

AN ANALYSIS OF METAPHOR IN *ELEMENTAL* (2023) MOVIE

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Abstract

Metaphors in the movies often serve to deepen the narrative or highlight themes. The research aims to find out the types and meanings of metaphors used in *Elemental* Movie. The research applied the descriptive qualitative method and follows the interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman, which included data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion. Based on data analysis conducted on *Elemental* Movie, it contains 30 expressions from forty types of metaphor according to Ullmann's theory; those types of metaphor consist of concrete to abstract metaphors (40%), followed by anthropomorphic metaphors (33%), synesthetic metaphors (20%), and animal metaphors (7%). Based on the findings, the writer concludes that the type of metaphor that moves from abstract to concrete is the most frequently used in *Elemental*. It becomes the most frequently used metaphor since it has a crucial role across various media by making complex ideas more accessible through tangible experiences. The study suggests that English students and those interested in semantics should analyze metaphors in movies to deepen their understanding of metaphorical language.

Keywords: Metaphors; Movie; Ullmann's Theory

Abstrak

Metafora dalam film sering kali berfungsi untuk memperdalam narasi atau menonjolkan tema. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui jenis dan makna metafora yang digunakan dalam Film *Elemental*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dan mengikuti model analisis interaktif Miles dan Huberman, yang meliputi pengumpulan data, reduksi, penyajian, dan kesimpulan. Berdasarkan analisis data yang dilakukan pada Film *Elemental*, terdapat 30 ekspresi dari empat puluh jenis metafora menurut teori Ullmann; jenis metafora tersebut terdiri dari metafora konkret ke abstrak (40%), diikuti oleh metafora antropomorfik (33%), metafora sinestetika (20%), dan metafora hewan (7%). Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penulis menyimpulkan bahwa jenis metafora yang bergerak dari abstrak ke konkret adalah yang paling sering digunakan dalam Film *Elemental*. Metafora ini menjadi metafora yang paling sering digunakan karena memiliki peran penting di berbagai media dengan membuat ide-ide kompleks lebih mudah diakses melalui pengalaman nyata. Penelitian ini menyarankan agar mahasiswa bahasa Inggris dan mereka yang tertarik dengan semantik harus menganalisis metafora dalam film untuk memperdalam pemahaman mereka tentang bahasa metaforis.

Kata kunci: Metafora; Film; Teori Ullmann

INTRODUCTION

For young adults, watching movies becomes a favorite pastime. They could spend for hours watching their favorite movies. Watching movies allows young adults to escape from the stresses of everyday life and immerse themselves in different worlds and storylines. In watching movie, understanding semantics unit enables the viewers to analyze and interpret movies in a critical and insightful manner (see Harida et al, 2023; Nuryani et al, 2023; Erdianto & Arifin, 2024). Thus, it can help them appreciate the nuances of language and communication, enhancing their ability to express themselves effectively. According to Saeed (2016) and Hurford et al (2007), linguistic semantics offers the convention that means conveyed through the usage of words and sentences of a language. Through studying linguistic semantics, individuals can also gain a better appreciation for the complexities of language and how it shapes our perceptions and interactions with others.

One of the popular topics in semantics is figurative language. Figurative language is speech or writing that departs from literal meaning in order to achieve a special effect or meaning, speech or writing employing figures of speech (Nehe & Sinambela, 2022). Figurative language adds depth and nuance to communication, allowing for a more vivid and imaginative expression of ideas (see Luthfiana et al, 2020; Hidayati et al, 2022; Ningtyas & Arifin, 2025). Cristiana (2023) states figurative language is a conspicuous departure from what users of a language understand as the usual meaning of words, or the usual order of words, to be able to acquire a few special meanings or impacts. It explicitly describes something in a completely unique method, which includes an idea, theme, or mood.

It is interesting to look into movies for their figurative language, particularly cognitive metaphor, in addition to their entertainment value. Analyzing the use of cognitive metaphor in movies can offer a deeper understanding of the underlying themes and messages portrayed in the film. By examining the symbolic meanings behind the language and imagery used, viewers can gain insight into the characters' emotions and motivations. This adds another layer of appreciation for the artistry and creativity that goes into crafting a compelling story on the big screen.

Many people are unaware that they employ metaphors without recognizing it. In a movie's language, metaphors allow filmmakers to evoke emotions and create vivid mental images for the audience. Metaphors can add depth and complexity to a film's narrative, enhancing the overall viewing experience. According to Ullmann (1972), metaphor is based totally on the similarity between things or concepts that are the object we are talking about and the thing we are comparing it to. There are four categories of metaphors according to Ullman (1977): anthropomorphic metaphor, animal metaphor, synesthetic metaphor, and concrete-to-abstract metaphor. Understanding these different categories of metaphors can help individuals recognize and appreciate the various layers of meaning within a film, ultimately leading to a richer viewing experience.

Anthropomorphic metaphor is a figure of speech that refers to bodily parts (Chairunnisa, 2017). The majority of terms used to describe inanimate objects are analogous to the way that human bodily parts, limbs, senses, and emotions are transferred in all languages, for example: 1) the heart of the city, 2) the car groaned as it struggled up the hill, and 3) The flowers nodded their heads in agreement.

Other example on animal metaphors include the following: The impudence of people, who exhibit more than animals, also draws comparisons between human traits and physical features of animals. Certain ones are used on inanimate things or animals (Chairunnisa, 2017). This other category of animal imagination is applied to humans, where it might have satirical, comical, derogatory (meaning it weakens morals), or fanatical overtones. The examples are; 1) He's a bull in a China shop, and 2) She's a night owl.

Concrete to Abstract Metaphor can be defined as the polar opposite of an abstract or ambiguous object that is given life in order to behave in a concrete or animate manner (Chairunnisa, 2017). Metaphors are powerful tools for writers to convey complex ideas and emotions in a creative and engaging way. Whether used in business, sports, or everyday life, metaphors help us make sense of the world around us by drawing connections between seemingly unrelated concepts.

So far, previous studies on investigating figurative language on movie have been done by many researchers. Cristiana's (2023) study aims to identify and analyze the types of figurative language employed in John Dryden's poem "Happy the Man." Utilizing textual analysis, the research examines the poem to uncover instances of figurative language. The analysis reveals five types of figurative language in the poem: metaphor, synecdoche, irony, personification, and symbol. Each contributes to conveying profound meanings about human life, allowing the poem to express complex ideas succinctly.

Chairunnisa's (2017) study investigates the use of metaphors by the main characters in the animated film "Moana," aiming to understand how these metaphors contribute to the film's semantic depth. Setiawan's (2015)

research explores the conceptual metaphors present in the film "About Time," focusing on how these metaphors shape the audience's understanding of the narrative and themes. Indah & Mustaqim's (2023) study aims to analyze the types and meanings of metaphors used in the animated film "Ratatouille" through a semantic lens. Applying a descriptive qualitative approach, the researchers identify metaphorical expressions in the film's dialogues.

Dunat's (2022) article investigates how time is conceptualized and represented metaphorically in cinema, comparing linguistic models of time metaphors with cinematic expressions. Asrul's (2022) study examines the use of metaphors in the film "Ratatouille," aiming to understand how these metaphors contribute to the film's semantic richness. Panjaitan's (2022) research analyzes the conceptual metaphors present in the film "Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps," focusing on how these metaphors reflect financial concepts and character motivations.

Other research by Dwiyantri's (2021) explores the use of metaphors and emotional expressions in the character Summer's dialogues in the film "Jinn" (2018), aiming to understand how language reflects social and emotional contexts. Hermawan's (2019) study investigates the conceptual metaphors utilized by the main character in the film "Les Misérables," focusing on how these metaphors convey the character's experiences and worldview.

The goal of this study is to look into the figurative languages used in *Elemental* movies, particularly conceptual metaphor. Understanding the various metaphors used in the film is essential. Without an understanding of the many sorts of metaphors, we will be unable to comprehend the meaning of a given discussion. As a result, audiences will

find it simpler to comprehend metaphor in the film’s authentic scenarios. Based on the introduction and problem identification mentioned previously, the author aimed to determine the common metaphor forms found in the movie *Elemental* and how these metaphors were interpreted.

METHOD

The descriptive qualitative method was used in the research design with the goal of describing metaphor. The object of the research is the *Elemental* movie, released in American cinemas on June 16, 2023, directed by Peter Sohn. The duration of this movie is 1 hour 49 minutes. It is a romantic comedy drama-themed movie. The movie draws inspiration from Sohn’s youth, growing up as

the son of immigrants in New York City during the 1970s. The duration of this movie is 1 hour 49 minutes. The movie was ultimately considered by analysts to be a success and grossed \$496.4 million worldwide. The movie was nominated for several awards, including the Academy Award. This research follows an interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman (1984: 23). In this research process, analysis is done through four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion and drawing/verification.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results gathered from the research were as follow:

Table 1: Types of metaphor data tabulation

Metaphor Types		Data Excerpt	Freq.	Percent
Abstract to Concrete Metaphor	1.	Fern : “Living the dream” (00:21:50)	12	40%
	2.	Cinder: “Winner winner, charcoal dinner.” (00:12:53)		
	3.	Bernie: “This shop is dream of our family! And someday it’ll all be yours.” (00: 10:24)		
Antropomorphic Metaphor	1.	Bernie: “Welcome, my Ember, to your new life.” (00:04:55)	10	33%
	2.	Ember: “Calm as a candle” (00:14:40)		
	3.	Wade: “Your eyes shine and steal the show” (0045:03)		
Synesthetic Metaphor	4.	Ember: “You’re smelling love on me?” (01:01:20)	6	20%
	5.	Cinder: “And then you must light these with your fire, and I read the smoke” (01:01:45)		
	6.	Cinder: “I knew it. My nose always knows” (01:28:22)		
Animal Metaphor	1.	Ember: “You can fly off this bridge” (00:12:23-00:12:51)	2	7%
	2.	Ember: “Climb the rocks, quickly” (00:56:30)		
			30	100%

Based on Table 1, the writer found 30 data. 12 data, which means 40% from concrete to abstract metaphors, which are most frequently used; Anthropomorphic metaphor has 10 data, which means 33%; synesthetic metaphor has 6 data, which means 20%; and the last is Animal metaphor with 2 data, which means 7%.

Discussion

Abstract to Concrete

Datum 1 (00:21:50)

Fern: "Living the dream."

The type of metaphor develops a movement from concrete experience to abstract experience or vice versa. Its fundamental characteristic is the translation of abstract experience into concrete form or treating things as something that is alive so that it can act concretely (real). A concrete-to-abstract metaphor is used in this sentence. In this expression, "living" is a concrete thing that is used to describe an abstract thing, "dream." The "living" definition of dictionary is maintaining life. "Dream," according to the dictionary, is a series of thoughts, images, and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep. The dialogue that describes living the dream in this sentence as an expression of being tired because, in that context, he is working.

Datum 2 (00:12:53-00:13:12)

Ember: "Winner, winner... charcoal dinner."

An abstract-to-concrete metaphor is used in this dialogue. In this expression, "dinner" is an abstract thing that is used to describe a concrete thing, "charcoal." Dinner is a formal evening meal, typically one in honor of a person or event. Charcoal is a porous black solid consisting of an amorphous form of

carbon, obtained as a residue when wood, bone, or other organic matter is heated in the absence of air. This dialogue occurs when Eve successfully completes her task of delivering orders to her father's customer (Bernie). Charcoal dinner, in this expression, is like a celebration held by the Ember family.

Datum 3 (00:10:24-00:10:52)

Bernie: This shop is a dream of our family! And someday it'll all be yours."

A concrete-to-abstract metaphor is used in this dialogue. In this expression, "shop" is a concrete thing that is used to describe an abstract thing, "dream." "Shop," according to the dictionary, means a place where things are manufactured or repaired; a workshop. "Dream," according to the dictionary, is a series of thoughts, images, and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep. This dialogue occurs when Bernier's father explains that the prices of the shop are for their family, and that's all that will be given to his daughter, ember.

Anthropomorphic Metaphor

Datum 4 (00:04:55-00:05:1S)

Bernie: "Welcome, my Ember, to your new life."

Ullmann (1977) states that anthropomorphic metaphor describes a physical characteristic of a person and their characteristics in relation to unliving things. Therefore, the dialogue above is categorized as an anthropomorphic metaphor because the word "Ember" is part of the anthropomorphic metaphor, which is taken from the name of a human. The dialogue occurred when the father welcomed his daughter of birth. In another meaning, the name *Ember* is a spark or small flame, a symbol of the fire that burns within (confident and enthusiastic). The

conclusion is that the name *Ember* includes an anthropomorphic metaphor because it has two different meanings that compare human personality and unliving things.

Datum 5 (00:14:40-00:15:02)

Ember: "Calm as a candle."

The dialogue occurred when Ember Lumen calmed himself down when she wanted to open a shop where he would face busy buyers. She said, Calm as a candle. The word "calm" in this dialogue is part of the anthropomorphic metaphor, which is taken from a mood or emotion owned by humans and then compared to an inanimate object, "a candle." The meaning is she wanted to calm herself down before serving the customers.

Datum 6 (00:41:28-00:42:04)

Wade: "Your eyes shine and steal the show."

The dialogue occurred when Wade Ripple tried to melt Ember Lumen's heart after they visited Wade's apartment. The dialogue above is categorized as an anthropomorphic metaphor because the word "your eyes" is part of an anthropomorphic metaphor, which is taken from the part of the body's human. "Shine" refers to inanimate objects such as the sun, moon, diamonds, and so on. It's equalized with human eyes that can shine. Shining is a symbol of beauty, according to the intended meaning of the dialogue.

Synesthetic Metaphor

Datum 7 (01:01:20-01:01:40)

Ember: "You're smelling love on me?"

A synesthetic metaphor is a metaphor that combines a variety of sensory senses or is based on distraction use from one sense to another: from hearing to seeing, from touching to hearing, etc. (Ullmann, 1972). This sentence employs a synesthetic metaphor.

Because the word "smelling," which is the sense of smell, is used in this dialogue, there is a transfer between the sense of "smell" and "love," which is usually synonymous with the sense of feeling. Thus, there is a transfer from the sense of smelling (smells) to the sense of feeling (love). That you're smelling love on me? describes someone who asks to fall in love.

Datum 8 (01:01:45-01:02:01)

Cinder: And then you must light these with your fire, and I read the smoke."

This dialogue is used in synesthetic metaphor because the word "read," which is the sense of vision, is used in this dialogue. There is a transfer between the sense of vision" and" smoke," which is usually synonymous with the sense of olfactory. Thus, there is a transfer from the sense of vision to the sense of olfactory. The dialogue occurs when Cinder performs a ritual to predict a couple's fortunes. Cinder tries to find out the results of her prediction through the smoke of the candle that the couple lit earlier.

Datum 9 (01:28:22-01:28:58)

Cinder: "I knew it. My nose always knows."

The dialogue above includes the synesthetic metaphor because of the words "nose" and "knows." There is a transfer between the sense of "smell" and the sense of "vision." Thus, there is a transfer from two different senses, which is from nose (smell) to nose (vision). The dialogue occurred when Cindy (her daughter) and Ember and Wade, a couple, fell in love with each other. The meaning of the dialogue is Cinder's feeling always right.

Animal Metaphor

Datum 10 (00:12:23-00:12:51).

Ember: "You can fly off this bridge."

This type of metaphor is a transfer of meaning using animal body parts or animal characteristics to compare with a human. This dialogue is categorized as an animal metaphor because "fly" refers to an animal ability. It is a feature only found in animals with wings, like birds. In the sentence above, "fly" applies to a human. This dialogue has the meaning of someone who is desperate.

Datum 11 (00:56:30-00:56:34)

Ember: Climb the rocks quickly!

The dialogue occurs when Ember Lumen and Wade Ripple are trying to patch the dam leak in Fire City. This dialogue is categorized as an animal metaphor because almost the same as datum 5, which is taken from the word "Climb" refers to an animal ability, such as monkey, cat, and so on. The sentence above, "Climb," applied to a human. This dialogue has the meaning of Ember giving instructions to Wade so Wade moves faster.

Based on the data in Table 5.1, the most frequently occurring type of metaphor is the concrete-to-abstract metaphor, which comprises 40% (12 out of 30) of the total metaphors identified. This suggests that characters in the film often use tangible or physical experiences to describe or make sense of abstract ideas, such as emotions, aspirations, or mental states. For example, in Datum 1, the phrase "living the dream" uses the physical concept of "living" to express a mental or emotional state of fatigue or disillusionment. Similarly, Datum 3 reflects this tendency as the word "shop," a concrete noun, symbolizes a cherished family aspiration or goal. These metaphorical expressions enrich

the narrative by making abstract experiences more relatable and vivid for the audience.

The use of tangible experiences to convey abstract ideas adds depth and complexity to the characters and their motivations in the film. By grounding emotional and mental states in physical terms, the audience can better understand and empathize with the struggles and triumphs of the characters. This technique allows for a more immersive and engaging viewing experience, as viewers can connect on a personal level with the themes and messages of the film. Ultimately, these metaphorical expressions serve to enhance the storytelling and make the film more impactful and memorable for audiences. The use of tangible experiences in film can also serve to create a deeper connection between the characters and the audience. By grounding abstract concepts in physical terms, viewers are able to more easily empathize with the characters and their struggles. This connection can enhance the emotional impact of the film and allow for a more immersive viewing experience. In Datum 2, the character's physical journey through a dark forest mirrors her internal struggle with fear and uncertainty, creating a powerful visual representation of her emotional state. Overall, the use of tangible experiences in film adds depth and complexity to the storytelling, inviting audiences to engage with the narrative on a more visceral level.

Anthropomorphic metaphors are the second most frequent type, accounting for 33% (10 out of 30) of the data. This type of metaphor humanizes non-human entities, often imbuing them with human traits or emotions to convey deeper meanings. In Datum 4, for instance, the character name "Ember" reflects both a literal spark and a metaphorical personality filled with passion and vitality. Meanwhile, in Datum 6, the

metaphor “your eyes shine and steal the show” attributes human emotion and attention-commanding presence to the eyes, which metaphorically “shine” like a spotlight. These examples demonstrate how anthropomorphic metaphors serve as a narrative tool to express characters’ feelings and inner transformations, enhancing emotional connection between characters and viewers.

By attributing human qualities to non-human elements, such as eyes or names, writers are able to create a deeper level of emotional resonance within their stories. This use of anthropomorphic metaphors allows for a more nuanced understanding of characters and their internal struggles, making their journeys more relatable and engaging for the audience. Through these subtle yet powerful literary devices, writers are able to convey complex emotions and themes in a way that is both creative and impactful, ultimately enriching the overall narrative experience for readers or viewers.

Synesthetic metaphors account for 20% (6 out of 30) of the data, illustrating how the film creatively blends sensory experiences to express complex emotional or psychological states. This is evident in Datum 7, where “smelling love” represents a fusion between the olfactory sense and the emotional experience of affection. Datum 9 further exemplifies this with the phrase “my nose always knows,” where the sense of smell is metaphorically linked to intuition or understanding—typically associated with cognition or sight. Such metaphors not only create poetic resonance but also highlight how characters process and express their emotions in multidimensional, sensory-rich ways.

In Datum 12, the protagonist’s sense of taste becomes a powerful tool for conveying their inner turmoil. The bitterness of betrayal is likened to the taste of bile, while the sweetness

of forgiveness is described as a delicate dance on the tongue. This blending of sensory experiences adds depth and complexity to the characters’ emotional journeys, inviting readers to engage on a visceral level with their struggles and triumphs. Additionally, by intertwining the physical and emotional realms, the author creates a more immersive and resonant reading experience, allowing readers to fully inhabit the world of the story and empathize with its characters on a profound level.

Although animal metaphors appear the least (7%, 2 out of 30), their presence is still significant in portraying action and instinctive behavior. These metaphors attribute animalistic abilities or traits to humans, often to express strength, speed, or desperation. For instance, in Datum 10, the phrase “fly off this bridge” invokes the idea of escaping or ending suffering, using the animal ability of flying as a metaphor for release or despair. Similarly, in Datum 11, the command “Climb the rocks quickly!” reflects an animalistic instinct for agility and urgency, likening human effort to that of climbing animals. These metaphors are impactful in intense scenes, emphasizing emotional or physical stakes in the narrative.

One crucial finding in this study is the significant role context plays in shaping the interpretation of metaphors. While metaphors inherently involve figurative language, their true meaning often depends heavily on situational context and character intent. For instance, the expression “living the dream” (Datum 1) could conventionally be interpreted as a positive affirmation; however, in this scene, it is used ironically to express exhaustion or dissatisfaction with a repetitive job. Similarly, Ember’s phrase “Winner, winner... charcoal dinner” (Datum 2) recontextualizes a common celebratory

chant with the cultural element of fire and family business, transforming a cliché into a metaphor rich in symbolic meaning. These examples demonstrate how metaphorical meaning is not static but dynamically co-constructed with narrative context, cultural background, and character experience.

From the findings, it was found how metaphors function not only as stylistic devices but also as instruments for conveying cultural background and character identity. In the film's context, many metaphors are fire-related, directly reflecting the cultural and *Elemental* identity of the main characters, especially Ember and her family. For instance, Ember's self-soothing metaphor "Calm as a candle" (Datum 5) uses an image rooted in the fire element to reflect emotional regulation—something uniquely appropriate to her fiery nature. Likewise, Cinder's use of fire and smoke in the fortune-reading ritual (Datum 8) merges cultural tradition with metaphorical language, reinforcing her identity as both a family elder and a symbolic interpreter. Through such metaphors, the film subtly weaves in character development and cultural representation, using figurative language to deepen viewers' understanding of personal and communal identities.

In addition to the use of metaphors, Cinder's character is also developed through her actions and interactions with other characters in the film. Her role as a family elder is exemplified through her guidance and wisdom, while her role as a symbolic interpreter is demonstrated through her ability to decipher the messages of the fortune-reading ritual. These interactions not only reveal Cinder's importance within the community but also highlight the significance of her cultural heritage in shaping her identity. As viewers witness Cinder's multifaceted character unfold, they are invited to reflect on

their own personal and communal identities, drawing parallels between the characters on screen and their own experiences. Through the use of both metaphorical language and character development, the film offers a rich tapestry of storytelling that resonates with audiences on a deeper emotional level.

Among the four identified metaphor types in *Elemental*, concrete-to-abstract metaphors emerged as the most dominant, accounting for 40% of the data. These metaphors take tangible or physical experiences and use them to express abstract concepts such as dreams, goals, and emotions. This frequent use reflects the film's tendency to ground complex emotional or psychological states in everyday, relatable imagery. For example, the metaphor "This shop is a dream of our family" (Datum 3) equates a physical space (the shop) with an intangible aspiration (a dream), emphasizing the emotional value embedded in a family business. This type of metaphor helps viewers connect with characters on a deeper level by transforming intangible feelings into concrete visual forms, which is particularly effective in an animated film where imagery plays a central role in storytelling.

CONCLUSION

Among the four identified metaphor types in *Elemental*, concrete-to-abstract metaphors emerged as the most dominant, accounting for 40% of the data. These metaphors serve as a powerful narrative tool by transforming physical or tangible experiences into expressions of abstract emotions and ideas, allowing viewers to relate more deeply to the characters' inner worlds. Anthropomorphic metaphors, comprising 33%, enhance emotional connection by attributing human qualities to non-human elements, enriching the portrayal of identity

and personal growth. Synesthetic metaphors (20%) creatively blend sensory experiences to depict emotional or psychological states, adding poetic depth and sensory complexity to the film's narrative. Although animal metaphors appeared least frequently (7%), they remain impactful in emphasizing instinctive actions and high-stakes moments. Ultimately, these metaphorical expressions do more than beautify language—they function as essential instruments for expressing cultural identity, emotional nuance, and character development. The interplay between figurative language and narrative context in *Elemental* not only enriches the storytelling but also deepens the audience's engagement, inviting them to explore meaning beyond the literal and connect with the film's themes on a personal level.

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