THE POWER OF LANGUAGE: EXAMINING ARRIVAL THROUGH A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Arrival, tells the story of a linguistics professor decoding an alien language after 12 spacecrafts land on Earth. The film offers a drama on the importance of language and how it can shape reality and the future of Earth. This poster examines *Arrival* using a narrative analysis to explain the underlying story behind the power of language comparing it to the implications of powerful language, particularly surrounding the 2016 presidential election.

Introduction

The artifact under review is the 2016 science-fiction film, *Arrival*.

- Dr. Louise Banks attempts to decipher an alien language
- Dr. Banks discovers the aliens are offering a weapon to Earth
- Incorrectly interpreted by others as "use weapon" causing panic
- Alien language is the "weapon," which opens time and allows future events to be foreseen
- Banks uses this "weapon" to communicate with China and end the rising conflict

Significance

- One of the top 10 (1) and best films of 2016 (5)
- Released in U.S. days after 2016 presidential election
- Nominated for 8 Academy Awards (2) and 2 Golden Globes (4)
- One of the most recent films depicting alien life
- Significant attention regarding linguistics
- Seen as an accurate depiction of linguistics

Method

This research incorporated a narrative paradigm, which is concerned with the narration and storytelling of the media messages that people view (3; 6).

Four components of narrative paradigm:
- Presents multiple events | active and stative
- Organized by time | flashbacks and flashforwards
- Causation | relationship between events
- Presents unified and connected story

Analysis

Setting
Modern-day Montana, United States (location of one of 12 alien vessels that landed on Earth)

Characters
3 main human and 2 alien characters:
- Dr. Louise Banks | Amy Adams
- Ian Donnelly | Jeremy Renner
- Colonel Weber | Forest Whitaker

Narrator
Dr. Louise Banks (infrequent narration)

Intended Audience
PG-13 Rating | teenagers, young adults, and adults (specifically those interested in sci-fi) as well as those that followed the 2016 presidential election

Temporal Relations
Paradigmatic - Flashbacks and flashforwards

Events
Event #1 | Active/ Stative
- Dr. Banks deciphers alien language

Event #2 | Active
- Persuades Chinese General to stand down by reciting his wife's dying words
- "In war, there are no winners, only widows."

Causal Relations
Banks communicates using their language and learns it is a weapon that allows her to travel through time in her mind.
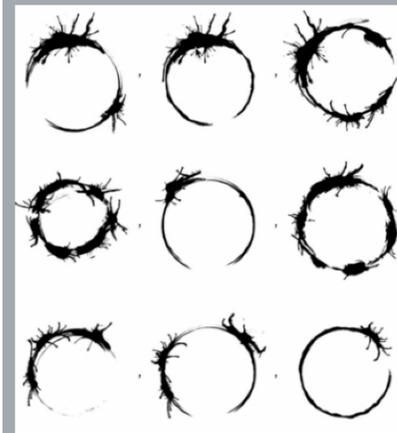
Moral Conveyed
Indirect but intentional | Language is a powerful weapon and should not be taken for granted.

Narrative Rationality
- Coherence | plausible story, believable characters, and consistent storyline
- Fidelity | good reasons provided to accept moral conveyed

Implications

- Words are weapons
- Donald Trump continuously in the news for language such as "grab them by the p*ssy," "little rocket man," "bigly," and "sh*thole countries"
- Language is powerful | Appropriately communicating words can resolve, (or start) many conflicts.

"Language is the foundation of civilization. It's the glue that holds people together. It's the first weapon drawn in a conflict."
– Ian Donnelly played by Jeremy Renner

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