Phraseology of animated films you should see by the age of 14

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1. Introduction

This article concerns phraseological units (PUs) in animated films. The films were selected from the list of *TOP 50 films you should see by the age of 14* created by the British Film Institute in 2005. Seventy experts including film producers, teachers, authors and critics compiled the list in order to inspire parents and educators to take films as seriously as books and other kinds of art.

Cary Bazalgette, head of education at the British Film Institute, said: "It's quite a controversial list that's likely to provoke continuing debate, but that's the idea. We want people to discuss what children should see, rather than what they shouldn't see." (BBC News)

In this article we will focus on the PUs used in the following animated films: 1) *Beauty and the Beast*, a 1991 American animated musical romantic fantasy film (screenplay is written by L. Woolverton); 2) *Toy Story*, a 1995 American computer-animated family buddy comedy film (screenplay by J. Whedon, A. Stanton, J. Cohen and A. Sokolow); 3) *Finding Nemo*, a 2003 American computer-animated comedy-drama adventure film (screenplay by A. Stanton).

The films are rated G by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), where "G" stands for "general admission".

2. Theoretical bases

Since the birth of the cinema, canonical textbooks on film aesthetics have been neglecting dialogue. E. Katz provides the following definition of dialogue in his widely used *Film Encyclopedia*: "**dialogue**: In a film, all spoken lines. Since the cinema is essentially a visual medium, dialogue is, or should be, used more

sparingly than in the theater, supplementing action rather than substituting for it" (Katz 1979: 395).

Nevertheless, linguistics has recently shown an interest in the study of film dialogue.

A couple of terminological clarifications are needed before we proceed. The term **cinematic discourse** is not to be mistaken for **film dialogue**. *Cinematic discourse* is mainly seen as "an array of cinematographic techniques, which are studied primarily outside linguistics" (Dynel 2011: 42). According to authors of monographs (Kozloff 2000; Richardson 2010) the term *film dialogue* (rather than *cinematic discourse* or *film discourse*) is to be used when referring to an ensemble of verbal (both oral and written) components of the film. To further complicate matters, the term *diegesis* is used to describe the world of the story. Thus, the elements that occur within it are called *diegetic*, while those that occur outside it are *non-diegetic* ones (Figure 1).
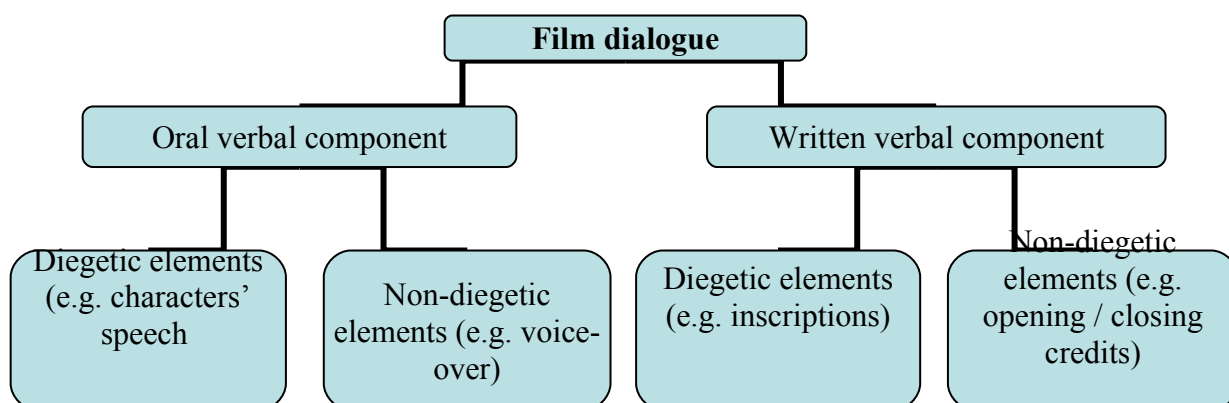
Figure 1. The Structure of Film Dialogue

Film dialogue is investigated by linguists from different angles: 1) the nature of film dialogue, its peculiarities and functions (Kozloff 2000; Dynel 2011; Muha 2011); 2) similarities and differences between real spoken language and television/film dialogue (Quaglio 2009; Freddi 2011; Piazza 2011; Taylor 2004, 2006); 3) sociolinguistic study of television/film dialogue (Lippi-Green 1997; Rey 2001; Richardson 2010); 4) pedagogic uses of television/film dialogue (Sealey 2008; Leopard 2013), etc.

3. Film dialogue: phraseological approach

The total number of the PUs under analysis is 135 (Table 1).

PUs	*Beauty and the Beast*	*Toy Story*	*Finding Nemo*
Core use	30	28	28
Instantial stylistic use	19	11	19
Total number:	49	39	47

Table 1. Number of PUs in film dialogue

As to the terminology used when discussing phraseological units in the web of film dialogue, it should be said that we mostly apply the terms introduced by A. Naciscione, the author of the book *Phraseological Units on Discourse: towards applied stylistics* (Naciscione 2001).

CORE USE is "the use of the PU in its most common form and meaning" (Naciscione 2001: 233), for example:

*LUMIERE: Oh, you are soaked **to the bone**, monsieur. Come, warm yourself by the fire.*
MAURICE: Thank you.

Beauty and the Beast

To the bone – 'all the way through, or very badly' (CDO). The PU **to the bone** is used in its most common form and meaning without acquiring any additional stylistic features in discourse.

INSTANTIAL STYLISTIC USE is "a particular instance of a unique stylistic application of a PU in discourse resulting in significant changes in its form and meaning determined by the context" (Naciscione 2001: 235)

Within the database of the PUs used in the animated films we have encountered the following patterns of instantial use of the PUs: replacement of a component(s), addition of a component(s) to the beginning/end of a PU, insertion of a component(s) into the body of a PU, permutation (rearranging of the words of a PU; the term applied by F. Chitra (Chitra 1996)), ellipsis, phraseological reiteration (the repetition of the whole PU, its parts or isolated components), phraseological saturation (interfusion of several PUs) and phraseological pun (the interplay of idiomatic and literal meanings of a PU) (Figure 2).
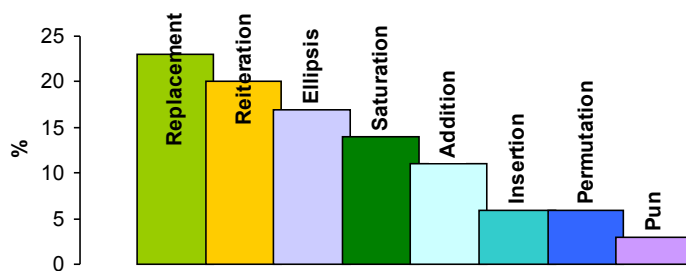
Figure 2. Frequency of instantial patterns in film dialogue

According to the research, the most common pattern of instantial use is the **replacement of a component(s)**. There are eight extracts where a base component of a PU was substituted by one or several instantial components. The following example illustrates the phenomenon:

BLOAT: You can do it, kid.
GILL: Okay, you gotta be quick. Once you get in, you swim down to the bottom of the chamber and I'll talk you through the rest.
NEMO: Okay.
*GILL: Go on, it'll be **a piece of kelp**.*
NEMO: [takes a deep breath]

Finding Nemo

Piece of cake – 'something that is very easy to do' (CDO). The use of the instantial component **'kelp'** (a large, brown plant that grows in the sea) alludes to the setting of the film, the sea.

Our data shows that **phraseological reiteration** is common in film dialogue. The whole PU is repeated once in six extracts and twice in one extract. For example:

*LUMIERE: Good. You **fall in love** with her, she **falls in love** with you, and – Poof! – the spell is broken! We'll be human again by midnight!*
MRS. POTTS: Oh, it's not that easy, Lumiere. These things take time.

Beauty and the Beast

Fall in love – 'to be very attracted to someone and begin to love them' (CDO). The bare repetition of the PU **fall in love** (reinforced by syntactic parallelism) adds rhythm to the sentence.

The next frequently used pattern is **ellipsis**. Six extracts contain the truncated form of a PU. Every single case of the elliptical use of a PU is an example of aposiopesis, a sudden breaking off of a thought, as though the speaker was unwilling or unable to continue. Let us have a closer look at this pattern:

> DENTIST: **What the!?**
> PATIENT: Aaaaaaaah! Oooooh...
>
> *Finding Nemo*

In case of aposiopesis the viewer has to develop the thought, therefore this pattern is so productive in film dialogue for children by the age of 14. Scriptwriters avoid using foul language; however, they may leave swear-word expressions incomplete (as shown in the previous example). The base form of the PU might be **what the hell** (informal), **what the devil** (old-fashioned informal), **what the fuck** (taboo) or **what the shit** (taboo); with all of them used instead of 'What?' or 'What has happened?'

The analyzed film dialogues contain several forms of **phraseological saturation**. The simplest form – the use of two PUs running close to each other – is present in four extracts. Let us illustrate this phenomenon:

> DORY: *Well then, how are we gonna do that unless we **give it a shot** and **hope for the best**? Hmmm? Hmmmm!? Come on, trust me on this.*
> MARLIN: *All right.*
>
> *Finding Nemo*

Give it a shot/whirl *informal* – 'to attempt to do something, often for the first time' (CDO). **Hope for the best** – 'to hope that something will be successful or happen in the way you want, even if it seems unlikely' (CDO). The PUs create a phraseological space, attracting the viewer's attention.

The complex form of phraseological saturation is created by using two or more PUs running close to each other with a number of additional instantial changes:

> *[Gerald the pelican seems to be choking]*
> NIGEL: *[casually] Alright Gerald, what is it? **Fish got your tongue?***
> *[Gerald opens his mouth to show this is indeed the case]*
> DORY, MARLIN: *Aaaaahh!*
> NIGEL: ***Love a duck!***

(Has the) Cat got your tongue? – 'said to somebody (especially a child) who refuses to speak or to answer a question, or who is tongue-tied or speechless with embarrassment, shyness, surprise, fear, etc' (TFD). **Lord love a duck!** *slang* – 'a mild expression of shock or surprise' (TFD). Both PUs are exploited to produce a new instantiation, saturating the context by involving a replacement of a component (the component 'cat' is substituted by an instantial component 'fish'), phraseological pun (Gerald opens his mouth to show that fish indeed got his tongue) and ellipsis (the PU **Lord love a duck!** is reduced to 'Love a duck!'). The whole set of instantiations creates a humorous effect.

Addition of a component(s) and **insertion of a component(s)** are sparingly used in films dialogues under analysis. The difference between these patterns lies in the position of instantial components: they are either added to the beginning/end or inserted into the constituent structure of a PU. Let us give two examples to illustrate the difference between these patterns:

*ANDY: [pulling Woody's string] You **saved the day again**, Woody.*
WOODY (VOICE BOX): You're my favorite deputy.

<div align="right">

Toy Story

</div>

Save the day – 'to do something that prevents a likely defeat or failure' (CDO). The addition of the instantial adverbial component 'again' to the end of the PU leads to the specification of phraseological meaning.

WOODY: If I send out the troops, will you all calm down?
REX: Yes! Yes! We promise!
WOODY: Okay, save your batteries!
*HAMM: Eh, very good, Woody. That's **using the old noodle**.*

<div align="right">

Toy Story

</div>

That's using your noodle – to come up with a good idea – comes from **use one's head/bean/noodle/noggin** *AmE* – 'think carefully about' (TFD). The inserted instantial component 'old' is deployed in this extract because the character addressed (Woody) is an old toy; thus, the pattern is also used to specify the phraseological meaning.

Permutation, the rearranging the words of an idiom as we do it in non-idiomatic constructions, is present in a couple of cases; for example:

GASTON: It's like this. **I've got my heart set on** marrying Belle, but she needs a little persuasion.
LEFOU: [butting in] Turned him down flat!

Beauty and the Beast

Set your heart on sth/doing sth – 'to want to get or achieve something very much' (CDO) – turns into the causative construction with 'have got'.

4. Conclusions

In this article film dialogue has been studied from a phraseological angle.

First, it has been shown that film dialogues under study are rich in PUs that occur in their instantial use (36.5% of the total number of PUs); however, the more recognizable (thus, comprehensible) core use of PUs prevails over the instantial stylistic use because films are targeted specifically at children under 14.

Second, we can see from Figure 2 that the instantial patterns that are most common in film dialogue are replacement (23%), phraseological reiteration (20%), ellipsis (17%) and phraseological saturation (14%); less productive patterns are addition (11%), insertion (6%), permutation (6%) and phraseological pun (3%).

Third, the instantial pattern that was not found in film dialogue is an extended phraseological metaphor. Two factors might be responsible for this phenomenon: a) an extended metaphor often reaches a considerable scope (lengthier than a sentence) which is inimical to film dialogue that strives for compression; b) children by the age of fourteen may have difficulty interpreting the message of this device because it calls for a great stylistic awareness.

Fourth, the pedagogical value of the animated films under analysis is dubious. On the one hand, young viewers encounter a range of common PUs; thus, explore their meaning and usage through a rich informational environment of an animated film. On the other hand, several taboo PUs are suggested.

We believe that there might be a lot more to be found in the field of phraseology, once we look more closely into a great number of films that do not appear in the list of *TOP 50 films you should see by the age of 14*.

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