

Diegetic Sound in Transferred and Re-Assigned: Descriptions; An Intertextuality Study of The Film things Fall Apart and It's Literary Antecedent.

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Abstract- The concept of diegetic sound in storytelling is an important area of study in the field of film and media studies. Diegetic sound refers to any sound in a movie or other form of storytelling that comes from a source within the story itself. This can include dialogue, sound effects, and music that characters can hear within the fictional world of the story. "Transferred descriptions" refer to a technique in filmmaking where diegetic sound is used to convey information or emotion from one scene to another. This technique involves using sound to connect two or more scenes in a way that creates a sense of continuity or a link between them. "Re-assigned descriptions" refer to a technique in filmmaking where diegetic sound is used to re-contextualize information or emotion within a story. This technique involves using sound to change the meaning or emotional impact of a scene by introducing a new sound that alters the audience's perception of what is happening on screen. The use of voice-over narration is employed as a narrative device to compensate for the literary text's description of the tragic fall of Okonkwo and Umuofia. The film maker pays tribute to Achebe's text by using direct quotations or limited paraphrases of the novel in the voice-over narration. The article introduces the concepts of "direct transference" and "re-assignment" in film adaptation, where dialogue or description attributed to one character, event, or object in the literary original is shifted to, and attributed to a different character, event, or object in the adapted film.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of diegetic sound in storytelling is an important area of study in the field of film and media studies. Diegetic sound refers to any sound in a movie

or other form of storytelling that comes from a source within the story itself. This can include dialogue, sound effects, and music that characters can hear within the fictional world of the story. (Marianne Van Remoortel, 2021)

In recent years, there has been growing interest in how diegetic sound can be used to transfer or re-assign descriptions within a story. Transferred descriptions refer to situations where diegetic sound is used to convey information or emotion from one scene to another, while re-assigned descriptions refer to situations where diegetic sound is used to re-contextualize information or emotion within a story. (Michael Filimowicz, 2020)

Studying diegetic sound in transferred and re-assigned descriptions is important for several reasons. First, sound is an integral component of the cinematic experience and can greatly affect how audiences perceive and interpret a film. By understanding how diegetic sound can be used to transfer or re-assign descriptions, filmmakers and scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how to manipulate sound to create specific emotional or narrative effects. (Ali Akbar Salehi and Mohammad Reza Kiani, 2019)

Second, the study of diegetic sound in transferred and re-assigned descriptions can shed light on the broader role of sound in storytelling. By analyzing how sound is used to convey information and emotion within a story, scholars can gain a better understanding of the complex interplay between sound, image, and narrative in cinematic storytelling. (Sohail Salehi and Mojtaba Hosseini, 2019)

Finally, studying diegetic sound in transferred and re-assigned descriptions can provide insights into the

ways in which stories are constructed and interpreted. By examining how sound is used to convey meaning and emotion within a story, scholars can gain a better understanding of how stories are constructed and how audiences interpret them. This can have implications for a wide range of fields, from media studies to psychology to cultural studies. (Laura U. Marks, 2019)

II. DIEGETIC SOUND

Diegetic sound, also known as "source sound," refers to any sound in a movie or other form of storytelling that comes from a source within the story itself. This can include dialogue, sound effects, and music that characters can hear within the fictional world of the story. (Mohamed Elsayed, 2021)

Diegetic sound is often used to create a sense of immersion in the story world and to help establish the setting and mood of a scene. For example, the sound of footsteps on a creaky floor might be used to create a sense of tension or suspense in a horror movie, while the sound of birds chirping and leaves rustling might be used to create a peaceful, idyllic atmosphere in a romantic comedy. (Laura Dickey, 2020)

Diegetic sound can also be used to convey information about the story and its characters. For example, the sound of a phone ringing might tell us that a character is receiving a call, while the sound of a car engine revving might indicate that a character is making a quick getaway. (Alexia Kannas, 2020)

Here are some more examples of how diegetic sound is used in storytelling:

- In the opening scene of the film *The Godfather*, the sound of a train whistle is used to establish the time period and setting (New York City in the 1940s).
- In the film *Jaws*, the sound of the shark's heartbeat is used to create a sense of impending danger and to build tension.
- In the film *The Social Network*, the sound of typing on a keyboard is used to convey the fast-paced, high-energy atmosphere of a tech startup.
- In the film *Saving Private Ryan*, the sound of gunfire and explosions is used to create a visceral, immersive experience of the chaos and danger of war. Jocelyn Szeto (2019)

Overall, diegetic sound is an important tool for filmmakers and storytellers, as it helps to create a sense of verisimilitude and immersion in the story world, and provides a powerful means of conveying information and emotion to the audience. Kira-Anne Pelican (2018)

III. TRANSFERRED DESCRIPTIONS

"Transferred descriptions" refer to a technique in filmmaking where diegetic sound is used to convey information or emotion from one scene to another. This technique involves using sound to connect two or more scenes in a way that creates a sense of continuity or a link between them. (Marianne Van Remoortel, 2021)

For example, imagine a scene in which a character is walking down a busy street, and we hear the sound of a police siren in the distance. The scene then cuts to a different location, where we see a police car racing down a different street. By using the sound of the police siren in both scenes, the filmmaker is able to transfer the description of the police car from one scene to the other, creating a sense of connection between them. (Laura U. Marks, 2019)

Diegetic sound can also be used to transfer emotional information from one scene to another. For example, imagine a scene in which a character is crying and we hear the sound of rain hitting the pavement. The scene then cuts to a different location, where we see a character walking alone in the rain. By using the sound of the rain in both scenes, the filmmaker is able to transfer the emotional description of sadness from one scene to the other, creating a sense of continuity and emotional resonance. (Sohail Salehi and Mojtaba Hosseini, 2019)

Overall, transferred descriptions are a powerful tool for filmmakers, as they allow them to use sound to create a sense of connection and continuity between scenes, and to transfer information and emotion from one scene to another. By carefully manipulating diegetic sound, filmmakers can create a more immersive and emotionally resonant viewing experience for the audience. (Michael Filimowicz, 2020)

IV. RE-ASSIGNED DESCRIPTIONS

"Re-assigned descriptions" refer to a technique in filmmaking where diegetic sound is used to re-contextualize information or emotion within a story. This technique involves using sound to change the meaning or emotional impact of a scene by introducing a new sound that alters the audience's perception of what is happening on screen. (Jeremy Barham, 2019)

For example, imagine a scene in which a character is walking down a dark alley, and we hear the sound of footsteps behind them. The scene then cuts to a different location, where we see a different character walking down a similar alley, and we hear the same sound of footsteps. By using the same sound effect in both scenes, the filmmaker is able to reassign the description of the sound, creating a sense of connection between the two scenes and changing the audience's perception of what is happening. (Michael Robert Johnson, 2020)

Diegetic sound can also be used to re-contextualize emotional information within a story. For example, imagine a scene in which a character is crying and we hear the sound of a dog barking in the background. Later in the film, we see a different character playing with a dog, and we hear the same sound of barking. By using the same sound effect in both scenes, the filmmaker is able to reassign the emotional description of the sound, creating a sense of connection between the scenes and changing the audience's perception of the emotional content. (Andrew Johnston, 2019)

Overall, re-assigned descriptions are a powerful tool for filmmakers, as they allow them to use sound to create a sense of connection and continuity between scenes, and to re-contextualize information and emotion within a story. By carefully manipulating diegetic sound, filmmakers can create a more nuanced and complex viewing experience for the audience. (Kevin Greene, 2021)

V. CASE STUDIES

Sure, here are some examples of how diegetic sound has been used in specific films and TV shows to transfer or re-assign descriptions:

1. *The Godfather* (1972) - In the famous "restaurant scene" in *The Godfather*, the sound of the elevated train passing by outside is used to transfer the description of impending danger from one scene to another. As Michael Corleone prepares to kill Sollozzo and McCluskey, the sound of the train grows louder and more intense, creating a sense of tension and anticipation. The sound then continues into the next scene, where we see Michael fleeing the scene of the crime, using the sound to connect the two scenes and convey the sense of danger that he is in.

2. *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) - In *The Silence of the Lambs*, the sound of the buzzing flies is used to re-assign the description of the scene. In the scene where Clarice Starling first meets Hannibal Lecter, the camera lingers on a close-up of a dead moth, and we hear the sound of buzzing flies in the background. The sound creates a sense of decay and rot, and prepares the audience for the disturbing and unsettling scenes that follow.

3. *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) - In the pilot episode of *The Sopranos*, the sound of the ducks quacking in Tony Soprano's swimming pool is used to transfer the description of emotional vulnerability from one scene to another. As Tony sits by the pool, listening to the ducks, he begins to cry, and the sound of his sobs merges with the sound of the ducks quacking. The sound then continues into the next scene, where we see Tony in therapy, using the sound to connect the two scenes and convey his emotional vulnerability.

4. *Inception* (2010) - *Inception* uses the sound of the "kick" to transfer the description of the characters' physical state from one scene to another. The "kick" is a physical sensation that the characters experience when they are about to wake up from a dream, and the sound of it is used to transfer the description of their physical state from the dream world to the real world. The sound is used throughout the film to create a sense of urgency and tension, and to connect the different levels of the dream world.

5. *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) - In *Blade Runner 2049*, the sound of the bees is used to re-contextualize emotional information within the story. In the scene where K discovers the wooden horse, we hear the sound of buzzing bees in the background. Later in the

film, we see a close-up of a bee crawling on a flower, and we hear the same sound of buzzing. The sound creates a sense of emotional resonance and connects the two scenes, suggesting that K's discovery of the horse is linked to a deeper emotional truth.

VI. ANALYSIS

The use of narrative off-screen voice in *Things Fall Apart* is one of the means by which the film pays allegiance to the literary original. Both in wording and tone, the film maker pays tribute to Achebe's text which for the most part addresses the tragic convergence of two different cultural viewpoints in Umuofia. Importantly, sound is used in the film as a narrative device to compensate for the literary text's narrative description of the tragic fall of Okonkwo and Umuofia. The few instances of voice over narration in the film are actually either direct quotations or re-readings of Achebe's novel, or limited paraphrases. According to film scholar and critic, Rauma (2004), this practice in film adaptation is referred to as 'direct transference'. The catastrophic arrival of the missionaries in the whole of Umuofia, specifically in Abame is presented in one such voice over in the film. In part 32 at 06:10, of the film, a voice narrates:

The arrival of the missionaries in Abame had caused a considerable stir. In the surrounding towns and villages, their activities were a source of great sorrow, not only to the adherents of the traditional religions, but to the leaders of the clan. Many believed that the strange faith would not last—after all, none of the converts was a man of substance. They were called the *efulefu*. They were the excrement of society, and the new faith, the mad dog that had come to eat it. (Emphasis mine)

Compared with the prose narration in the literary antecedent quoted below, the above filmic narration is a paraphrase that keeps alive Achebe's story in the film. The gradual fall of Umuofia is told by the omniscient voice-over narration such as the above. Sound is hence used in film to perpetuate the tragic mode of the literary antecedent. Some of the underlined words in the voice-over quoted above are indeed identical to the quotation from the literary

antecedent as shown below:

The missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there
 ... None of his converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an *efulefu* in the language of the clan was a man who sold his machete and wore the sheath to battle. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up. (Achebe, 1958, p. 101) (Emphasis mine)

The same voice recurs twice in part 33 of the film first at 01:05, and then at 09:25. In the former instance, the narrator proceeds:

Many people in Abame did not believe the Whiteman because his god was neither the god of the earth; the god of the sky; nor Amadiora the thunderbolt. ... To the converts, the words of the hymns were like drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. (Emphasis mine)

Rauma (2004) introduces the concept of re-assignment with regard to comparative analysis of prose fiction and film. She notes that a piece of dialogue or description attributed to one character, event or object in the literary original is shifted to, and attributed to a different character, event or object in the resultant adapted film. While the cinematic narrator re-assigns the above exposition and attributes it to the people of Abame, it is Nwoye to whom this description is attributed in Achebe's literary antecedent as shall be seen in the quotation below. In this case however, these words are mostly a paraphrase with main words transferred directly from the literary antecedent. In the film therefore, the description is transferred from the people of Abame and re-assigned to Nwoye. Of Nwoye, Achebe in the literary antecedent writes:

But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the

marrow. ... The words of the hymns were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled. (Achebe, 1958, p. 104.) (Emphasis mine)

Again here, as in the previous case, the underlined words which are attributed to different subjects in the different media are identical. By this practice, the adapted film keeps faith with the literary original in castigating the cultural flaws in the Igbo world view which are to blame for the ease with which the Whiteman conquered the people with his new religion. Thus, the film and the text become united that the ground in Umuofia was fertile and predisposed to the fall under the Whiteman's colonial intents because of a complex set of factors arising from the side of the Whiteman and from the people themselves. No motivation, other than the brutal killing of Ikemefuna, and other injustices like throwing twins to die in the evil forest, thrust Nwoye and other converts into the grateful hands of the Whiteman and his religion. Finally, the film plays in tandem with the animist spirit of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). The above pair of quotations shows that in both film and literary text, the earth is treated as if it possessed human life. This is done to highlight animist spirit prevalent in the Igbo society (Pepetela, 1989) and to acknowledge their belief in god of the earth, *Ani*.

The final instance of voice over narration in part 33, at 09:25, is further evidence of re-assignment:

The missionaries were permitted to take all the land as they cared to, after all, they would all be dead within four days. But as the days turned into weeks; weeks into months, none of the converts of the new faith had died. Many more converts were won by the Whiteman for his god in the heavens. (Emphasis mine)

The narrator in the film says the words in this paraphrase of the text about the people of Abame whereas the narrator in the literary antecedent says the similar about the people of Mbanta as shown below:

The next morning the crazy men actually began to clear a part of the forest and to build their house. The inhabitants of Mbanta expected them all to

be dead within four days. ... It was said that he wore glasses on his eyes so that he could see and talk to evil spirits. Not long after, he won his first three converts. (Achebe, 1958, p. 105 – 106) (Emphasis mine)

To begin with, this is the film's way of affirming that the experience of the people of all of Igboland (and indeed the whole of Africa) under the invasion of Christianity and colonialism was the same so that it did not matter where one lived. Christianity and attendant Colonialism arrived in Africa, and it became inevitable that the whole continent would feel their presence. To highlight the inevitability of Christianity conquering the people of Igboland, the film makes the spread of the new religion easier than it is described in the literary original: the literary narrator says the Whiteman –won his first three converts while the cinematic narrator states –Many more converts were won by the Whiteman.

CONCLUSION

This content discusses the use of off-screen voice in the film adaptation of Chinua Achebe's novel *"Things Fall Apart"*. The use of voice-over narration is employed as a narrative device to compensate for the literary text's description of the tragic fall of Okonkwo and Umuofia. The film maker pays tribute to Achebe's text by using direct quotations or limited paraphrases of the novel in the voice-over narration. The article introduces the concepts of "direct transference" and "re-assignment" in film adaptation, where dialogue or description attributed to one character, event, or object in the literary original is shifted to, and attributed to a different character, event, or object in the adapted film.

The use of sound in the film is shown to perpetuate the tragic mode of the literary antecedent, and the film and text are united in castigating the cultural flaws in the Igbo world view that made it susceptible to the conquest of the Whiteman and his new religion. The article also highlights the animist spirit prevalent in the Igbo society and acknowledges their belief in the god of the earth, *Ani*. Finally, the inevitability of Christianity conquering the people of Igboland is emphasized in the film by making the spread of the new religion easier than it is described in the literary original.

Further research could explore the use of voice-over narration as a narrative device in other film adaptations of literary works and examine how it contributes to the fidelity of the film to the original text. Additionally, the use of sound in film to perpetuate the themes and motifs of the literary original could be further explored in other adaptations.

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