



MJ

Multidisciplinary Journals

Volume 3 Issue 3, 2026 (389-396)

ISSN (online) : **3047-8499**

Homepage : <https://jurnalunived.com/index.php/MJ>

Doi : <https://doi.org/10.37676/mj>

The Representation Of Verbal And Non-Verbal Communication Through The Character Of Elodie In Damsel (2024): A Semiotic Approach

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Received [20-06-2026]

Revised [07-09-2026]

Accepted [09-09-2026]

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the verbal and non-verbal communication signs represented through the character of Elodie in Damsel (2024) and interpret their meanings and communication functions in relation to her character transformation. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory and Mulyana's (2019) communication function theory. The data were collected through repeated observation of the movie and identification of scenes containing Elodie's communication signs. The findings reveal 36 data, consisting of 15 verbal and 21 non-verbal communication signs. Verbal communication is predominantly represented through oral communication, including dialogues, emotional expressions, warnings, clarifications, persuasive messages, and confrontational statements, while non-verbal communication is represented through kinesics and eye movements, with kinesics appearing in all non-verbal data. The findings indicate that expressive communication is the dominant communication function in both verbal and non-verbal data, followed by persuasive, informative, and social communication. From Peirce's semiotic perspective, the communication signs function as representamina that construct meanings related to vulnerability, self-reliance, courage, compassion, and moral maturity. Overall, the findings demonstrate that verbal and non-verbal communication work together to portray Elodie as a resilient character whose transformation progresses from vulnerability and dependence to self-reliance and moral maturity.

Keywords: *Verbal Communication, Non-Verbal Communication, Communication Function.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental process that enables individuals to exchange meaning, build relationships, and create social understanding. It occurs through both verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal communication uses spoken or written language to express ideas and emotions, while non-verbal communication conveys meaning through facial expressions, gestures, body posture, eye contact, tone of voice, and visual cues. In film, these two forms of communication play an important role in shaping meaning, developing characters, and delivering emotional and cultural messages to the audience.

Film is one of the most effective media of communication because it combines narrative, sound, images, and symbols to convey complex meanings. Movies are not only created for entertainment but also function as educational media, social reflections, and cultural representations. Through dialogue, facial expressions, body language, and visual signs, films can communicate inner conflict, desire, emotion, and character transformation. Therefore, understanding a film requires more than analyzing its plot and dialogue; it also requires examining the signs and symbols that construct meaning. A semiotic approach, particularly

Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic theory, is relevant for analyzing how meaning is formed through signs in cinematic narratives.

Previous studies have examined verbal and non-verbal communication in films from various perspectives. Some studies focused on non-verbal signs such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, and visual symbols, while others analyzed emotional expressions through psycholinguistic or semiotic approaches. However, most of these studies examined verbal and non-verbal communication separately and did not fully explore how both forms interact in constructing meaning, shaping communication functions, or representing character development within film narratives.

Based on this research gap, this study focuses on the interaction between verbal and non-verbal communication through the character of Elodie in **Damsel** (2024). Unlike previous studies that primarily discussed one form of communication or focused on different film genres, this research applies Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory to analyze how verbal and non-verbal signs work together to represent meaning and character transformation in a fantasy narrative. Therefore, this study is entitled "The Representation of the Meaning of Verbal and Non-verbal Communication through the Character of Elodie in **Damsel** (2024): A Semiotic Approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human existence. It allows people to share meanings, concepts, beliefs, and emotions during their social interactions. This emphasizes the importance of communication in forming relationships, developing culture, and maintaining social systems. The term "communication" is derived from the Latin word "communicare," which translates to "to share" or "to make common," signifying that communication involves sharing understanding and establishing mutual meanings between two or more individuals (Turner & West, 2018).

Etymologically, the term semiotics originates from the Greek word semeion, which translates to "sign." Regarding its academic evolution, semiotics is characterized as a discipline that investigates systems of signs, encompassing language, codes, symbols, signals, and other means of representation. A sign is viewed as an element that indicates something else, based on mutual agreement within society or established cultural norms. In the earlier stages, a sign was deemed evidence of the existence of the object it depicted (Sasmita, 2018). In terms of terminology, semiotics examines objects, events, and cultural elements through the scope of sign systems. The terms semiotics and semiology are frequently perceived as synonymous; however, there are distinctions in their theoretical perspectives. Researchers who align with the ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce generally use the word semiotics, while those who adhere to the principles of Ferdinand de Saussure favor the term semiology. Nevertheless, the term semiotics is now more widely accepted, even among those influenced by Saussure's theories (Sasmita, 2018).

Character serve as essential component in audiovisual narratives, acting as catalysts for storytelling and conveying both ideological and emotional significance. According to Abrams (2009, as cited in Ramadhani, 2019), describes characters as depictions of people endowed with moral, psychological, and emotional traits actions, speech, and reactions to various circumstances. They are not only participants in the plot but also embodiments of values that reflect the author's perspective and the societal framework presented in the work. As noted by Boggs & Petrie (2012), the process of characterization involves developing characters through their actions, gestures, and their interactions with others, enabling viewers to understand their personalities and shifts in attitudes. Characters that experience development reveal internal complexities that become central to the meaning of the narrative.

Damsel (2024) is a fantasy adventure movie from the United States that debuted on Netflix on March 8, 2024. Directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo and penned by Dan Mazeau, the movie draws its inspiration from Evelyn Skye's book titled Damsel. The cast includes Millie Bobby Brown, Angela Bassett, Nick Robinson, Robin Wright, and Ray Winstone. The plot centers on Princess Elodie (Millie Bobby Brown), a young woman hailing from a modest kingdom who consents to marry Prince Henry from a nearby territory. This marriage is set up under the guise of fostering peace and prosperity between their two lands. However, Elodie quickly realizes that this union is a ruse aimed at offering her as a sacrifice to a dragon to atone for the royal family's previous misdeeds and maintain their authority.

METHODS

The analysis of data in this study utilized a qualitative descriptive approach guided by Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic theory, which includes three key components: representamen (sign), object, and interpretant. The analytical process followed to the qualitative data analysis framework revised from (Creswell & Poth, 2017), which involved the following steps:

1. The data were organized by classifying the verbal and non-verbal signs into an analytical table that highlighted their corresponding scenes and communicative contexts.
2. Each selected instance of verbal and non-verbal communication was carefully examined to understand its contextual meaning and its impact on the narrative.
3. Each verbal and non-verbal sign was scrutinized through Peirce's triadic model, identifying the representamen (appearance of the sign), object (the thing the sign represents), and interpretant (the meaning perceived by the audience).
4. The interaction between verbal and non-verbal communication was analyzed to explain how meaning is constructed and how Elodie's transformation from a compliant princess into a strong and independent character was represented.
5. Additionally, the examination included the functions of communication to determine how the symbols transmitted information, revealed feelings, and shaped the significance within the story.

In conclusion, the researcher synthesized the findings to describe how the meanings of verbal and non-verbal communication were constructed and understood through peirce's semiotic theory in the *damsel* movie:

RESULTS

The study identified 36 communication signs represented through the character of Elodie in *Damsel* (2024). These signs consist of 15 verbal communication signs and 21 non-verbal communication signs. The verbal communication signs are entirely categorized as oral communication, while the non-verbal signs are mainly represented through kinesics, including gestures, facial expressions, posture, body movements, and physical actions. Eye movements also appear in several scenes and function to strengthen the emotional and psychological meanings conveyed by Elodie.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Communication Signs

No.	Type of Communication	Category	Number of Data
1	Verbal Communication	Oral Communication	15
2	Non-verbal Communication	Kinesics	21
3	Non-verbal Communication	Eye Movements	5

Using Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic theory, consisting of representamen, object, and interpretant, the findings show that Elodie's communication signs represent her gradual character transformation. At the beginning of the film, her verbal and non-verbal expressions show fear, uncertainty, vulnerability, and dependence. As the story develops, her communication begins to reflect awareness, courage, emotional control, and independent decision-making. By the end of the film, Elodie's verbal statements, gestures, posture, facial expressions, and gaze represent confidence, resilience, authority, and moral maturity.

In verbal communication, Elodie's spoken utterances develop from expressions of helplessness into statements of courage and moral conviction. For example, the utterance "Is anyone there?" represents fear and dependence, while "We have both been lied to" shows her growing awareness and empathy. Later, the statement "It's not me you should fear" reflects her confidence, authority, and resistance against injustice.

Table 2. Summary of Verbal Communication Signs

No.	Type of Communication	Verbal Number Data	Main Meaning
1	Oral Communication	15	Fear, awareness, empathy, courage, confidence, and moral maturity

In non-verbal communication, kinesics becomes the dominant form. Elodie's body posture, facial expressions, gestures, and physical actions illustrate her emotional and psychological development. At first, her movements show fear, defensiveness, and helplessness. Later, her actions become more controlled and purposeful, showing her ability to adapt and survive. In the final stage, her upright posture, firm gestures, direct gaze, and decisive actions symbolize courage, self-confidence, and moral strength.

Table 3. Summary of Non-verbal Communication Signs

No.	Type of Communication	Non-verbal Number Data	Main Meaning
1	Kinesics	21	Fear, determination, resilience, confidence, empathy, and moral courage
2	Eye Movements	5	Fear, awareness, focus, confidence, and emotional stability

The study also found four communication functions in Elodie's verbal and non-verbal communication: expressive, informative, persuasive, and social communication. Expressive communication is the most dominant function in both verbal and non-verbal data. This indicates that Elodie's emotions, inner struggles, fear, courage, and resilience are central to the construction of meaning in the film.

Table 4. Recapitulation of Communication Functions

No.	Communication Function	Verbal Communication	Non-verbal Communication
1	Expressive Communication	7	7
2	Informative Communication	4	4
3	Persuasive Communication	3	5
4	Social Communication	1	5
Total		15	21

The dominance of expressive communication shows that Elodie's transformation is strongly shaped by emotional experiences and survival situations. Informative communication appears when Elodie begins to understand the truth behind the conflict. Persuasive

communication becomes more visible when she starts to influence others and confront injustice. Meanwhile, social communication reflects her ability to build trust, cooperation, and emotional connection with others.

Table 5. Elodie's Character Transformation through Communication Signs

Stage of Transformation	Verbal Communication	Non-verbal Communication	Character Meaning
Initial Stage	Expressions of fear, confusion, and dependence	Defensive posture, fearful facial expressions, hesitant movements	Vulnerable and dependent
Development Stage	Statements of awareness, truth, and empathy	More controlled gestures, focused gaze, purposeful actions	Aware, adaptive, and self-reliant
Final Stage	Statements of courage, warning, and moral conviction	Upright posture, firm gestures, direct gaze, decisive actions	Courageous, independent, and morally mature

Overall, the findings indicate that Elodie's transformation in *Damsel* (2024) is represented through the interaction between verbal and non-verbal communication. Her communication develops from vulnerability and dependence into independence, courage, resilience, and moral maturity. Through Peirce's semiotic perspective, Elodie's words, gestures, facial expressions, posture, and gaze function as signs that construct the meaning of her transformation as a resilient female character in the film.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in Sections 4.1.1–4.1.3 are discussed by relating them to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter II. The discussion focuses on how verbal and non-verbal communication signs represent Elodie's character transformation throughout *Damsel* (2024) and how these signs perform different communication functions. The analysis first draws on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory to explain the meanings constructed through verbal and non-verbal communication signs, and then employs Mulyana's (2019) communication function theory to explain the communicative purposes conveyed through those signs.

The findings reveal that 15 verbal communication signs were identified in *Damsel* (2024), and all of them are categorized as oral communication. As explained in Chapter II, Peirce's semiotic theory views each verbal utterance as a representamen that refers to Elodie's emotional and psychological condition as the object, while the interpretant is constructed through the audience's understanding of her changing character. This pattern indicates that spoken language serves as the primary verbal medium through which Elodie's transformation is represented.

Throughout the movie, Elodie's verbal communication develops alongside her experiences. At the beginning of the narrative, her utterances predominantly express fear, hesitation, and dependence, reflecting her vulnerable condition and reliance on external assistance. As the story progresses, her speech becomes increasingly reflective and rational, demonstrating greater awareness of the deception surrounding the conflict as well as growing empathy toward others. By the end of the film, her utterances convey confidence, authority, and moral conviction, illustrating her transformation into an independent and resilient individual. These findings demonstrate that verbal communication signs progressively represent Elodie's

psychological, emotional, and moral development through the semiotic relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant.

Compared with verbal communication, non-verbal communication appears more frequently in representing Elodie's character transformation. Based on Table 4.2, 21 non-verbal communication signs were identified, with kinesics appearing in all data and eye movement identified in five data as a separate category of non-verbal communication. This distribution suggests that visual communication plays a more dominant role than spoken language in portraying Elodie's emotional and psychological development.

This finding is consistent with Peirce's semiotic theory, which explains that non-verbal signs also function as representamina that refer to emotional and behavioural conditions through the relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant. The high occurrence of kinesics demonstrates that body posture, facial expressions, gestures, and physical movements become the principal visual signs representing Elodie's transformation. Initially, these bodily expressions communicate fear, hesitation, and helplessness. However, as the narrative develops, they gradually convey confidence, determination, resilience, and courage, reflecting her increasing emotional control and independence.

Although eye movement appears less frequently, it also contributes significantly to representing Elodie's transformation. Her gaze gradually changes from expressing uncertainty and fear to reflecting confidence, determination, and emotional stability. These visual changes strengthen the meanings conveyed through other non-verbal signs and provide additional evidence of her psychological maturity. Collectively, the findings indicate that Elodie's transformation is represented not only through spoken language but also through visual behaviour, making non-verbal communication the dominant semiotic mechanism throughout the movie.

The communication functions identified in this study further explain how these verbal and non-verbal signs operate throughout Elodie's transformation. Based on Tables 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5, four communication functions were identified, namely expressive, informative, persuasive, and social communication. Among these, expressive communication is the most dominant in both verbal and non-verbal communication. This finding is consistent with Mulyana's (2019) explanation that expressive communication functions to convey an individual's emotions, feelings, and psychological condition.

The predominance of expressive communication reflects Elodie's emotional journey throughout the movie. During the early stages of the narrative, both her verbal and non-verbal communication primarily express fear, anxiety, helplessness, and uncertainty. As the conflict develops, informative communication becomes more evident as Elodie understands the truth behind the royal family's deception and communicates her discoveries. Persuasive communication also becomes increasingly prominent, indicating her growing confidence in influencing situations and confronting injustice. Meanwhile, social communication reflects her ability to establish trust, empathy, and cooperation with others, demonstrating her emotional and interpersonal growth.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and communication functions develop progressively alongside Elodie's character transformation. Through Peirce's semiotic perspective, verbal and non-verbal signs construct meanings that represent her psychological, emotional, and moral development, while Mulyana's communication function theory explains the changing purposes of those signs throughout the narrative. Together, these findings answer both research questions by showing that Elodie's transformation is represented through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal communication, while their communicative functions reflect her development from a vulnerable and dependent young woman into an independent, courageous, and morally mature individual.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the researcher identified 36 communication signs representing Elodie's character transformation in *Damsel* (2024), consisting of 15 verbal and 21 non-verbal communication signs. The findings reveal that Elodie's communication develops progressively throughout the narrative. At the beginning of the film, her verbal and non-verbal communication mainly reflects fear, vulnerability, and dependence. As the story progresses, her communication gradually demonstrates greater independence through observation, decision-making, and strategic action. By the end of the film, her communication reflects courage, moral responsibility, compassion, and reconciliation, indicating that her transformation involves emotional, cognitive, and moral development rather than merely physical survival.

The analysis also shows that expressive communication is the most dominant communication function in both verbal and non-verbal data. In the verbal communication, expressive functions are followed by informative, persuasive, and social communication, while the non-verbal data are followed by persuasive, social, and informative functions. From a semiotic perspective, these communication signs function as representations of Elodie's evolving identity, illustrating her progression from a fearful and dependent young woman into an independent, resilient, and morally mature individual. Overall, the findings demonstrate that verbal and non-verbal communication work together to construct and reinforce Elodie's character transformation throughout the movie.

LIMITATION

Based on the result of this research, the researcher would like to provide several suggestion. Firstly, for students and upcoming researchers, this investigation aims to deepen the comprehension of verbal and non-verbal communication as depicted in movies by using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory and communication theory. It is also recommended that future researchers look into various movie genres, different communication theories, or wider elements of non-verbal communication to achieve richer and more thorough analyses.

Secondly, for academic purposes, this research is aimed at enhancing the field of communication studies, particularly in examining the roles of communication and the semiotic symbols shown in visual media. This study could also serve as a valuable source for additional inquiries connected to verbal communication, non-verbal communication, semiotics, and film critique.

Lastly, for movie audiences and professionals within the movie industry, this research intends to foster a better understanding of how communication messages are conveyed and understood in movies through both verbal and non-verbal sign. Therefore, viewers are urged to see movies not just as sources of entertainment, but also as mediums of communication carrying social, emotional, cultural, and symbolic significance.

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