

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS ON *KIMETSU NO YAIBA* MOVIE POSTERS

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Abstract

This research is aimed to explain the types of semiotic signs and symbols, the denotations and connotations meaning of signs and symbols found in the posters on *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. The researchers use the descriptive qualitative method to identify, analyze, and explain the signs and symbols in *Kimetsu no Yaiba* the movie posters. The theory used by the researchers in carrying out this research is the theory of Dyer (2009) to analyze the types of semiotic signs and symbols. In addition, Barthes' theory (1983) is used to analyze the denotation and connotation meaning. The data in the analysis chapter are taken from pictures, words, expressions, and colors in four posters on *Kimetsu no Yaiba* the Movie. The results of this research show that there are 26 symbols consisting of both verbal and visual signs, each of which is viewed from the meaning of denotation and connotation. Further, after translating the symbols and signs using the theory of Dyer (2009) and Barthes (1983), it is found that the meanings revealed give a teaser or clue about the story which tells about the journey in carrying out missions.

Keywords: Connotation, Denotation, Semiotics, Signs, Symbols

1. INTRODUCTION

Signs and symbols, are common things to find nowadays. They can be found in every corner of human life, starting from public spaces, bus stations, train stations, streets, in books, even handphones. This phenomenon has started long before the invention of letters. Signs and symbols were used by ancient man to leave traces of human history to the next generations and to communicate with each other. This continues to this day and even continues to grow. Thus, in result a research that specifically deals with signs and symbols appears which is called semiotics. Semiotics is branch of science that research about signs and symbols, and the meaning behind them. As Curtin (2009, p. 51) says "semiotics

is concerning with meaning: how representation, in the broad sense (language, image, objects) generates meanings or the processes by which we comprehend or attribute meaning". Alternatively, semiotics is a research of signs and symbols that convey their meaning.

A sign can convey different meanings from its original meaning, denotation meaning, and the connotation meaning. For example, the word 'open' at a store, the origin meaning of the word 'open' is not closed or blocked. However, the meaning changes when the sign 'open' is placed in front of a store. The sign 'open' means that the store is in business and ready to serve the

customers. This made the usage of signs and symbols reached other media, especially in poster advertisement. With its double meaning, signs and symbols can lure people attention and persuade people to buy their products. Another example, the signs in Chitato advertisement that consist of many verbal and non verbal signs. The famous verbal signs are their tagline, "life is never flat". This tagline has two meaning; the first one depicts one's behavior in everyday life, constantly changing from time to time. Some ups and downs make human life exciting and precious to live on. The second one, it depicts the shape of the Chitato chips. The form of Chitato chips is unique that far from word flat, it is round and curved towards the center.

Semiotics not only concerning with sign, but it focuses on researching all things that can be referred as a sign. As Eco (1976 p. 7) states that "Semiotic analysis is concerning with everything that can be taken as a sign." Semiotics studies concern everything that stands for something else or has other meaning from its origin definition. This also supported by Sebeok (2001) that highlight in his book, semiosis is the phenomenon that distinguishes life from the inanimated object. It is the ability of living being whether is human, animals or plants to create and understand signs. Sebeok also highlight, the main functions of semiotics are to give signal of the existence of something, a tool to communicate, and model incoming information from external world.

As a tool to communicate and a model incoming information, sign has not only one meaning, sign can alter meaning far from its original meaning. This called denotation and connotation. Denotation is the real meaning or the dictionary-based meaning, while the connotation is the meanings that have

been influenced. This theory was initiated by Roland Barthes, a Saussure follower. In Chandler (2002) highlight that Barthes elaborated on Saussure's signification theory to be the two orders of signification to make it easier to understand meaning behind a sign. Barthes' theory is the system of two orders of signification that used denotation, connotation, and myth. The first order showed the relationship between the signifier and reality. The theory used the term denotation in this first order, which reflects the actual or common meaning of the signifier. Connotation is used in the second order. The second-order showed what happens if the signifier interacts with the interpreter's feelings, emotions, and background. Moreover, the myth is the deepest part in the second order as it justifies things simultaneously.

In addition, Chandler (2002, p. 137) stated that "Denotation refers to the definitional, literal or common-sense meaning of a sign, and it tends to describe what the dictionary attempts to provide". People will quickly know the denotative meaning of a thing without associating it with its culture, society, or ideology. Barthes (1983), as cited in Wirhayati & Sudrajat (2019), expresses that the denoted message bears analogical properties, and it is primary to connotation in the process of signification. This means that the sign carries the primary meaning; for example, the image of the sun rises. The denoted meaning can be the beginning of a new day or the end of night time. In short, denotation refers to the dictionary meaning and common-sense meaning of a thing from a sign.

In semiotics, the term connotation refers to the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations of the sign. This includes ideological, emotional, or societal association (Chandler, 2002).

The connotation is typically related to the interpreter's age, gender, ethnicity, background, and many other factors. As Fiske (2010) stated the connotation is the cultural meaning that becomes attached to a term; connotation illustrates the interaction that occurs when a sign meets the emotions and cultural value of the reader. It can be concluded that connotation meaning is influenced by one's cultural factor and myth. Barthes (1967, p. 91) states, "connotation is the second order of signification comprised of signifiers, signified." The connotation is a sign that derives from a denotative signifier (so denotation leads to a chain of connotations). The connotation meaning is also influenced by color. As Chapman (2021) states that color is not only used to decorate something; it is also used to express something. Chapman also highlight that color affects many significant aspects for designers, colors consultants, brands, and even the public. The slightest change of hue or contrast can give a different mood and meaning to things. One specific hue and saturation might give happy and uplifting meaning in a country, but give the opposite meaning to another country. There are three different color families that are known; warm colors, cool colors, and neutral colors. Warm colors are composed of red, orange, yellow, and variations of these three colors. Warm colors reflect happiness, passion, love, energy and enthusiasm, but they can also reflect anger, violence, and warfare. The cool colors are composed of green, blue, purple, and the variations of these colors. Cool colors can represent peace, freedom, sadness, envy, and many others. The last one is neutral colors that are composed of black, brown, grey, white, beige, and tan. The neutral colors can highlight the meaning of other

colors, makes the effects become stronger.

Based on the explanation above, the researchers are interested in analyzing the semiotic signs and symbols in the four posters of *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie* as they contain meaningful symbols and signs which are useful to learn. *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie* is a famous movie that first released in October 2020. It won the 2019 Newype Anime Award in many categories, won anime of the year at Crunchyroll, and also became the highest-grossing film of all the time, surpassing the Oscar-winning animation *Spirited Away* by Ghibli. The popularity of this object makes it more important to analyze. This research is focused to analyze the types of semiotics signs and symbols on *Kimetsu no Yaiba Movie* posters, denotation meanings and the connotation meaning of the signs and symbols.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Being an interesting topic, there are and researchers who have analysed the same issue. The first was conducted by Setia and Deliana (2021). By using the theory of sign by Saussure (1974) and some other theories such as theory of color terms by Wierzbicka (1996), and verbal and visual aspect theory by Dyer (1986), it was found that there were two aspects which was formulated in movie poster *Shutter Island*, they were verbal and visual aspect. Further, Pratiwi et al (2021) also discovered the meaning of verbal and nonverbal signs used on *forest fire* posters using Barthes' theory (1998) and supporting theory by Wierzbicka (1996). The findings showed that both verbal and nonverbal signs had important purposes such as giving some information about the impact of forest fires on nature and human life as well as warning people to

be more responsible and aware of the global issue. Wirhayati and Sudrajat (2019) also used Barthes' theory to find out the denotation and connotation meaning behind the signs in selected Hollywood horror movie posters. This research has similar issue to analyze, which is semiotics signs and symbols using the theory of Barthes (1998) and Dyer (1986). The difference between the three previous researches with this research is the object and the focus of research. This research uses *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie* posters as its object, and focuses on their connotative and denotative meanings.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The data were taken from the posters of *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie* which was published in October 2020. Data collection was carried out in several stages, starting from downloading the movie on the internet. Then, the researchers identified and highlighted the signs and symbols in the four posters. After that, the researchers analyzed the visual imagery of the movie posters. Finally, the researchers observed the text on the movie posters. The verbal and visual signs in the movie poster were analyzed by using the Dyer's concepts (1986), while Barthes' theory was used to find the denotation and connotation meanings in the movie posters. The researchers used qualitative approach in this research. The approach was chosen because this research analysed and explored the phenomenon that comes from human problems, in this case human problem in understanding semiotics signs. This approach was chosen also because the data in this research were presented in descriptive analytic without using numeric elements, and the researchers made interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are twenty six data found from 4 *Kimetsu no Yaiba The Movie* posters based on the verbal and visual signs, with details ten verbal signs and sixteen visual signs. These data were analysed using Dyer's theory to classify the types of semiotics. The denotation and connotation meaning were analysed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to explain the denotation and connotation meaning behind the signs and symbols.

4.1 Types of Semiotics Sign

The semiotics signs found in the movie posters are divided in two categories or type of semiotics signs. These two types are verbal signs and visual signs. Verbal sign is sign that consists of textual symbols to express meanings. Verbal signs can be in the form a words, two words, phrases, and a sentences. Visual sign, as its name the visual, is a sign that can be in the form of pictures, graphics, diagrams, colour, and symbols itself. Table 1 is the analysis result of which types of signs being used on the *Kimetsu No Yaiba Movie posters*.

Tabel 1. Types of Semiotics Signs

Semiotics Sign	Frequency	Percentage
Verbal Sign	10	38,46%
Visual Sign	16	61,54%
Total data	26	100%

Table 1 showed that visual signs dominating the usage of signs in the movie posters on percentage of 61,54%. More than half of the signs found are visual signs with 16 data of 26 data.

4.2 Denotation and Connotation

Each signs found represented and emphasized its own meaning in its own way. From 4 posters of *Kimetsu no*

Yaiba Movie, the researchers found 26 data that has different meaning from one another. However, these signs are interconnected with each other.



Figure 4.1. Poster of *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie*

WITH YOUR BLADE, BRING AN END TO THE NIGHTMARE

Figure 4.2. Tagline of the movie (datum1)

The first sign found is the tagline of the movie, “*With Your Blade, Bring an End to this Nightmare*”. The first sign is classified as verbal sign because it contains textual symbols. The first data can be found easily at the top of the movie posters. The denotation meaning of the first data is the tagline of the movie. It was used to attract people’s attention to watch the movie. The noticeable things found in this tagline are the word blade and nightmare. These two words gave the audience rough picture about the movie. As for the connotation, the tagline used in the poster gives a clue to the audience about the main problem and the solution. The word nightmare is foreseen for the

audience as the main problem of the movie. Nightmare means a frightening dream closely related to scary, mysterious, hideous, grave things or events. This word perfectly describes and sums up the protagonists’ obstacles. The word nightmare is combined in the second phrase, *bring an end to this nightmare*. This indicates that the nightmare is the protagonist’s main obstacle to achieving their goal, defeating the villain. As for the first phrase, *with your blade*, it is foreseen for the audience about the solution to overcome the obstacles. As seen in all the posters, the blade is the main weapon used by the protagonists to fight evil creatures.



Figure 4.3. verbal signs are written in white color (datum 2)

The next verbal sign found is *Coming soon and the website address*. Both verbal signs are written in white color. The website address is written in lower case font and smaller than the phrase coming soon. Whereas the phrase coming soon is written in uppercase font, with a larger size to catch the audience's attention. As for the connotation meaning, the verbal signs in poster one are the official website address and the phrase coming soon. The first verbal sign is the worldwide version of the official website of *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. This website is the English version of the *Kimetsu no Yaiba* Japanese website; therefore, all the information on this

website is the same as the Japanese one. The poster mentioned the website address to access accurate and recent information regarding the movie. The audience worldwide that cannot read the Japanese writing can access the worldwide version of information about the movie and other information related to the *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, whether it is the official merchandise or the series adaptation. The second verbal sign in this poster is the phrase *coming soon*. This phrase indicates that the movie can be enjoyed very soon. There is no specific date, such as the month, the date, or the year of the movie, indicating that this poster is the teaser poster.



Figure 4.4. Poster name in the movie (datum 3)

The above verbal sign found in the poster is the name of who was involved in the movie. Several names are written at the bottom of the poster to show the audience involved in the movie-making. The names go from the staff that includes the author, the manga publisher, the studio's employees who adapted it to the voice actors and actresses who voiced the characters in the series and the movie. The names are written in small font at the bottom of the poster, different from the rest of the tagline and the movie's title. Those involved started from the author of the original story, Kyoharu Gotouge. By mentioning the author, the poster gives the audience information about the movie's storyline that most likely is the continuation of the main series or related to the main series. It also means that the movie project had

received the author's permission before it was produced. Moreover, it can also be connotated that the movie promotes Gotouge's works, not only *Kimetsu no Yaiba* manga, but also the previous or future works. The name continues to names of people who create the movie, who are the studio's employees. This tells the audience that the quality of the picture, soundtrack, back sound is high quality, like the studio's previous works. The last names that presented are the cast or the voice actors and actresses. The voice actors and actresses are famous individuals in the industry. As famous actors and actresses, they are a tool for marketing in this poster. The poster aims to catch the audience's attention by showing talented individuals involved in this movie.



Figure 4.5. Movie title *Demon Slayer* (datum 4)

The movie: *Kimetsu no Yaiba Demon Slayer Mugen Train* is the title of the movie. It is written in a unique capital font with an almost circle red and black unique line that is the series' trademark. By seeing the title, the audience will know that this movie tells about the continuation of the series or relate to the main series. The following verbal sign in the first poster is the title of the movie. The title of the movie uses the series' title template. Instead of using one language for the title, the

poster used Japanese and English versions, *Kimetsu no Yaiba* for Japanese and *Demon Slayer* for English. The poster also mixes the Japanese word 'Mugen' and the English word 'Train' at the bottom of the title in red to draw attention. 'Mugen Train' or Infinite Train in English tells the audience about the movie's main problem. By using the series template and mixing both the Japanese and English words, this poster is expected to attract much attention and make the film successful like the series.



Figure 4.6. The picture of several characters in the movie (datum 5)

The noticeable visual sign found in the first poster is *the picture of several characters* in the movie. This shows the audience the main characters that support the plot of the movie. From the bottom poster, three characters look like young boys holding a sword in different attire. The boy in the middle is drawn more prominent than the other two. Then at the upper poster, there are three other figures, a young man with bright hair on the left side, a young man with

dark attire on the right side, and a little girl in the middle. Unlike many movie posters, poster one of *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie* shows many characters involved in the story. The bottom of the poster shows several characters with bright colors to show the protagonists of the story. It started with the big three from the series, from the left are Zenitsu, Tanjirou, and Inosuke, with their trademark stances, then a girl, Nezuko and the leftmost is the group

leader Rengoku. At the top right corner, a character is drawn in a darker shade, indicating the movie's villain, Enmu. Tanjirou, as one of the main characters, is described full determined to break Enmu's trap. Even if the other two main characters do not clearly show their facial expression, they are just as determined as Tanjirou described from their stances. Nezuko, the girl in the middle, reaching out her hand can be connotated that she brings hope and

clues to assist the other in breaking the villain's trap. At the leftmost is Rengoku, the group leader. He is described as looking straight while drawing his sword. His pose can be connotated as an optimistic gesture, optimising that the protagonist characters can defeat evil. Enmu, the villain, is described as having a smile on his face, indicating that he is confident and overjoyed that his trap is a success.



Figure 4.7. The picture of light from inside the train window (datum 6)

The next visual sign found is *light from inside the train window*. It can be denoted that the train is in use. It also means that the train operated at night, so the light seen from the outside is very bright. The visual sign found in the background is quite eye-catching, the visualization of the train's windows that illuminated light. The denotation as mentioned above is that the train was in use. This also can imply other things.

The glowing window at the train connotated that the train was indeed in use; to be more precise, the train was operated in the nighttime. This explains why the windows at the vehicle are illuminated light. Then, it also can be connotated that the train contains many passengers since all the windows are bright. Another meaning is that the train cars can be connotated as the primary setting where the story happens.



Figure 4.8. The main protagonist and the villain images (datum 7)

This visual sign found is *the main protagonist and the villain*. The main protagonist in this movie is Tanjirou, whereas the villain in this movie is Enmu. In supporting their characters in the poster, both are described to have opposite characteristics. Tanjirou described being a determined boy. His hand is swinging a sword like he wants to slash Enmu. Whereas Enmu is depicted to be a creepy young man, he jumps to avoid Tanjirou's attack. As one of the main villains in the movie, Enmu also appears in poster two of *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie Mugen Train*. Enmu is described wearing dark clothes in this poster, closely related to mourning, sadness,

and death. This can be connotated that Enmu is the looming evil that haunts down the innocent people with his trap which is a dream, just like in the tagline in poster one. His trap, the dreams, is described as a deep dream where even if the protagonist characters were under attack, they would not be aware of it, and the dream will continue to become endless dreams. The main protagonist, Tanjirou, is described as the only person who can fight Enmu in this poster. This can be connotated that he is the only person who can break Enmu's trap, end his dreams and attack Enmu.



Figure 4.9. Coming 2021 poster (datum 8)

Coming 2021 were found in poster two as the next verbal sign. Based on the oxford dictionary, coming means the time when something begins. Poster two of *Kimetsu no Yaiba* also mentioned these phrases like in poster one. In this poster, there are two verbal signs, the world *coming* and *2021*. The word *coming* can be connotated that the movie is soon to be released. The usage word *coming* makes the

audience cannot wait for the following information regarding the movie. The poster also mentioned the year *2021*. This implies that the movie is most likely to be released within the year 2021. However, there is no actual date, such as the month, in the poster. This indicates that the poster is the teaser because no specific dates are written, just the specific year of the movie release.



Figure 4.10. Set your heart ablaze tagline (datum 9)

Set your heart ablaze is another tagline used in this movie besides the one in the first poster. It is written in uppercase with a big size at the top of

the third poster. The tagline is written in white colour. It stands out the most with the dark background. This tagline is used to gain the audience's attention to

be interested in the movie. This tagline in poster three encourages the audience. The words 'heart' and 'ablaze' here are the keyword from the tagline in poster three. The heart is usually related to the source of one's will. Breaking one's heart is connotated the same as breaking apart their life. Then, ablaze is closely associated with destruction; however, it also can be connotated as lit the new spirit. The two words are combined in

this tagline creating new meaning. This sentence carries the meaning that one must always be enthusiastic and have a fighting spirit, even if at their lowest. Here in poster three, Rengoku uses it to encourage his subordinate. This tagline means do not give up and keep fighting even if one is in the lowest or the worst situation. With the tagline set your heart ablaze, the poster also wants to encourage the audience.



Figure 4.11 Poster with two contradicting colors (datum 10)

The next visual sign found in the third poster is *Rengoku on fire*. Rengoku is one of the protagonists of the movie; in supporting his character on the poster, he is described as determined by holding a sword to fight for protecting the other. His facial expression is tense, with both his brows frowning, glaring eyes, and teeth-gritting. His whole body is surrounded by fire which drives from his sword. Rengoku is one of the leaders in the movie who devoted his life to protecting others and did his duty well. Because of it, he is not afraid to put his life on the line to fulfil his duty, even if it is hard. In the datum twenty-one, it showed Rengoku's serious expression. It can be connotated that Rengoku is a very determined person who tries to do his job well. It is supported by the sign of the fire that surrounds Rengoku's body. Besides being associated with calamity and destruction, fire also describes one's passion. The fire in poster three

refers to Rengoku's incredible determination and fighting spirit to do his duty to eradicate all the demons who hurt humans.

This visual sign found is in *two different colors*. In this poster, two contradicting colors are used as the main background. The right side is dominated by the yellow color, while the other side is dominated by blue. The contradicting color is usually used to differentiate two opposite things: bad and good, cold and hot. The third poster uses two hues and saturation of color. The right side is dominated by the warm color mainly composed of red, yellow, and orange. The warm colors give the audience an uplifting, energetic, and passionate mood toward the poster. Here in the third poster, this hue and saturation refer to the Rengoku's power and swordsmanship. As one of the sword masters and one of the leaders in the movie, he masters special swordsmanship, the flame breathing

style, even creating a new fighting movement. While using the flame swordsmanship style, fire comes out of Rengoku's sword, a massive fire that will destroy all the evil creatures and protect human beings. The warm hue and saturation also can be connotated with Rengoku's personality. He is a cheerful, pure of heart, and friendly young man.

The cool color dominates the opposite side of the poster. It is mainly composed of varieties of blue

color. This color tone gives the opposite effect and mood from the warm color to the audience. The cool colour gives the vibe of sorrow and sadness. It also gives a dangerous mood to the audience. This poster's cool colours perfectly describe Akaza's power. Humans and even other demons feel intimidated and endangered just with his presence. His power will bring destruction and calamity toward his enemies.



Figure 4.12 The Flaming Background Poster (datum 11)

The flaming background is categorized as a visual sign. In poster four stood one of the main characters, Rengoku, in the middle of the flame. The poster's background was dominated by yellow, orange, and a bit of black color at the top of the poster. As for the connotation meaning, the sign of a big flame is associated with calamity due to the nature of fire that burns almost everything. The warm tone color in the poster also supports the feeling of a massive fire that will burn down everything in its way. However, the signs of huge flame and warm colors

also can be associated with an energetic, cheerful, and passionate spirit. These signs in this poster refer to the natural personality of Rengoku. The warm tone reflects his cheerful, pure heart and humble personality. Even though he is one of the most powerful sword masters with extraordinary technique, he is very amiable and reliable. As for the big flame, it can be connotated the fighting spirit of Rengoku in carrying out his duties as the leader. It leads to the nature of power possessed by the character in the poster, Rengoku.



Figure 4.13 Rengoku with his sword Poster (datum 12)

The following visual sign found was *Rengoku with his sword*. The fourth poster only consists of Rengoku looking straight while holding his sword. In supporting his determined character in the poster, he was described as very confident while looking forward and holding his trademark sword. The two previous posters show Rengoku; however, he always appears with other characters. In poster four, Rengoku's figure can be analyzed in several signs, for example, the figure of Rengoku himself. He appears alone in poster four. It can be connotated that Rengoku plays a big part in the movie. Poster four focuses on showing his figure smiling. His figure is printed almost filled the poster. It gives a clue to the audience that Rengoku is an important character who plays a big role in the movie. Then, his pose in poster four, in martial art Rengoku's pose, is the neutral position that can be used to attack and defend. This image gives the impression that Rengoku is an alert and always ready person. This was supported by the sword in front of Rengoku. His pose also can be connotated that Rengoku is a reliable, determined, and brave leader.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the result and discussion done from four posters of *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie Mugen Train*, it can be

concluded that every aspect and element in the poster has function and meaning in its way. The signs found in four posters of *Kimetsu no Yaiba Mugen Train* are not limited to signs in the form of shapes such as triangles, squares, crosses, or circles. However, the signs found include words, pictures, colors, expression, and characters. There are two types of semiotics signs found in the poster; visual signs and verbal signs. Visual signs were found more frequently than the verbal signs in all posters, with sixteen visual signs and ten verbal signs. This occurred because visual signs can convey several meanings at a time. Visual signs also are more accessible to understand by the audience. As stated by Dyer (2009) in her theory, people are often more attracted by visual signs and easier to understand them.

In addition, it was discovered that the connotation meanings dominated the finding. Although there are the denotation meanings found, they are not as many as the connotation meanings. This is in accordance with Barthes' theory (1983) about denotation and connotation meanings. The denotation meaning is the primary meaning of things that tend to refer to the definition provided by the dictionary. Meanwhile, the connotation meaning is second-meaning that transforms the denotation meaning (first meaning) by an effective

system, including ideology, social sense, and knowledge. Each data found in four posters of *Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie Mugen Train* has different denotation and connotation meaning which gives a teaser or clue about the story and attracts the audience's attention through the signs shown in the posters.

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