

Original Article

Construing the Significance Titles: A Qualitative Study on Unique Film Titles

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Abstract - A film is a medium to entertain the mass at large. However, the mass puller initially is the film's title that helps grab the attention of audiences of various classes to get the updates and get them to the theatres. The word Title origins from old English "Titul" and old French "Title" and "Titulus" from Latin. Titles are the names given to identify an article, book, play, music album, film, and other works. The purpose of this article is to interpret the unique film titles sensationalised among the audience. The inimitable titles and captions that made the audience brainstorm and also created the required commercial hype for a film to entice the audience are discussed in this article. The methodology applied here is based on the descriptive linguistic method, which directly relates to the film titles. The article analyses the impression the film title of the films directed by Upendra created among the audience of both domestic and other regional languages.

Keywords - Film Title, Kannada Films, Upendra, Unique Title.

1. Introduction

Filmmakers spend ample time to derive the title and captions for their film, which could even be similar to the time spent developing the story and the script. The title sets the mood and gives an overview of the film's story, concept, and caption.

Films that would not have decided on the title set the production floor with working titles. It mostly captures the semantic multidimensionality of the original title, and thus the film title should be studied as a complex linguistic unit. However, most filmmakers, producers, and distributors look forward to having a catchy title and retention among the audience. It is also a marketing strategy analogously to the poster, trailer, and advertising/ promotion campaign. A film is often found on the borderline between two generations; hence finding a title has turned into an art form on its own (E. A. Krasina, 2020). Titles and texts are interpreted and analysed based on linguistics, which is the study of language.

Linguistics is considered a science in a wide-ranging manner, which may be based on grammatical features theoretically like word or sentence structure or qualitative and quantitative aspects of linguistic data (LINGNCT). Linguistics is broadly classified into six areas, namely phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics; however, Morphology (study of the formation of words), Syntax (study of the formation of sentences), Semantics (study of meaning) and Pragmatics (study of language use) are the four concepts that are keenly considered for the analysis of the language (UCSC, 2017). Tailoring to interpret the above four branches, we understand that Morphology leads to syntax to describe

Pragmatic further broadens to Semantics. In another sense, Pragmatic analysis must be based on Morphology and Syntax to understand the semantics. The titles are analysed semiotically, as few of them are considered analysing symbols, a mark used as a conventional representation of the letter having a chemical element and its significance. To illustrate, semantic or semiotic concerning linguistics is the study of meanings concerned with the relation between words or other symbols and objects or concepts to which they refer (Pardede & Siantar, 2016). There are limitless branches in semantics; however, general, conceptual, and lexical semantics are the primary three twigs one must grasp and understand (123helpme.com). However, Charles Morris, whom scholars across the globe look up, formed a general theory of semiotics acknowledging the distinction between denotation versus use defines that study of the relations of signs to the object to which the signs are applicable is semantics and studying the relations of signs to interpreters is pragmatic. The very characteristics of pragmatics are associated with disciplines such as rhetoric, critical discourse analysis, communication studies, and intercultural pragmatics (McNally). Understanding the essence of the distinctions, the study attempts to narrow down to the pragmatic analysis of the titles, which are more to interpret the signs.

2. About the Director

Upendra (Wikipedia, 2022) is an Indian film writer, actor, and director known primarily for his work in Kannada cinema; he was born in Bangalore. He began his career writing dialogues and lyrics for the soundtrack in Kannada films in 1989, for which he worked with Kashinath- senior film director. Upendra made his debut as a director in 1992 with Tarle Nanna Maga. In a career



spanning over 25 years, he has worked in about 64 films, of which he has directed 10 films in Kannada and 1 film in Telugu, 16 films as a writer, and as an actor in 60 films, including Kannada and Telugu. He also attempted to sing as playback for 21 songs for his films and other film productions and penned lyrics for numerous songs. Realistic dialogues, innovative and logical screen narration, reverse narration, unique film titles, and captions have made people curiously wait for his movies. With his social concern and democratic thoughts, he originated a political party called Prajaakiya. He is fondly known as Uppi among the film circles and his fans. His fans have honoured him with the title Real Star after his debut as an actor in his film titled "A."

3. Titles Chosen for the Study

The director has directed ten films, of which eight titles that are keen to the study have been deliberately chosen for the study based on the symbolic and linguistic perspective the film title has, namely, *Shhhh* (1993), *Om* (1995), *A* (1998), *Swasthik* (1999), *Upendra* (2000), *Super* (2015), *Uppi 2* (2010), *UI* (to be released in 2023)

4. The Study

Researchers and scholars have extensively studied analysing the various aspects of a film, namely film posters, full film, and characters sketched in the film. These dialogues are from the perspective of linguistics. Numerous studies have also been carried out about semiotic analysis of what a film, shots, and the mis-en-scene interprets in the whole structure of the film. Numerous studies have also been made on reading the film's images and analysing them thoroughly. However, there seems to be a shortage of studies analysing the film title, especially for experimental film titles in the Kannada language.

The article intends to study the interpretations of eight film titles written and directed by Upendra in the Kannada language and how the audiences consumed and interpreted them.

The study also briefly discusses the hype created among film enthusiasts' viewers, film critics, and industry fraternities. The study shall not attempt to analyse the story and making of the film in semiotic aspects. In one of the interviews for a YouTube channel, the director mentions that these unique titles are to make the audience think and make their perspectives until the film is watched.

4.1. Shhhh



The title of this film is attributed more to the sound than to its literal meaning of silence. The meaning of this title is global as a language of sign or signal, which conveys silence by keeping the finger on the mouth, signalling to be silent or maintain silence. It

makes the title analyse pragmatically interpreting the sign. The interpretation of the title stirred curiosity among the audience, who had never heard such a title since the film's inception in India. The title *Shhhh* was justified when the movie was watched as the concept was a horror genre and got acceptance from the audience. The director experimented with narrating the story with horror experiences faced by the film crew at a tea estate housing a haunted house. The story reveals the answers to the horror experiences and audiences' questions: are they man-made or natural spirits? The narration enrages the audience with suspense until the truth is revealed.

4.2. Om



The title directly gives scope to analyse the sign pragmatically, which relates to spirituality in the Indian context and has various meanings.

Om is the sound that starts and is pronounced with every spiritual chanting. It is also written as *AUM*, which defines the three states of substance- *solid*, *liquid*, and *gaseous*. The title is also chanted as *Omkaara*, symbolising a fresh start. While the title again stimulated the audience's curiosity about what and how it would relate to the story. However, it justified the film's story, along the lines of a college-going teenager being provoked by a girl to fall in love and ditching him later, turning out the boy to become a local don. The protagonist's life starts afresh, taking twists due to the situation and thus justifies the title *OM*. Though the climax has a message for the audience, the director, with all his intelligence, experimented with the reverse narration of storytelling that again set the trend. To be more precise on the success, the film even today, after 25 years of its first release, runs house full in theatres.

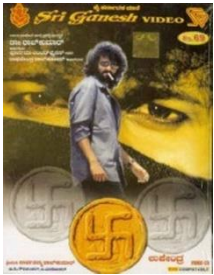
4.3. A



The title again created curiosity among the audience as it was just a letter. The masses, which were used to titles that gave meaning to words related to the film, could not understand what the letter *A* meant with regard to the film. While a few perceived it as an adult, some read it as a letter without understanding it. However, the sub-title or the caption "*Buddivantarige Maatra*," meaning "*Only to the Intelligent*," challenged the audience's intelligence, striking their ego. Audiences and research scholars could not interpret what the title means to the film storyline, which revolves around a film director with no feelings and emotions who falls in love with his heroine. While there is back-and-forth friction of rejection and vengeance, he learns her intentions later. However, he would have lost her by then. The film confused the audience with the "The End" slide shown in the first half an hour of the film and took some time to know the strategy of keeping the audience confused by showing a film in the film. The film

became a super hit because of its soundtracks, frequent reverse narration, title, and by-line. However, very few other directors could catch the speed of film A.

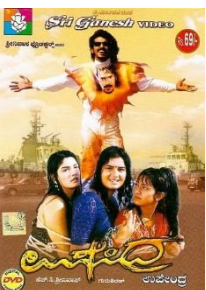
4.4. Swasthik



The director's first unique symbolic title put the audience in a dilemma as they could neither interpret nor guess or relate the title to its story. An Indian Police informant who is raised by a family of Pakistan decedents and later gets to know that his parents are terrorists is the plot.

The film is the first terrorist thriller cult in Kannada, justifying the title as per the audience's intellectuality. The *Swasthik* sign can be pragmatically interpreted from two perspectives. While the lines start from four different points/ directions, connecting all of them to the centre and continuing to its other side is one perspective, the other is that all the lines which are pointed in different directions originate from the centre, which is deeply connected to the story. While the sign is interpreted in different ways and meanings worldwide, according to the ancient Indian scriptures, the Sanskrit word *Swasthik* or *Swasthika* means conducive well-being and symbolizes prosperity and good fortune. It was a famous symbol on the ancient Mesopotamian coinage. It can also be interpreted as the four *Vedas* viz., *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda*, *Atharvaveda*; four *yugas* viz., *Sathya*, *Treta*, *Dvaapara*, and *kali*; four *goals*, viz., *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kaama*, and *Moksha*. The *Buddhists* interpret the symbol as the 7th *Teerthankara*, with the arms symbolizing one of the four places a soul can be reborn in the cycle of birth and death. This symbolic title justified the film's title no matter where we start our lives or where we are born. Still, all that ends as a centre epitome of patriotism, and on the other side, no matter whether we all belong to one and start at the same point, life takes its destined journey through various paths, which may or may not meet at the end, however crossing each other's paths (Mat McDermott, 2016).

4.5. Upendra



The title of this film was named after the director himself, which attracted and confused the audience again. Interpreting the title pragmatically, the syllables of the title reflected the real names of the hero and the three heroines of the film. While the syllable *U* related to *Upendra*, *P* related to *Prema*, *D* and *Ra* reflected on the other two lead characters,

Daamini and *Raveena Tandon*. The story even more confused the audience as the hero's name was "*Naanu*," meaning *Me* or *Myself*, relating to the ego of oneself. At the same time, the three heroines reflected the three basic

desires/ feelings of every human being. While he marries an orphan girl *Prema* for commitment, he loves the cute *Daamini* for Entertainment and continues to have an affair with a rich girl *Raveena* for all his needs and achievement. *Naanu* is a character who lives like a wanderer without anybody's concern, care, or obligation, having all three qualities of a human being. Everyone, irrespective of gender, needs someone to be with them for entertainment, commitment, and achievement, and finally reveals that all three feelings are an illusion and vanish only when the ego of *Me* or *Myself* leaves the mind of a human being. The film's narration confused the audience even more when compared to the director's earlier films, making them watch the film more than once to understand the concept and the story.



4.6. Super

The title is neither a letter nor a word but a symbol, a gesture shown as good, super, nice, and gives scope for pragmatic interpretation. The symbol, originally known as *Vitarka Mudra*, attracted the audience again as previously and had various thoughts of interpreting. The masses could, though, relate to the title; they could not guess what could be the storyline and concept. The story revolves around a Non-Resident Indian guy who always loved his origin country India and found a huge difference in the political and social system between India and London, where he stayed. He makes up his mind to turn India into a developed nation by 2030 and exhibits how to achieve it. The Utopian film displays the futuristic nation and the contemporary image of India.



4.7. Uppi 2

This is the sequel to his earlier film titled *Upendra*. While reading the title, it looks very common and easy; however, interpreting it pragmatically in the regional language Kannada gives a different meaning when pronouncing it. The title *Uppi 2*, when pronounced together, sounds like *Uppittu*, a south Indian snack dish. And more confusing is the caption *Unknown* having the character name as "*Neenu*" (*You*). It may also look like a common English word. However, in Kannada, it means-Also Known As (*aka*). While the prequel movie *Upendra* was all about "*Naanu*" (*I*), having a song titled "*Uppiginta ruchi bere illa*," which means nothing tastes better than salt, it also has another meaning that "*Uppi*" is better than others. At the same time, the title song *Uppi 2*, which also sounds like *Uppittu*, is part of the movie. The story revolves around acquiring the property and wealth of a woman who took the spiritual path, confusing the audience yet engaging. The story narration was hardly understood by mere filmgoers, which had a repeat audience.

4.8. UI



The film is yet to release; however, the title has been released. This title is seen and can be pragmatically interpreted as combining the character names of his earlier films, *I & U (Naanu & Neenu)*.

The title image is also read as the symbol for fooling, named *Naama (Lines)* or *Panganaama (Fooling Lines)*. The word is slang, referring to the person who got fooled. Referring to the two prequel films, we can assume how You & I can be fooled and make others fooled, putting the nation and its development at stake or the psychological feelings portrayed as characters of You and I. However, the audio and film are awaited release in 2023.

5. Views from the Industry

Veterans from the Kannada film industry never bothered about Shhhh getting released and making waves. In fact, they gossiped about the title and how the audience would receive such new trends. Further, after the film became a huge success and Om was on the floor, people still gossiped but had limitations as a production house produced the film with a big name. There was no turnback after the release of Om, and producers lined up to approach Upendra to make their films. However, Upendra rules his terms when it comes to making his films. Today, not only the industry and fans in Karnataka but also film fraternities across the other Indian film industry wait to watch films directed by Upendra.

6. Conclusion

Understanding to interpret the titles pragmatically, the director has deliberately used his intelligence to gauge the audience's pulse and expectations regarding his films. He has always been careful in generating titles that keep the audience looking forward to furthering information that keeps up the hype for his film. The titles chosen indefinitely have built the curiosity for every film he directed and gained commercial success. The titles are a brainstorming to guess and gauge how that gets related to the story. The films also experimented with reverse narration now and then, with human philosophy. He has applied the confusing techniques of film-in-a-film, story-in-a-story, and convergence of multiple storylines, adding

his style of forwarding/ straight and reverse narration, which makes the fans and audience watch his film once to celebrate, twice to understand, and thrice to enjoy watching the film as it is after understanding. While the titles generate inquisitiveness to analyse for researchers, it engenders impeccable intrusiveness not only for the story but also for the songs, dialogues, realistic narratives, visual richness, and other technical appraise. With these adopted techniques while directing his films, Upendra has never let himself and his film down and become a roaring hit.

Limitations to the study

1. We intended to approach the director and made several attempts to personally meet him and understand his perception of deriving such titles for the story and how they originated. However, he was unavailable due to his busy schedule making his latest film.
2. It gives the impression that it is difficult to interpret the titles by reading the appropriate available works of literature that have less scope to analyse such titles.
3. The study being unique as the film titles chosen, literature concerning the specific study of this genre was hard to discover, and the references were broadly on linguistics, general literature of pragmatic, and semantic study while understanding those pieces of literature and relating it to the study was quite a hindrance.
4. Based on the pilot study, it seemed difficult to get the survey done among audiences to capture their perspective as most of them are unaware of reading a film title in a research sense. The responses were too vague and general as it became a pride to talk about or give an opinion about a film celebrity.
5. The cost was another hindrance. A sponsored study could be in the process of a qualitative study analysing the difference in opinion sharing between a set of controlled audience who gets educated on analysing that's helpful to the study and the uncontrolled audience.

Scope

This study can be further pursued with a research sponsorship/ grant that can help understand the right analysis of the audience, as mentioned in point 5 of the limitations above.

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