use of narration [22].

Based on a comprehensive theory of communication, the approach to global media discourse in the works of Machin, Kress and van Leeuwen is to date practically the rare available comprehensive framework for the analysis of verbal and visual modes of communication. The reason is, as claimed by Kress and van Leeuwen, that literate cultures have systematically suppressed means of analysis of the visual forms of representation [16]. Indeed, film has been regarded as text since the early decades of the 20 century thanks to Eisenstein and his

early theoretical studies in 1920s, and a famous study *Film Language* by Christian Metz, dating from 1974. However, the groundbreaking theory was also that of Barthes, who in his book *Mythologies* argues for representation and communication, the language *sense* makes *no-sense* and as such demands meta-interpretation. In his famous and frequently cited study “Myth Today”, Barthes noted that everything can be a myth since it is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message stated [1]. For Barthes, myth is a type of speech and everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse [1]. What follows were the narratologies interested in the discourse analysis which pushes towards the rhetoric and pragmatic media representations without ever privileging any of them.

Moreover, when talking about the myth and film, Hall notices that all these cultural practices and forms of representation have the black (and Asian) subject at their centre, putting the issue of cultural identity in question. Hall sees cinema as a “vibrant visual representation of 'blacks' of the diasporas of the West - the new post-colonial subjects” [12]. The questions raised are: ‘Who is this emergent, new subject of the cinema? From where does he/she speak?’ In this way, Hall emphasizes the practices of representation which always implicate the positions from which we speak or write - the positions of enunciation [12]. The ways of living in the world together is pivotal to further identity differentiation; cultures side by side must learn how to see things through the eyes of different cultural-identity positions and add their knowledge to our personal analytical repertoires of a wholly different category. Types and functions of narratives develop the construct of alterity or otherness, discussed in terms of politics of identity, and reflecting the contemporary attitudes and popular prejudices in alluding to the political use of such material of a so-called

free-floating mythology (e. g. a position central to the field of Orientalism, i.e. touches Asia).

The multicultural world assumes there are common elements across cultures, as well as culturally distinctive elements that offer the opportunity to introduce and discuss differences, for example via binary oppositions. Integrating these views with language learning in respect to verbal and visual modes fits the interpretative interest by depicting and contrasting common elements in a pattern in the expression of multicultural issues. In the light of postclassical narratology, this pattern is independent from the sequential structure as the elements are taken out of the context regardless of the chronological or “given” order, as, for example, in classical narratological schema. Still, film is regulated pragmatically and it depends on the cooperative principle with the Western viewer [5]. Thus, further film text analyses contribute to critical skills developed through (a) comparing and contrasting variants of a film narrative as a symbolic representation, and (b) supporting it with evaluation in terms of interpretative discursive expression.

## 2.1. Storytelling Strategies and the American Creed

The American Identity (Creed) as a myth is connected to a diversifying society in the development of multiculturalism. Gunnar Myrdal (1944) is held responsible for the popularity of the expression of the American Creed: it is considered the strongest foundation for abolishing the racial segregation and discrimination, within the principle of a strong American identity, also including the all-American values, such as protestant beliefs and values, *laissez faire*, freedom to travel, freedom to have a private initiative, individualism and work ethics, self-made man, etc. The Creed is connected to the widespread population migrations as cultural interconnectedness has increased.

According to Chan and Starosta, the United States especially has felt the impacts of this trend: the numbers show that historically structured multiethnic society makes intercultural contact among co-cultures inevitable in the US, with numbers revealing that the first-generation foreign-born population in the United States had reached almost 20 million [8]:

*These figures indicate that the increasing numbers of immigrants have restructured the fabric of American society. The United States has become much more culturally diverse than it has been in the past. This multiethnic structure makes intercultural contact among co-cultures inevitable. Members of the various co-cultures and ethnic groups residing in the United States must learn to adjust to one another's identities. This trend demands that individuals learn to communicate in ways that are effective in such a diversifying society (...) Cultural diversity, or multiculturalism, will become the norm rather the exception in American life (...) These developments foster within individuals multiple, simultaneous identities in terms of culture, ethnicity, race, religion, nationality, and gender.*

Bearing in mind that film is told aloud, like folktales, and oral telling being a major storytelling characteristic in classical terms of folktales and myths, the important name is that of Vladimir Propp. His study *Morphology of Folktale* does not only provide the framework for the plot and characters, but also serves as a useful analytical tool that would withstand the narratological changes and functions in narratological fluctuations. Most importantly, classical storytelling relies on sequences of events, the pattern, and paradigmatic relationships. Narratological conduct (in film) helps in following the narratives since they are produced in structurally and characterologically coherent way, as prescribed by Propp, especially considering the characterization of character role [21]. In this research paper the Propp's seminal concepts are

formally recognized so this approach is used as the chronological order of events in the film [6]; [26]. A nice example is how the framework of characters and events helps viewers to form the basis of film commentary by discerning if the structure of the film is logical, thus further assessing characterological coherence, and finally helping in assuming a critical point of view or comment on the attribution of significant functions in the film. What makes film even more accessible and comparable to any folktale in a narratological way is that its characteristic may contribute to easy understanding in terms of "reading" the film text. This approach relies on the early storytelling, which is synchronically and conveniently translated it into our multiplatform world. For example, we can enjoy film *The Joy Luck Club* without having to read this book written by Amy Tan. Borrowing from Chatman, in her study "On the Foundations of Transmedial Narratology", Ryan explains what it means to the story [22]:

*It loses its exclusive concentration on verbal narrative and places it on the interdisciplinary track, while story is independent of the techniques that may bear it along, it may be transported from one to another medium but through them it is a story that we know and follow, it could be the same story.*

There are several more arguments for film being the right medium according to storytelling strategies and a medium for language and culture learning. Firstly, it is well-known that film can and textbook cannot produce the audiovisual symbolic meta-reality. As noted by Taylor, certain typical narratological characteristics may contribute to classroom activities in English language teaching (ELT) [24]. For example, "time-ordered structure, repetition and redundancy, predictability, concrete vocabulary and ideas, visual representations of relationships, etc." (9). Secondly, mythology contributes to the story-world in a way which discusses

ideologies with the help of classical variations of storylines. The notion of the myth, according to Barthes, we do not outgrow, especially as form of national identity. Hall also discusses identity in terms of myth and filmic text: “Such texts restore an imaginary fullness or plentitude, to set against the broken rubric of our past. They are sources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West” [12]. The characteristics similar to those typical of folktale (3) and their firm structure certainly could be translated in the modern Western world and therefore contribute to interest of ELT. In the discourse analysis related to global communication and myth, in words of Machin [17], when referring to characters or people in the (photograph) frame, to communicate particular ideas through participants and a particular attitude towards them:

*Also important is what people are doing. This may seem an obvious question to ask of a photograph. Yet in linguistics and in discourse analysis it has been demonstrated that the precise details of action in written text of speech can reveal more subtle messages about the way people are represented as having power or being passive (...) What people are depicted as doing visually may be very different to what they are described as doing in accompanying text in captions.*

Thus, the approach to this study finds some of the schema might be useful in terms of binary principle of opposition and as such allegedly underlies the (folkloristic) text [24]. Regarding the organization in the research conduct, regrouping is done in a priori one or more analytic schema, which might be called „paradigmatic“, since it borrows from the notion of paradigms in the study of language. (4). However, when dismissing the privileged linguistic position, Barthes elevates the discussion to myths and

argues for the expression. Thanks to him, it is the performative action of the narrative that is being interpreted against the context.

### 3. The Communicative Stratification and Survey

The films chosen for this study are *The Joy Luck Club* (Wayne Wang, 1993), and *The Visitor* (Tom McCarthy, 2007). The films are analyzed in terms of the American Creed and the question of the identity and multiculturalism in the USA. Due to construing experience through meaning based on the language approach to cognition, the strata assumed are: context, semantics, and lexicogrammar. English is used as a source language in combination with both visual and the verbal representation, which realizes the expression of the binary oppositions in language and culture. Drawing from the global discourse analysis which depicts from the film representations, the viewer is led from the medium of film to the medium of language as making the headway towards a cultural-theoretical myth of the Otherness to be discussed in the interpretative analysis. In the light of postclassical (postcolonial) narratology, Prince says [20]:

*Of course, like other narratologies, a postcolonial narratology would aim to account for the kind of characters inhabiting these spatial and temporal settings and to supply instruments for the exploration and description of their significance, their complexity, the stability of their designation and identity, or the actantial slots they occupy and the actantial functions they fulfill. In addition, it would allow for the study of their perceptions, their utterances, thoughts, and feelings, their motivations, their interactions, and their position with respect to such commonly exploited semantic categories as goodness and badness, class and power, sex, gender, or sexuality. But it might also make provisions for focusing on the exploitation*

*of particularly pertinent features like (formerly or newly) colonizing or colonized, race or ethnicity, otherness and hybridity, collaboration, (forced) assimilation, resistance, or ambivalence, and, obviously, linguistic and narrative capacity.*

In order to provide the prototypical framework, the analytical route selects the film texts, while simultaneously compares and contrasts depicted representations regarding their specific situated - social and identity - performativity. The tactics are exceptional for expanding and reviewing the viewer's response, which involves critical examining of a film narrative. The communicative stratification emphasizes the audience reciprocally, therefore a relationship with a viewer is established according to specific metafunctions. Thus, the paradigmatic organization in film means that the language learners are offered interrelated options as alternative strategies of linguistic expression, depending on the communicative function within context [13]; [16].

Film representations suffice for the analytical skill assessment in ELT as follows: firstly, the film narrative (as a symptom of a society) produces the audio-visual-verbal representations of culture and identity. Secondly, contextual variables connote the cultural concepts

(identity roles, East vs. West), which are further analyzed according to the lexicogrammatical meta-functions made available by a linguistic system (binary oppositions). Thirdly and lastly, film shapes and defines a situated communicative situation, as shown in Figure (1) in order to illustrate the overlapping characteristics, i.e. the communicative stratification of film (5). This is due to the fact that language could be considered as a stratified resource where choices on one level affect the surrounding levels as well [13]; [16]. As Figure (1) shows, the strata assumed are: context, semantics and lexicogrammar (grammatical structures and lexical items). The representation of stratification as concentric circles is to show that each stratum – or level – of language appears in the environment of another stratum. In other words, in the systemic-functional view language bridges from cultural meanings (social processes) to the actual, concrete expression of linguistic structure, whereas “culture” is understood as values which inform a society or characterize an individual [16]. They are related by means of realization: On the level of context, cultural meanings are expressed through situation types which are themselves determined by configurations of the contextual variables.

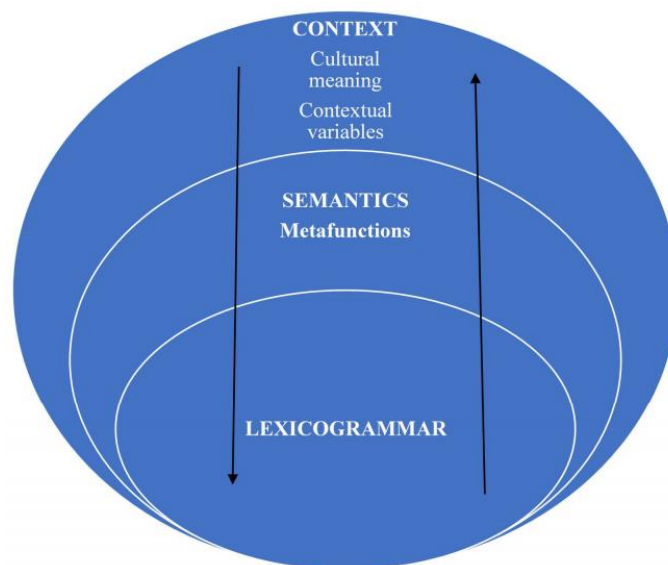


Figure 1: The Communicative Stratification in Film

The preliminary survey was conducted within the Pregraduate and Graduate English Language Study Programme at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary, Italian and Cultural Studies, University of Juraj Dobrila in Pula in the academic year 2020/2021. In this study 101 students were surveyed aging from 19 to 34 years (Tables 1 and 2). The hypothesis for the survey was that films are mainly watched for entertainment rather than contextually read. The survey questions were formed accordingly: (1) Students would largely choose films over

some other media programmes in English; (2) Students would choose films for entertainment rather than for educational purposes; (3) Students might be aware of film potential as a learning artefact, however, their EL acquisition typically occurs incidentally. Questions (1) and (2) were a multiple-choice question, whereas the statement (3) offered a range of answers from fully agree to completely disagree. As expected, the results of the survey support the further research aims of this paper.

### 3.2. Participants

Table 1: Juraj Dobrila University of Pula survey participants 2020/21

GENDER	Number	Percentage
Female	84	83%
Male	17	17%

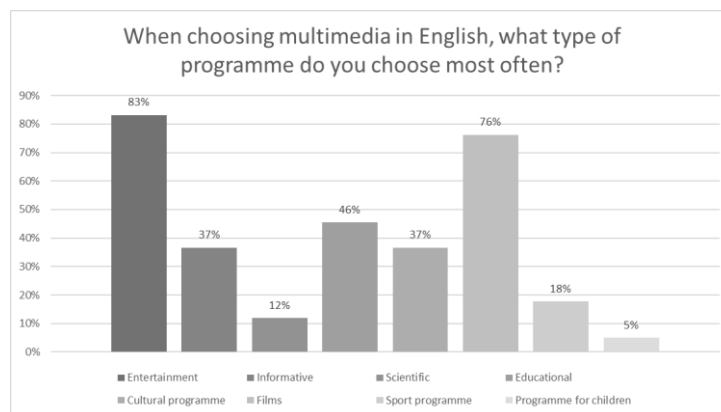
Table 2: Juraj Dobrila University of Pula survey participants 2020/21

Participants	Number	Percentage
Pre-graduate	80	79%
Graduate	21	21%



### 3.3 RESULTS

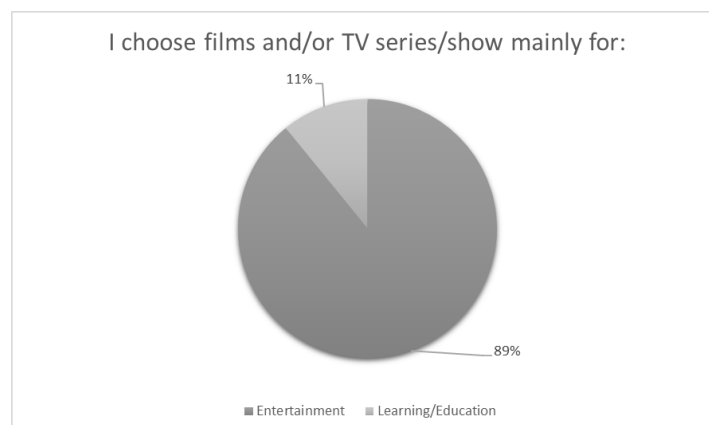
1. When choosing multimedia in English, what type of programme do you choose most often?



Picture 1: Film Survey Results

Picture 1 shows that most students choose entertainment programmes in English (83%), then films (76%), followed by educational programmes (46%), then the number for informative and cultural programmes (37%), followed by (46%) sports programmes (18%), scientific (12%)

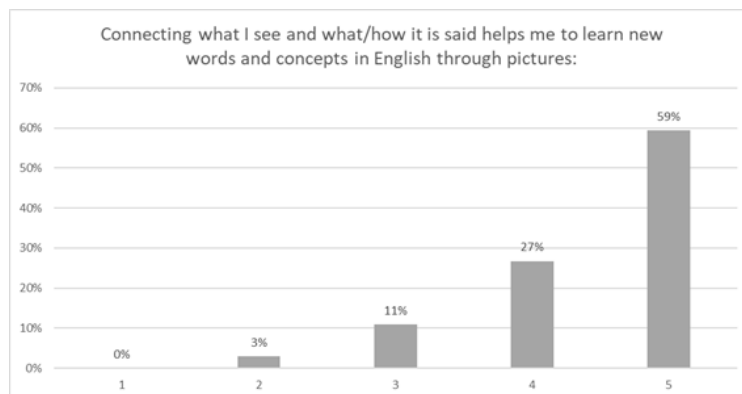
- and programmes for children (5%).
2. Do you choose films/TV series for entertainment or education?



Picture 2: Film Survey Results

Picture 2 shows that students most commonly watch films and TV programmes for entertainment (89%), whereas only 11% of students use them as a conscious tool of language and culture learning.

3. Connecting what I see and what and how it is said in film helps me to learn new words and concepts in EL through pictures.



Picture 3: Film Survey Results

Picture 3 shows that 59% students fully agree, 27% of them agree, then 3% of students disagree with this statement, whereas 11% of them are undecided.

#### 4. Film Analysis

The aims of the survey are achieved in respect to the confirmation of hypothetical thesis that films are not rightfully perceived as a learning artefact; films are highly popular with students compared to other programmes, however, students watch them typically for entertainment, with little or no awareness of film visually and verbally facilitating the EL learning processes. Consequently, a further procedure employed in this paper is relevant due to a) shifting the awareness from the incidental acquisition experience to film narrative being consciously supportive in ELT, and b) providing the results which prove the given strategic agenda. On the one hand, the research approach establishes this purpose because it uses film information to generate purposes, makes inferences, makes relevant assumptions, embodies a point of view and thus establish critical communicative apparatus. On the other hand, it is precisely the communicative point of view that further raises questions, utilizes concepts and above all – generates relevant cultural implications. This is where linguistics and narratology are intertwined on the of film semantics: a

discursive level of film representations requires relevant meta-interpretative strategies regarding those of the American Creed and myth-related identity.

##### 4.1. *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Visitor*

The analysis of film *The Joy Luck Club* (Wayne Wang, 1993) involves comparing and contrasting the action-reactions shots: the notion of Other in relations between the American and Chinese society is represented through a conflict. The scene 'Family Supper' (6) is chosen due to the montage cut to subjective and objective shots: a daughter Waverly, who is an American of Chinese descents, brings her fiancé Rich, the American, to a family supper at her parents'. Waverly is keen on her mother's acceptance of Rich. However, during the supper Rich unintentionally disrespects Chinese table manners, which is disappointing to Waverly and offensive to her mother. In the construct of stereotypical oppositions between East and West and within the concept of the alterity [12], the viewer relies on the cooperation (understanding what is going on) within the scenes. What is alternately shown is as follows: a) Rich's *actions* from Waverly's point of view; b) objective shots which the viewer is presented by the *reactions* of Waverly and the mother. According to Turkovic, a descriptive plan of the scene specifies the information produced [26], which in this case further points to the cultural conflict. Firstly, by the

emphasized Rich's gestures at the table. Secondly, by the wrong impressions Rich made on the mother by not being familiar with the expected traditional Chinese table manners. Moreover, humorous gestures obtain the function of creating the overly-rhetorical pronunciation in the film. Finally, this performative action in the scene presents a cultural stereotype to the viewer. In other words, the comparison visually emphasizes such stereotypical representations of food, drinks, as well as character's awkwardness in the terms of Chinese tradition, while the contrast in respect to binary oppositions of what should and should not have been done is being focalized from the (American) perspective of the daughter. Therefore, the metafunctions of the scene bear distinctive yet stereotypical cultural significance, while elaborate such differences as the possible means of a conflict.

A display of juxtaposed cultures in the American society tempts the assumption of

multiculturalism being receptive to all sorts of culturally shaped identities [15]; [27]. Additionally, the visual power of film is in its denotative plan: something is shown to the audience – a *denotative* plan. Precisely, Rich's mistakes at the table. At the same time, the scenes invite the audience to participate by explaining the effect produced by not obeying the table manners on both Waverly and her mother – a *connotative* plan. Pictures 4 – 7 show the two situations, the first where Rich does not drink as expected in Chinese tradition, which appalls Waverly's mother, and the second, where Rich puts too much food on his plate while Waverly anxiously overlooks the scene. Furthermore, from the binary point of view, the lexicogrammar and cultural interpretations are brought together. The focalized oppositions *should/shouldn't* transmit the identity binary opposition regarding East vs. West.



Pictures 4 – 7: *The Joy Luck Club*; The Family Supper Scene (00:36:30')

Consequently, the context relates to the notion of the otherness, which is supported by an intradiegetic narrator [19]; [26]. Waverly is explaining the situation to the audience, thus evoking the participative communicative situation. In terms of classical storytelling, the linear elements are chronologically ordered as reported from an informant who actually

shapes the audience in telling what *should* and *shouldn't have* been done. When saying that visual aspects are supplemented with the audio one [19], it is meant that Rich's actions at the table are shown from Waverly's point of view and accompanied by her audio-commentary. Speaking of visual power of the film in ELT, the visual representation of Rich's

gestures resembles a visual dictionary, where the binary principle *should/shouldn't* contribute to the powerful phenomenon of storytelling in film due to overlapping of what is seen and what is told. Such impression, or credible display of events [26], together with the fact that one of the characters verbally narrates the story, points the viewer in a certain ideological direction. The table shows the contextual plan: binary principle *should/shouldn't* as a lexicogrammar reference to a binary opposition of culture and race.

Furthermore, the story of *The Visitor* (Tom McCarthy, 2007) is taking place in New York and the analysis show



Pictures 8 – 9 *The Visitor*; The Cape Town, Senegal Scene (00:31:00)

When would the metafunctions of the scene imply the ideological contrast in relation to the otherness? The selective nature of stereotypes is examined within the context and due to identity-related visual representations. In the words of Machin, variations within the specific representative groups are allowed to the extent which does not imply the negative character's connotations, otherwise the stereotypes may be interpreted as racist [17]. Whether or not this is the case in this scene depends on a viewer's critical thinking. For example, does the choice of clothes and colours in the African representation (as well as the intradiegetic audio modus of ethnic music heard in the scene) necessarily suggest a lower social rank (perhaps because the girl is a street vendor)? Precisely, what is being implied and what is a matter of fact true is juxtaposed here on the level of biological

that the comparison and contrast of two characters who encounter in America emphasize the contrast of identities in relation to America and Africa. Zainab is a female street vendor from Senegal who is selling her jewelry to a white American woman. The traits of American Creed and multiculturalism are challenged by contrasting the race/ethnicity in a context of a scene 'Cape Town, Senegal'. Firstly, it is done on the visual level of different multimodal representations, for example flamboyant colours of clothes. Secondly, and most importantly, it is achieved on the basis of binary opposition of race on the character plan (Pictures 8 and 9).

and cultural identity [17]: not only all Americans are blond with a fair skin tone, but also all African women do not wear ethnic costumes and work and live on the streets.

#### 4.2. Discussion: The American Creed

In both cases it is the inherited myth that has been put forward. In *The Joy Luck Club* the myth has been connotated by binary oppositions *should/shouldn't*, while in *The Visitor* it is also the contextualized dialogue that carries the similar opposite connotations. For example, in the scene 'Cape Town, Senegal' there is a buying-selling situation, which is shot in the objective scene (as if the viewer observes the scene from a distance), where the viewer can focus on the visual biological representations of the binary oppositions between the race of the women (Pictures 10 – 11).



Pictures 11 – 12: Binary Oppositions; Culture and Race

In the context of film, the viewer objectively witnesses of the scene, that is, observes the narrative from aside. Placed in this position, what draws viewer's attention is the obvious race contrast of the two characters. However, what follows is the subjective shot of Zainab from the perspective of the American: the woman starts the conversation with Zainab by addressing her with the pronounced enthusiasm as if talking to a child, while Zainab talks back with the fixed stare and a distanced tone of voice. In this way a certain cultural connotation is addressed in the scene on both visual and verbal level. Then the American asks Zainab where she is from, and to the answer: Senegal, the American responds thrilled with joy that she herself has recently been to Cape Town. The picture shows a situation where shot-reverse shot functions as the principle of film motivation: just like the confusion of table manners has the humorous effect on the audience in *The Joy Luck Club*, the geographical misinterpretation is a bearer of humour here as well, the former being that of Chinese table manners and the latter of American ignorance. In both cases the representations are stereotypical.

Similarly, in both films, the ideological metafunctions take place according to American national identity in the sense of reexamination of America Creed as a myth. In broader perspective, the question of identity in globally connected world is a question of multiculturalism. According to the Creed the American society proclaims

multicultural equality and is proud of it. Despite that, what is emphasized here is that the question of identity is today equally imposed question in American society as in any other. For this reason, Huntington states that the global politics of identity here too asks the question of the Other [15]. This idea is supported by the intercultural and interracial issues which need more explaining; This is no longer the problem of the subnational American identity but the transnational (global) identity marginalization in general.

#### 4.3. Results: The Communicative Strata

The discursive analysis of context on visual and verbal grounds bears a prototypical significance relevant for further application to different film texts in relation to the otherness. When discussed in the realm of ideological metafunctions, Bhabha describes the narrative as an act of describing the nation [2]. This is due to the factors which directly refer to the New Orientalism paradigm in *The Joy Luck Club* [27], as well as indirectly undermine the Creed in *The Visitor* assuming the position of the Other [15]. The two national allegories (Asian-American and African-American) are contrasted implying, so borrowing the words of Bhabha, Huntington says that the individual is representing the collective [2]; [15]. Respectfully, the characters' positions surpass a dichotomy of relationships and signal the cultural discursive movements.

In the sense of storytelling characterization, the two characters are perceived as the exotic Other in a sense of a certain threat. One is the mother/China, and the other Zainab/Africa. Next, the scenes delineated in the postclassical terms

of context as binary oppositions here are not used in terms of the sequential structure but to compare and contrast how both films use binary oppositions to refer to the construct of identity (Figure 2).

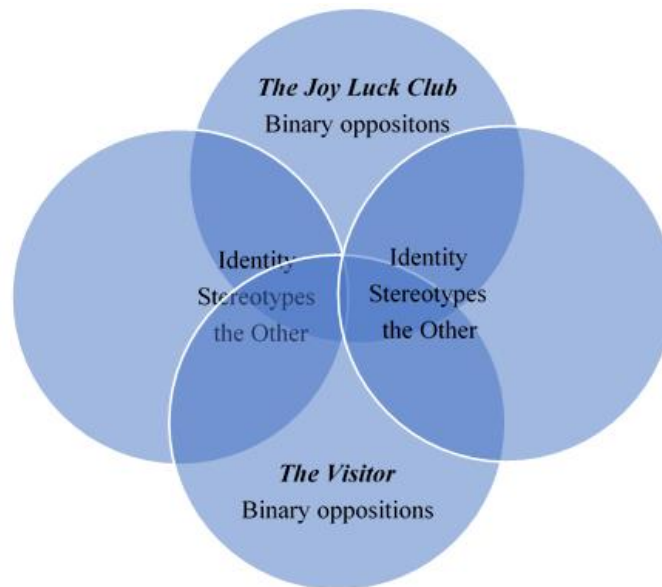


Figure 2: Binary oppositions, comparison and contrast

According to Yin, the film *The Joy Luck Club* contrasts the two cultures in order to promote the American idea of openness to multiculturalism: Rich is doing his best to please the mother, yet China is presented as the rigid Other, since the mother depreciates Rich. On the other hand, Waverly, the daughter, also fears of her mother's reactions. This shows that Asians or Asian Americans in their representations are not simply universally human but depicted as "Asians", which connotes they are not really accepted in dominantly American culture [27]. Moreover, Yin recognizes New Orientalism as a paradigm of assimilation, or political ideology, which still includes the stereotypical representations and acceptance of Asian culture solely by the superficial elements, such as table manners [27]. Secondly, the scene in *The Visitor* contextually criticizes the American ignorant attitude on the first level. However, the question should be asked

about the American identity in general. Throughout history the American self has proudly carried the traits of a racial-ethnic diversity [15]. What this scene shows is that the Creed is not more than an ideological construct. As said by Huntington, it describes the identity as the foundation of the termination of racial discrimination, but does not really deal with the issues raised by multiculturalism [15]. Therefore, the dialogue in the scene 'Cape Town, Senegal' on the first level promotes the stereotype about American ignorance, whereas on the second level asks the question of multiculturalism and the characteristic distance between races and ethnicities in the American society. In the end, the analysis has shown that the filmic performativity undermines the Creed for the purpose of showing that the proclaimed liability to multiculturalism in America is obviously not a *sine qua non*.

Finally, the stratification as an explicit concept in verbal and visual



representation distinguishes between certain levels within the proposed system of communication, which is in this work reminiscent of the strata of language and culture in film. As shown in Figure 3, the analogous levels to lexicogrammar, semantics and contexts would be visual

representations of characters, their interpersonal and intercultural relations and identity. The latter is to be understood as particular formations of meanings on the superordinate contextual level of culture [16]; [13].

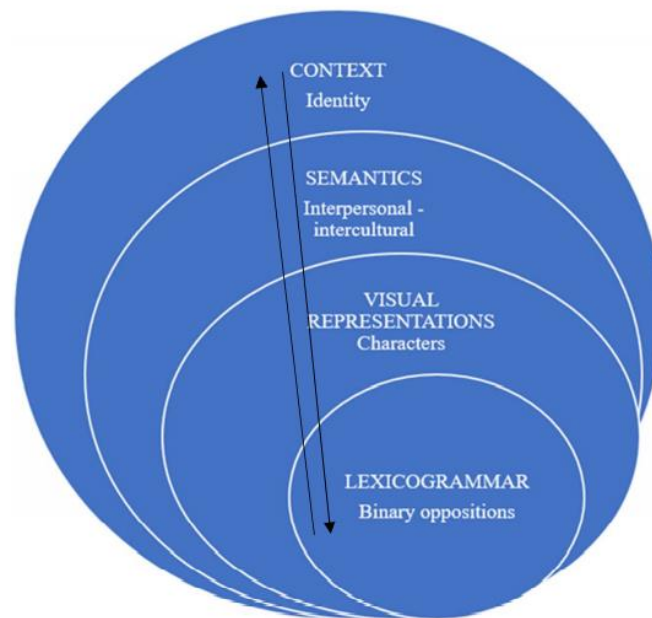


Figure 3: The Communicative Strata Prototype

## 5. CONCLUSION

The communicative prototype has been created as the critical analytical tools for specific classroom activities, which use film representations as text. In respect to English language teaching it dealt with: (a) context (a discursive role of the narrative); (b) situated meanings (visual and verbal representations), and (c) situated identities (the semantic metafunctions). The storytelling tactics on both descriptive, receptive and interpretative level of discourse analysis identified the important signifiers, which then resulted in creating the prototype in hope to set the trail for further studies. Also, in relation to narratology, semantics provided for the causality on the level of the plot, the story and the characters; syntax established a discourse by using narrative techniques; whereas pragmatics focuses on the performative act of the use of narration.

Theory is here to support the narrative practice of performed stories within the context as well as to provide the relevant model, i. e. the communicative platform for different narratives used for different cognitive patterns. Methodologically, the performative nature of representations points to multiculturalism. The situated meanings point to the choices provided by the binary functions and situated identities within the context. They are phenomenologically combined in order to present the layout for investigating films, which then facilitates in raising the awareness with students and educators.

Bearing in mind the critical visual literacy of the 21st century, films do not only serve the purpose of entertainment but also reflect the ideological context on a symbolic level. Thus, film text is a logical choice according to students' preferences, especially regarding discursive

performativity traits beyond entertainment. Indeed, film representations convey the image of the world, thus demand the ethical explanation in respect to the causality and ascribed metalanguage. Accordingly, the emphasis moves from the performativity of visual and verbal communication to establishing the narrative sustainability in the film scenes so that they can be further subjected to phenomenological unification. In the end, we have learnt that myths are types of speech and they never outgrow the national identity. That said, films may assist in so doing: if not to terminate the old myths, then at least to pull apart from them as forms of our prescribed identities. Film pedagogy and scholarship on using film would very much benefit from this paper, whereas references and discussion enable language learning methodologies to implement the prototype in different classroom contexts, not only in English language teaching, but also teaching narratology, literature, culture and media.

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## 7. Appendix

### Films

1. *The Joy Luck Club* (Wayne Wang, 1993).
2. *The Visitor* (Tom McCarthy, 2007)

### Figures, Tables and Pictures

1. Figure 1: The Communicative Stratification in Film
2. Figure 2: Binary oppositions, comparison and contrast
3. Figure 3: The Communicative Strata Prototype
4. Table 1: Juraj Dobrila University of Pula survey participants 2020/21
5. Table 2: Juraj Dobrila University of Pula survey participants 2020/21

6. Picture 1: Film Survey Results
7. Picture 2: Film Survey Results
8. Picture 3: Film Survey Results
9. Pictures 4-7: The Joy Luck Club; The Family Supper Scene (00:36:30')
10. Pictures 8 – 9 *The Visitor*; The Cape Town, Senegal Scene (00:31:00)
11. Pictures 11 – 12: Binary Oppositions; Culture and Race

### Film Synopses

#### 1. *The Joy Luck Club*

(Retrieved from <https://www.scripts.com> 1 June 2021)

Through a series of flashbacks, four young Chinese women born in America and their respective mothers born in feudal China, explore their past. This search will help them understand their difficult mother/daughter relationship.

Genre: Drama

Director(s): Wayne Wang

Actors: Kieu Chinh, Tsai Chin, France Nuyen, Lisa Lu

Production: Buena Vista Pictures

Nominated for 1 BAFTA Film Award.

Another 3 wins & 4 nominations.

“The Family Supper”

We're here!

Where is everybody?

The next week I brought Rich to Mom's birthday dinner, sort of a surprise present.

I figured she was going to have to accept Rich, like it or not.

- Oh, Rich, this is my father.

- How ya doin'?

- Happy birthday, Mom.

- How are you?

- I'm good, thank you.

And, Ma, this is Rich.

Great to meet you. Boy, something smells wonderful. I guess we came to the right

place, huh? Here you are. You know, Waverly has been telling me that you are the best cook.

I think maybe we got her.

So many spots on his face.

Of course, the night was still young.

Thank god I already prepped him on the Emily Post of Chinese manners.

Hi, Uncle.

How are you?

Actually, there were a few things I forgot to mention.

Uh, let me make a toast.

- He shouldn't have had that second glass...

- Here's to...  
 - when everyone else had had only half an inch...  
 - everyone in the family.  
 just for taste.  
 Shrimp. My favorite.  
 He should have taken only a small spoonful of the best dish...  
 until everyone had had a helping.  
 He has good appetite.  
 He shouldn't have bragged he was a fast learner.  
 But the worst was when Rich criticized my mother's cooking...and he didn't even know what he had done.  
 As is the Chinese cook's custom...my mother always insults her own cooking...but only with the dishes she serves with special pride.  
 This dish not salty enough.  
 No flavor.  
 It's too bad to eat.  
 But please--  
 Oh!  
 That was our cue to eat some...and proclaim it the best she'd ever made.  
 You know, Lindo...all this needs is a little soy sauce.

Oh! Uh, oh.

## 2. *The Visitor*

(Retrieved from <https://www.scripts.com> 1 June 2021)

In Connecticut, lonely widowed Professor Walter Vale has a boring life. He teaches only one class at the local college and is trying to learn how to play the piano, despite not having the necessary musical talent. Walter is assigned to attend a conference about Global Policy and Development at New York University, where he is to give a lecture about a paper on which he is co-author. When he arrives at his apartment in New York, he finds Tarek Khalil, a Syrian musician, and Zainab, a Senegalese street vendor, living there. He sympathizes with the situation of the illegal immigrants and invites the couple to stay with him.”

Genre: Drama

Director(s): Tom McCarthy

Actors: Richard Jenkins, Haaz Sleiman, Danai Gurira, Hiam Abbass

Production: Overture Films

Nominated for 1 Oscar. Another 19 wins & 34 nominations.

“Cape Town – Senegal”

Did you make these?

Yes, I made these.

Ooh.

- How much?

- Which one?

Mmm...

this one.

That's \$35.

Will you take 30?

No. 35.

Okay.

My daughter will think this is very cool.

Where are you from?

Senegal.

Oh, I was in Cape Town

Two summers ago.

It is so beautiful.

-Thank you very much.

- What's your name?

Uh, Zainab.

Zainab!

So pretty.

- Thank you.

- Your change.