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## The investigation and intersemiotic analysis of characters in the novel Blindness and its cinematic adaptation by a synthesized model from semiotic viewpoint

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### Abstract

The present study is an attempt to analyze the characters in the novel *Blindness* and its cinematic adaptation from intersemiotic viewpoint. To this end, the researchers provided a synthesized model, which is a combination of Bernando (2012) and Forster's (1927) classification of characters in order to analyze the two main characters from intersemiotic viewpoint. Considering the difference between a uni-sign system's tools, which is the novel and a multi-sign system's tools, which is the movie, the results of this research showed that the filmmaker could reflect the representative signs of the novel characters in the movie characters properly by means of cinematic techniques; therefore, he was able to be loyal to create the characters described by the author.

**Keywords:** adaptation, character, intersemiotic, semiotic

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### INTRODUCTION

As Chandler (2007) claims, "Semiotic is the study of signs" (p.2). The signs, which take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, objects and anything, which represents something else simultaneously, could be involved in the semiotic studies. To know the way that the meanings are made and reality is represented; semioticians study signs as part of semiotic sign-systems. Indeed, signs are not studied in isolation by them.

According to Chandler (1994), text can exist in any medium, verbal, non verbal or both to be analyzed by semiotic. This, as he further explains, undoubtedly means that text is physically

independent of its sender or receiver, usually refers to a message, which has been recorded in writing, audio and video recording.

Saussure was one of the first linguists who emphasized on the importance of semiotics. He believes that linguistic is only a part of Semiology, and language is a system of signs that expresses ideas; therefore, it is comparable to a system of writing. (Saussure, *General Course in Linguistics*, 1959)

According to Barthes (1968), images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment as the system of signs and their substance and limits are taken in Semiology.

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Saussure considered a sign as having two sides, signifier and signified. The sensible part of the sign is the signifier while the absent part is the signified; consequently, the relation between them is the signification. Indeed, the signifier is that substantial entity, which the unreflecting person may mistakenly identify with the sign but the signified is the sense with which the reader invests these graphic or phonic configurations. Therefore, an amalgamation of a signifier and a signified is the sign. (Saussure, 1983)

In contrast to Saussure's model of the sign, Peirce offered a three-part model, which consists of the representamen, the form that the sign takes, an interpretant, which is not an interpreter but rather the sense made of the sign, and an object that is something beyond the sign to which it refers (Chandler, 2007).

The film theorist Christian Metz (1974), holds that multiple codes are involved in media such as film, television and the worldwide web. She argues that codes are not added to one another, or put beside each other in just any manner. In fact they are organized, articulated in terms of one another in accordance with a certain order, and they contract unilateral hierarchies. It should be considered that a veritable system of inter-code relations is generated which is itself, in some sort, another code. (Chandler, 1994)

Adaptation is a creative process, which has always held a vague position, between an original work of art and its subjective reshaping in another form. Adaptation is a product and a process, which examines the bi-directional movements between telling, showing and interacting as the three modes of engagement. (Kemlo, *Different Voices? Film and Text or Film as Text: Considering the Process of film adaptation from the perspective of discourse*, 2008)

According to Seger (1990), character is a product of its environment so does not exist in a vacuum. They are a central factor for the understanding and experiencing, for the aesthetics and the rhetoric of films. They decisively contribute to their emotionality, thematic, and ideology. In the criticism and the analysis of films characters

play important roles also they occupy a central position in the production process.

This research investigates the film adaptation as intersemiotic translation of the Novel "Blindness", in order to analyze the characters to find the signs, which exists in the characters described by the author and comprise them with the signs' representation way in the movie characters.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Considering all existing character theories, the researchers provided a model, which is combined of two related frameworks for analysing characters' types. Consequently, those items of Bernando (2012), and Forster's models (1927), which are relevant to the corpus of the study were chosen in which the result was a synthesized model for analyzing characters' types. Eventually, the characters were investigated from intersemiotic view point by considering the existing signs in the characters of the novel and the movie.

The present study used the following theories in the synthesized model for analysing characters' types:

Major character(s) is vital to the development and resolution of the conflict. In other words, the plot and resolution of conflict revolves around this character. Minor character(s) serves to complement the major character and helps move the plot events forward. Dynamic character is a person who changes over time, usually as a result of resolving a central conflict or facing a major crisis. Most dynamic characters tend to be central rather than peripheral characters, because resolving the conflict is the major role of central characters. Static character is someone who does not change over time; his or her personality does not transform or evolve. Protagonist is the central person in a story, and is often referred to as the story's main character. They faced with a conflict that must be resolved. The protagonist may not always be admirable; nevertheless, they must command involvement on the part of the reader, or better yet, empathy. Antagonist is the character or situation that represents the opposition against which the protagonist must contend. In other

words, the antagonist is an obstacle that the protagonist must overcome. Symbolic character is any major or minor character whose very existence represents some major idea or aspect of society (Bernardo, 2012).

Flat characters are two-dimensional in that they are relatively uncomplicated and do not change throughout the course of a work. Round characters are complex and undergo development, sometimes sufficiently to surprise the reader " (Forster, 1927).

### **Methodology**

The present research is qualitative in its nature, which considered as a descriptive-analytical corpus-based study in which attempts to analyze the two main characters, which are at the heart of *Blindness*, novel and the movie, by means of the synthesized model of analyzing characters' types and presenting the signs' representation way in the movie characters from intersemiotic point of view.

### **Corpus of the study**

To accomplish the objectives of this study, the English version of Saramago's novel named *Blindness*, which is the written text and a uni-sign system considered as the source text and the Hollywood movie with the same name directed by Fernando Meirelles, which is a multi-sign system, is selected as the target text. In fact, a literature and its adaptation are selected as the corpus of this research.

*Blindness* was first published as "Ensaio sobre a cegueira" in Portugal in 1995. The English translation released in 1998. This book has been Saramago's most widely read book, partly because of the 2008 release of the movie, directed by Brazilian director Fernando Meirelles, based on novel (Gradesaver, 1999).

### **Summary of the Story**

The story starts out with one man suddenly goes blind in the middle of rush hour. Confused and scared, a crowd gathers, their frustration forgotten, one man offers to drive him home. Once he

has gotten the blind man's home, he steals the first blind man's car. Trying to hide the car, the thief goes blind. Then a wave of spontaneous blindness follows. The first blind man goes to an ophthalmology clinic where everyone is eventually struck blind. It is at this point that the narrative begins to follow the doctor at the clinic and his wife. Informed by the ministry of health that they must vacate their house and move to a quarantine, the doctor's wife decides to join her husband even though she is not blind herself. Inside this quarantine, the situation quickly turns dire as their supplies begin to run low and the criminal element takes over, demanding sex for food. Eventually the quarantine burns down and the blind internees escape into the city, finding that the whole world has turned blind.

While the group of seven people stick together to survive, with the guidance of the doctor's wife as the leader, they find that many of their residences have been taken over by others or that there is no sign of their families or friends when they attempt to find their old homes. Finally they get back to the doctor's home and decide to stay there as a family. Eventually, they all regain their sight as quickly as it was lost, leaving them to ponder the things that they learned about themselves and about humanity during their time blind. (Gradesaver, 1999)

### **Procedure**

The present study investigated two sign systems, the novel as the language system and the movie as a cinematic multi-sign system. In order to comprise the characters shown in the movie with the author's descriptions about the characters of the novel, the researchers first, classified the characters by the synthesized model of characters' types, and then investigated the existing characters' signs from semiotic aspect.

### **Discussion**

After reading the source text, the researchers specified the two main characters and classified them. The two characters include the doctor and his wife who have the main role in the story and

are at the heart of it. The classification of the characters and their semiotic analysis are as following:

According to Bernardo's (2012), classification of characters and his definitions, the doctor's wife is a major character and the protagonist, since she helps the development of the movie by doing as a central character to guide and help the others as soon as the blindness starts to spread. In fact, she plays the leader role, like an angle, she tries to help others by the sense of responsibility.

She is a dynamic character. As Bernardo's definition, dynamic character is a person who changes over the time, usually because of resolving a central conflict or facing a major crisis. Indeed, her biggest concern in the beginning is simply her husband but her ability to see ultimately both isolates her and makes her into a leader.

She is a flat character since according to Forster (1927) flat characters are two-dimensional in that they are relatively uncomplicated and do not change throughout the course of a work. In fact, in contrast to dynamic it refers to a character's complexity not their development. The doctor's wife has a tender, emotional, helper, responsible, and loyal personality from beginning to the end of the story and she does not change over the time.

She is a symbolic character. As Bernardo's (2012) statement, a Symbolic character is any major or minor character whose very existence represents some major idea or aspect of society. She is a symbol of a person with sight leading the blind against the evildoers.

According to the Bernardo's (2012) classification of characters and his definitions, the doctor is near a major character. Since he helps the development of the movie by doing as not the central character as his wife but his existence is vital to the development and resolution of the conflict and helps move the plot events forward but not as a minor character. Indeed, as Sanders (2008) argues the two ordinary people plucked from their ordinary lives into a maelstrom of disorientation and confusion, the doctor and his wife, are at the heart of Blindness.

He is a dynamic character. As Bernardo's

definition, dynamic character is a person who changes over time, usually because of resolving a central conflict or facing a major crisis. As he is a responsible man, after getting blind, he makes his effort to inform the authorities about the epidemic disease. In fact, Logic and efficacy demanded that his report about what was happening should be made directly and as soon as possible to someone in authority at the Ministry of Health.

The doctor and his wife were the first to be taken to the empty mental hospital then the other blind people arrived together One after another. He tries to control the situation by getting organized immediately while they are in the old-fashioned hospital. He is able to foresee the situation of that place after filling up with other blind people. He tries to control the situation and does his responsibility by taking food from the soldiers to give the blind people equally in order to prevent anarchy. As a whole, the doctor's responsibility sense is sensible from the beginning to the middle of the story, but gradually he turns into a helpless man who can be survive by the guidance of his wife who is seeing.

He is a round character since according to Forster (1927) round characters are complex and undergo development, sometimes sufficiently to surprise the reader." At the beginning of the story, he is a strong and responsible community leader but after getting blind and interring in the hospital he grapples with a growing sense of powerlessness and despair that leads to subjugation. At the beginning, he is a responsible, firm and strong man but gradually he loses his firmness and even his decency by disloyalty against his wife who is witness of her husband's sexual relation with the girl in the story in the blindness time. Furthermore, he and the other men become consent to give their women to the hoodlums in satisfaction of food.

He is a symbolic character. As Bernardo's (2012) statement, a Symbolic character is any major or minor character whose very existence represents some major idea or aspect of society. Except the doctor's wife, all the humans in the story are the symbol of a person who turned into

unwise and villain animals. The doctor also is the symbol of a civilized human who has the fancy of knowledge but in fact, the lack of insight is the reason of the political, cultural and morality degeneration.

The investigation and analysis of the characters' signs

Considering the characters' signs in the novel and the movie and comprising their way of representation, it can be pointed that the doctor's wife appears with a blond hair, white and pale skin. Her clothes are chosen among light colors and soft ones. She loves her husband. It is approved by her amorous look on her husband and her attention to him.

During reading the novel, the readers indirectly understand personality features of the character and simply can imagine her in their minds. Although the author has not mentioned the characteristics of the doctor's wife, she can be fancied as a holy woman with an innocent face, a genuine personality and a spruce and decent. All these traits is shown in the actress by a suitable make-up and proper clothes. Furthermore, the actress' acting way, her gestures, body language and all her ability and skills needs special consideration. Moreover, the camera techniques, the film lighting, setting, etc. are of crucial importance.

Considering these points, the doctor's wife's character should appear in an innocent and descent manner, therefore, blond color was selected for her hair with pale and white skin to give her an innocent face, which is much suitable for her role rather than black, brown or red and generally, dark color that cannot suggest the positive feelings as light color.

Her clothes are chosen among light colors, especially white, milky and light gray. As light colors are the symbol of innocence and holiness and specifically, white color illustrates loyalty and purity meaning, the doctor's wife character appeared with simple and immaculate light clothes. To suggest an image of this character with the mentioned traits the filmmaker also has been used other cinematic techniques such as camera movement's techniques, and lighting. In some

scenes the actress' face has been shown by a strong direct light which intends to add more innocence and holiness sense to her. Furthermore, the camera's angle can reflect the intentional feeling on the character.

In the movie, the actress shows the character's features specially her loving kindness by hugging him and kissing his eyes even in the time that her husband informed about his blindness. Her true love that is described in the novel and is obvious has completely shown in the movie. The characters could show her emotions as it is mentioned in the novel when they talk together.

As in the novel the Doctor's wife is described as a loyal partner for her husband who has not been affected but has pretended she is blinding in order to stay beside her beloved husband, the director shows her loyalty and camaraderie obviously in the sequence of getting on the ambulance.

Another traits that are special for the doctor's wife is her love, loyalty and caring her husband that clearly is shown in different sences which are corresponding to the story narative. These charecteristics represented in the character by her feelings, gustures and action. Her love and caring sense is shown by hugging and kissing her husband in different situations both before her husbands' blindness and after it. Taking care of him, heping him and her sprite of camaradership is sensible in different sences from begginng to the end of the story. Her kind and loving looks, taking and pressing her husbands hands, touching him gently, trying to make him calm in critical situations by talking to him are the actress' acts to play her role as close as to the character described in the novel.

One of the main scenes, which expresses the character's braveness as one of her indicator features is the scene of the murder of the hoodlum's head by scissors, the actress' acting by showing her aversion to bestiality of that blind group of rogues. In the scene of murder, the lighting techniques such as soft front light and hot back light to make darkness, properly could reflect the sense of her aversion in that horrible condition of

savagery. Moreover, the camera's movements by various techniques include Tilt Shot, Zoom shot, Tracking Shot, Crane Shot, etc. and coordination between camera, filmmaker and actress indicated the character's braveness and courage. Furthermore, the responsibility and humanity of the Doctor's wife character were described by the author. Furthermore, her ability to manage that awful situation could be sense in some parts of the novel. It is necessary to mention that the director was able to characterize well and it is shown in the movie in different sequences.

Creating a loyal, responsible, brave, etc. character in the movie as described and understood from the novel, the filmmaker chosen a middle-aged woman, with shoulder length blond hair and white and pale skin, to represent the signs of the character, which comprehended from the story. Naturally, a woman in that age has sufficient experience for confronting unforeseen exigency. Furthermore, she is capable enough to take responsibility of her husband, life and herself and even other people. She looks wise and reliable and with her make-up and clothes as important signs for distinguishing a character type, the signs of intended character could properly represented in the movie character.

Considering the descriptions about the Doctor's wife's character in the story, she is a woman with the character features of loyalty, responsibility, leadership, to be seeing both in appearance and essence, and braveness which makes her a unique and different person, and it is better to say a real human.

It is worth to say that feminism can be felt in the author's writing, in a manner that the author has chosen a woman as a leader and generally savior of those who were blind, specially the group of seven blind persons. In fact, she serves as mother for the entire group, she feeds them and clothes them and, when necessary, defends them with force. This last thing, though, can be construed as the actions of someone who has not been animalized yet, because she retains her sight.

That is to say, the author tried to create the character of the savior like an angle, who is seeing and lives among a group of blind people. A woman who is able to shift by murdering the man with the gun, the ward of hoodlums who comes up with wherein they have the right to rape the women of the other wards in exchange for food.

While the sexual interactions of animals are certainly different from humans, they would be hard pressed to find an animal group that functioned with this degree of calculated exploitation. Moreover, this situation cannot be solved by communication, but only by the murder of the group's leader but the complete extermination of the rest of the ward. It could be sense when the Doctor's wife says to herself, after she has killed the man with the gun, if "when it is necessary to kill when something that is alive is already dead." In this situation, she would then be justifying her actions by pointing out that he was already dead, already inhuman when she killed him or when she argues that "If we cannot live entirely like human beings, at least let us do everything in our power not to live entirely like animals.

Her braveness and awareness makes her to combat blindness of mind and humanity. In many ways, the rule by rape policy of the man with the gun is based on the assumption that women are always weaker than men are. This assumption is based, however, on a certain set of faculties, faculties that are different in the situation of the blind.

The filmmaker made his effort to create the doctor's wife character as character in the story, for this reason the actress appeared with an appearance of a middle-aged woman, with shoulder length blond hair, light and soft clothes to give her an appearance like an angle or in other words as a savior for others. Furthermore, in the poster, which was chosen for the film, she is the leader of the group with a pale skin, blond hair, light clothes and firm with a kind face.

**Table 1*****The general character's appearance traits of the doctor's wife in the movie from semiotic viewpoint:***

<b>The Character's appearance Traits as Sing</b>	<b>The Representative Meaning of the Signs</b>
A middle-aged woman	A matured and experienced woman
Blond hair, white and pale skin and bright face	Innocence, decency
White and light clothes	purity and holiness

Indeed, the movie director applied the signs, which could make the Doctor's wife character as a seeing leader of the blind group in terrible circumstances not only in her appearance but also in her actions and behavior. In various scenes, the signs of her loyal and helper personality could be seen. In the initial scenes of the film, she shows her love and respect to her husband by kissing, hugging and caring him, and then even after knowing about his blindness, she does not leave him alone, pretending to be blind, she goes with her husband to the hospital that is considered as quarantine for those who suddenly became blind. Her loyalty is shown by staying with her husband from beginning of the story to the end, even after seeing her husband's sexual relation during blindness with the girl with the dark glasses in the hospital. Moreover, she was witness of awful scenes such as impureness, rudeness, injustice, brutality among humans with animal nature, those who were blind not just in eyes but in their minds.

In the middle parts of the film, her braveness and specially her aversion of cruelty led her to murder the ward of hoodlums, which led to rescue the blind people from that unbearable quarantine. To save the group of seven blind persons include the her husband, the man with the black patch, the girl with the dark glasses, the first blind man and his wife, the car thief and the squint-eyed boy is her great responsibility. She seeks to find food for them and guides them all to find their way to their houses but finally they decide to stay together in the doctor and her wife's house.

In about the last scenes of the film, when they all are in the doctor and his wife's house, after being under the rain and making clean themselves, the doctor's wife put them up clean clothes and provided them for some foods. Even

tually, in the last scene of the film as the story, while she looks at the sky, sees the sky white, she became shocked with the thought of going blind but she takes her head below and looks at the city, the city was in its place and she is still seeing. In the scene the Doctor's wife appears with a spiritual and pure appearance even more than before, she is wearing a long white soft nightgown, with tidy hair, and a holy face, which makes her more holiness.

Generally, the filmmaker applied special signs in the character of the doctor's wife; especially in the last scene, he creates the character of an innocent savior woman with delicacy. The white soft nightgown, tidy and simple dressed hair and the peace and innocence that is clear in her face reflects her sacredness and purity. The actress could show these features by acting in a good manner and presenting her peace, dignity and firmness by her acting. Furthermore, the cinematic techniques such as camera's movement and lighting were crucial elements to help the actress for playing her role in order to show the doctor's wife character's traits.

The Doctor, who has a tumbling decent character contrasting with his wife, begins the story as a strong, responsible community leader but, he grapple with a growing sense of powerlessness and despair that leads to subjugation when he gets blind and interred in the hospital. He also becomes something of a leader in an early scene. He reveals that he has been elected as his ward's official representative to the rest of the community.

The director of film could show the doctor's sense of responsibility in the early scene well. The doctor starts to talk with the new blind people who just came to that section of hospital. Furthermore, his efforts to organize the terrible situation of the hospital, is shown by his taking differ-

ent responsibilities like getting food and giving them equally to the blind people.

To represent the character of a blind doctor as described in the novel, the actor wore a layer of makeup to appear older and also wore contact lenses to be blind while having his eyes open. His clothes' color is a significant sign for knowing about his shattered personality. In the early section of movie, exactly before getting blind he appeared with a white doctor's uniform, which was in his office. At night while he was searching on the net in his workroom at home, he was wearing light clothes, too. However, after getting blind, when the ambulance was sent to carry him

to the hospital, he was wearing dark clothes.

During settling in the quarantine, he appeared with the combination of light and dark clothes and after getting away from morality and humanity, which is the main theme of the story he appeared with dark clothes. Choosing proper color of the clothes, which is conform to a character is an important decisions taking by the filmmaker, which can develop a character role and help them to show the exact features of a character. Indeed, the variation of the doctor's color of clothes, the change from light to dark, demonstrates his unstable personality.

**Table 2**

*The general character's appearance traits of the doctor in the movie from semiotic viewpoint:*

The Character's appearance Traits as Signs	The Representative Meaning of the Signs
A middle-aged doctor	A matured, experienced and knowledgeable man
facial changes, Shaved and tidy before getting blind unshaved and untidy after getting blind,	Laps in conduct and morality
Changing of clothes' color early scenes: Light color clothes middle parts of the film: Combination of light and dark color clothes last parts of the film: Dark color clothes	An unstable personality, who falls into lowliness, A modern human who has imagination of knowledge and science but is ensnared into human instinct and returning to primitivism

All the doctor's perceptions completely shattered but finally he comes to a peace about his inability and his downfall and admits to an admiration for his wife's strengths. For him, blindness is terrifying, then is frustrating and then it gets quite. It is clear in the movie too. The doctor's character in the early scene is like a responsible, wise and strong, even after getting blind these features could be seen in his behavior and character but gradually involving with the terrible events that happens he loses his wisdom, strength, and even his morality, humanity, and decency. But finally he admits his wife's strength.

At the beginning of the story the doctor's

powerness and responsibility about others in his job could be seen. He is an ophthalmologist who confronts with a strange white blindness that leads to be quarantined in an old hospital. First, he tries to stay firm and controls the situation but gradually he loses his wisdom and strength. The film maker made his effort for creation of this character as near to the described character in the novel but if there are problems it is in his acting way. It means that he could play stronger and skillfully to make the film viewers to believe his blindness more by looking others as a real blind not with an artificial acting.

He is a middle-aged doctor who seems to be

wise and knowledgeable but according to the general concept of the story about him, he is a character with some lacks in his inner conception and nature that makes him to lose his humanity. His appearance is match with his personality. Before getting blind, he has a suitable appearance as a doctor, then during the events of the story, you are seeing a disheveled, helpless and infirm man who is dependent to a saviour and a guide who is her wife.

As a matter of the fact, the doctor's perceptions about his wisdom and abilities gradually shattered and finds out his downfall but finally admits to an admiration for his wife's strength and weakness of comprehension of the real world and humanity truth. As in the last part of the story, when the group is in process of regaining their sight he says : " There are no blind people, only blindness". Indeed, he believes that blindness is the same, not just being without vision, but unable to see in a deeper sense, unable to see what your neighbor means, unable to see the point of living.

To create the doctor's character, the filmmaker applied some signs which could reflect the character's traits properly. Considering the meaning of colors and use them in the character's appearance features, using correct and meaningful camera's movements and applying lighting techniques was the factors which could help to develop the character.

Comparing the system tools applied by the director in the movie and the tools in which the author applied in literature, it is clear that there are distinction between a novel and its adaptation. Accordingly, the adaptation of a literature generally obeys the common adaptations' principles including omission, deletions, additions and alterations. What is obvious about the Blindness movie is that the scenario naturally used those principles of adaptation especially omission considering the normal films' length but generally the process of the story is as the same as the novel.

In the present research, as mentioned earlier, just the characters were analyzed and the data were gathered. According to the related data, the

two analyzed characters of the film in comparison with the described characters in the novel tried to show the intended features somehow. The characters of the doctor and his wife who were the two main characters in the story were able to act their role as near as the characters, which described in the novel. From intersemiotic point of view, their acting, skills, make-up, clothes, appearance features, and generally their role-playing were as described in the novel by the author; they were as close as the readers' imagination of those characters.

In addition, the signs of the characters, both those, which were related to personality and those about appearance, represented in the movie characters properly. Furthermore, the filmmaker developed the characters' acting by applying camera's movements and lighting techniques. Consequently, the filmmaker reflected the representative signs of the novel characters in the movie characters by means of cinematic techniques; therefore, his loyalty to the source text and his ability to create the characters described by the author is sensible.

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