



NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION THROUGH FILM STORY STRUCTURE “BILA ESOK IBU TIADA”

April Yana¹, Muhammad Husni Ritonga²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email: april0603222055@uinsu.ac.id, muhammadhusniritonga@uinsu.ac.id

Corresponding Author: april0603222055@uinsu.ac.id

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Abstract

This study analyzes family communication in the film “Bila Esok Ibu Tiada” through the lens of Tzvetan Todorov’s narrative structure theory. The primary focus of this study is to understand how family communication is constructed and influenced by emotional conflicts, particularly between mother and child, as depicted in the film. This study identifies five narrative stages in the film: initial equilibrium, disruption, recognition of the disruption, attempt to repair, and new equilibrium. Each stage is analyzed to examine how the dynamics of family communication are manifested through the plot, conflict, and resolution. The results indicate that Todorov’s narrative structure is effective in depicting changes in family communication, particularly within the context of mother-child relationships influenced by dramatic events within the family. This study makes a new contribution to communication studies by integrating Todorov’s narrative theory into the analysis of family communication in film. Thus, this study not only enriches the field of family communication research but also offers a new approach to analyzing film as a narrative text.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Film is an audio-visual communication medium with a strong capacity to convey social, moral, and emotional messages to audiences. Through the combination of moving images, dialogue, sound, storyline, and characterization, film functions not only as a means of entertainment but also as a representational space for social realities that are closely connected to viewers’ experiences (Asri, 2020). In communication studies, film can be understood as a text that contains messages, values, conflicts, and meanings constructed through narrative structure. Messages in films are often not delivered explicitly; rather, they are constructed through relationships among characters, the development of conflict, dialogue, emotional expressions, and narrative resolution. Therefore, film is a relevant object of study for understanding how social realities, including family life, are represented and interpreted through visual narratives.

One theme frequently explored in film is family communication, as the family is the first social space in which individuals learn to express feelings, understand others, resolve conflicts, and build emotional closeness. Family communication is not merely concerned with the process of exchanging



messages; it also involves how family members form relationships, negotiate roles, manage conflicts, and maintain emotional warmth among one another (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). In family communication pattern theory, family dynamics can be examined through conversation orientation and conformity orientation, both of which influence how family members engage in dialogue, make decisions, and respond to differences in viewpoints (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2005). Thus, family communication in film can be analyzed through patterns of openness, empathy, emotional support, conflict, silence, and responses among family members that emerge throughout the storyline.

The analysis of family communication in film needs to be situated within a narrative framework because filmic messages do not stand in isolation; rather, they develop through a sequence of events. Narrative refers to the way events, characters, conflicts, and resolutions are organized to form a meaningful story for the audience (Nursubchiana et al., 2024). One relevant theory for examining narrative development is Tzvetan Todorov's theory of narrative structure. Todorov explains that narrative moves through five stages: initial equilibrium, disruption, recognition of the disruption, attempts to repair the disruption, and the establishment of a new equilibrium (Kristianto et al., 2022). In the context of this study, Todorov's narrative structure is used not only to map the storyline but also to examine changes in family communication, from harmonious conditions, the emergence of conflict, emotional awareness, and efforts toward reconciliation, to the formation of new communication patterns after the family experiences loss.

The film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* was selected as the object of this study because it presents a strong family narrative, particularly concerning the relationship between mother and children, emotional conflict, sacrifice, loss, and changes in relationships among family members. Directed by Rudy Soedjarwo and adapted from the popular novel by Nagiga Nur Ayati, the film presents the character of Ibu Rahmi as the emotional center of the family, while her children are portrayed as having personal dynamics that influence the quality of family communication. The mother's presence in this film is not merely positioned as a domestic figure but also as a symbol of affection, a unifying force within the family, a mediator of conflict, and a source of moral values for her children (Wening et al., 2025). Therefore, this film is relevant to be analyzed from the perspective of family communication because it demonstrates how warmth, tension, emotional distance, and regret are constructed through the narrative relationship between mother and children.



Figure 1. Poster

The relevance of *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* as the object of this study is further reinforced by its remarkable audience reception. The film reportedly attracted approximately 3.9 million viewers, making it one of the Indonesian films that received significant public attention in 2024 (Kurniawan, 2025). This achievement indicates that themes of maternal loss, family conflict, and emotional communication between parents and children resonate strongly with the lived experiences of society. From an academic perspective, the film's popularity is particularly significant because films that receive widespread public attention not only represent individual stories but also reflect collective values, concerns, and experiences regarding family life. Accordingly, the analysis of this film extends beyond its narrative structure to examine how messages of family communication are constructed through conflict, dialogue, silence, and the processes of reconciliation experienced by its characters.



Figure 2. Number of Viewers

Previous studies on the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* and family-themed films have examined intrinsic elements, moral values, representations of the mother's role, and the narrative plot of the film (Nabila et al., 2025; Pasaribu, 2025; Wulandari et al., 2025). However, studies that specifically connect Todorov's narrative structure with the dynamics of family communication remain limited. Several previous narrative studies have tended to emphasize plot structure, the representation of particular characters, or the construction of conflict in films, but they have not examined in depth how changes in narrative stages are related to shifts in family communication patterns (Auziah, 2021; Ibrahim & Kango, 2022). Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in the use of Todorov's narrative structure as a framework for analyzing family communication messages in the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada*, particularly how mother-child communication and communication among family members shift from harmonious, disrupted, and conflict-aware phases to efforts at relationship repair and the formation of a new equilibrium. Thus, this study aims to analyze family communication messages in the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* through Todorov's narrative structure and to explain how each narrative stage represents the dynamics of family communication.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using narrative analysis. A qualitative approach was selected because this study aims to understand family communication messages constructed through the storyline, dialogue, conflict, relationships among characters, and narrative resolution in the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada*. Qualitative research is relevant for interpreting meanings, symbols, experiences, and social realities represented in media texts, particularly when the object of study is not directed toward numerical measurement but toward an in-depth understanding of messages and structures of meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Nurrisa & Hermina, 2025). The material object of this study is the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada*, directed by Rudy Soedjarwo, while the formal object is the family communication messages that emerge through the film's narrative structure. The units of analysis include scenes, dialogue, characters' actions, family conflicts, emotional expressions, and changes in communication relationships between mother and children as well as among family members.

The primary data source in this study consists of all scenes in the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada*, while supporting data are obtained from scholarly articles, previous studies, film news, synopses, and other documents relevant to family communication, film, and narrative analysis. Data collection techniques include film text observation, documentation, and scene note-taking. Textual observation was conducted by watching the film repeatedly to identify scenes containing family communication messages, particularly those related to openness, empathy, conflict, sacrifice, silence, misunderstanding, and reconciliation. Documentation was carried out by recording selected scenes, significant dialogue, event duration, and relationships among characters that indicate changes in family communication. In media text analysis, the process of recording and categorizing data is important so that researchers can identify patterns of meaning systematically and not merely rely on the subjective impressions of viewers (Krippendorff, 2019).

The data analysis technique applies Tzvetan Todorov's narrative structure model, which divides a story into five stages: initial equilibrium, disruption, recognition of disruption, attempt to repair the disruption, and new equilibrium (Kristianto et al., 2022). These five stages are used to map the development of the film's plot while also interpreting how family communication changes in each phase of the story. In the initial equilibrium stage, the researcher identifies forms of harmonious family

communication; in the disruption stage, the researcher analyzes the emergence of conflict and emotional distance; in the recognition stage, the researcher examines changes in the characters' responses to family problems; in the repair stage, the researcher interprets forms of reconciliation and empathic communication; and in the new equilibrium stage, the researcher analyzes changes in family awareness after experiencing loss. To ensure data validity, this study employs theoretical triangulation and source triangulation by comparing the interpretation of film scenes with family communication theory, Todorov's narrative theory, and relevant previous studies. Through these procedures, the analysis is expected to be more systematic, argumentative, and scientifically accountable.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The results of the analysis show that the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* constructs family communication messages through a narrative structure that moves from equilibrium, disruption, recognition of disruption, attempts at recovery, to the establishment of a new equilibrium. This structure demonstrates that family communication in the film is not presented as a supplementary element, but rather as the central force that drives conflict, relational transformation, and narrative resolution. From the perspective of narrative analysis, film can be understood as a text that organizes events, characters, conflicts, and resolutions in a structured manner to construct particular social meanings (Asri, 2020; Nursubchiana et al., 2024). Therefore, the use of Todorov's theory is relevant because it helps explain how changes in family communication occur gradually in accordance with the development of the storyline. The film's narrative not only presents a story of maternal loss but also reveals how the weakness of empathic communication can create emotional distance among family members.

The initial equilibrium stage is evident in the early part of the film, when Rahmi's family is still portrayed as intact, warm, and relatively harmonious in its interactions. Scenes of family togetherness, especially when they eat together and joke at home, indicate the presence of a communicative space that enables each family member to feel connected. In this phase, Rahmi is positioned as the center of family communication because her presence creates a stable emotional atmosphere. From the perspective of family communication pattern theory, this condition reflects a relatively open conversation orientation, in which family members have the space to speak, respond, and build emotional closeness (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). However, this equilibrium is fragile because family harmony remains highly dependent on the mother figure as the primary bond that holds the family together. Thus, from the beginning, the film suggests that family stability is determined not only by the physical presence of family members but also by the quality of emotional communication that sustains their relationships.

The disruption stage begins to emerge when the family experiences the loss of the father figure, causing Rahmi's role as a mother to become increasingly dominant in maintaining family stability. The father's death is not merely a dramatic event but also a turning point in the structure of family communication. Previously, the family had two parental figures who supported the children's emotional relationships; after the father's passing, however, Rahmi must assume a dual role as caregiver, mediator, and emotional center of the family. In the context of family communication, this shift indicates that the family is a relational system that can be disrupted when one important role is lost or transformed (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2005). The disruption becomes more visible when the children become increasingly occupied with their own lives and communication with their mother shifts from being emotional to more functional. They continue to interact, but these interactions do not fully reflect the care, sensitivity, and emotional involvement that Rahmi needs as a mother.

The recognition of disruption stage is seen when family conflict is no longer hidden, particularly in the scene where the children argue about who is able to accompany their mother. This scene is significant because it shows that the family problem does not merely lie in each child's busyness but in their failure to recognize their mother's emotional needs. The communication that emerges is defensive, as each child is more concerned with explaining personal reasons than listening to shared family interests. From the perspective of family communication, defensive communication reflects low levels of empathy and openness because family members focus more on self-protection than on understanding the feelings of others (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Rahmi, on the other hand, appears as the figure who remains silent, yields, and tries to understand her children, even though she herself needs attention. This representation aligns with findings that the mother figure in the film is portrayed as a symbol of sacrifice, a mediator of conflict, and a source of familial affection (Wening et al., 2025).

The attempt to repair stage becomes evident when the children begin to realize that their family relationship is no longer in a good condition. In this section, the film depicts a shift in communication

from an initially defensive pattern toward a more reflective one. The children begin to pay attention to their mother's condition, although this process is still marked by awkwardness, regret, and emotional tension. In Todorov's theory, the repair stage does not mean that the conflict is immediately resolved; rather, it indicates the characters' efforts to restore the disrupted order (Kristianto et al., 2022). In the context of family communication, this stage can be interpreted as a process of relational reconstruction, in which family members begin to learn to listen, understand feelings, and renegotiate the closeness that had previously weakened. The film shows that family reconciliation does not occur instantly but through a process of awareness, dialogue, acceptance of mistakes, and the desire to rebuild emotional bonds.

The new equilibrium stage emerges after the family experiences the loss of Rahmi. The mother's passing becomes a turning point that changes the way the children understand the meaning of family, communication, and emotional presence. The new equilibrium in the film does not mean that the family returns to its initial condition, but rather that it forms a different relational order after loss. The children can no longer depend on their mother as the center of communication, so they must learn to build more mature relationships among siblings. In narrative analysis, the new equilibrium is a phase in which conflict has produced a transformation of awareness and a new relational structure within the story (Ibrahim & Kango, 2022; Kristianto et al., 2022). Interpretatively, the film shows that the loss of a mother does not only produce grief but also encourages the children to understand that family communication requires attention, openness, and emotional presence before loss occurs.

When analyzed more deeply, the main conflict in *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* does not lie solely in death or loss, but in the weakening of empathic communication within the family. Rahmi's children actually love their mother, yet this love is not always manifested in communication that is sensitive, present, and responsive. The film presents the irony that a family may appear biologically intact but remain communicatively fragile when its members are unable to recognize one another's emotional needs. In family communication theory, the quality of family relationships is strongly determined by the ability of family members to open conversations, manage differences, and maintain emotional support in situations of conflict (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2005). Thus, the film emphasizes that family communication should not be understood merely as the act of speaking, but as a process of building presence, empathy, emotional responsibility, and a willingness to understand the experiences of other family members.

Overall, the discussion shows that Todorov's narrative structure is effective for examining the dynamics of family communication in the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada*. Each narrative stage not only indicates the development of the storyline but also illustrates changes in the quality of family communication, from harmonious, disrupted, defensive, and reflective communication to the formation of new awareness after loss. This finding reinforces the view that film can serve as a reflective medium for understanding issues of family communication in social life, as film narratives are capable of representing conflicts, values, and emotional experiences that are closely related to social reality (Asri, 2020; Wulandari et al., 2025). The novelty of this study lies in its effort to connect Todorov's narrative structure with family communication messages in a more interpretive manner, so that film analysis does not stop at mapping the plot but also explains how mother-child relationships, sibling conflict, silence, sacrifice, and reconciliation shape the meaning of family communication within the story.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the film *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* represents family communication messages through a narrative structure that moves from initial equilibrium, disruption, recognition of disruption, and attempts to repair the situation, to the formation of a new equilibrium. Each narrative stage reveals changes in the quality of family communication, beginning with relationships that are initially warm and harmonious, then disrupted by loss, the children's busyness, emotional distance, and weak empathic communication, and eventually leading to a new awareness of the importance of attention, openness, and emotional presence within the family. The main conflict in the film lies not only in the event of losing a mother, but also in the failure of family members to understand one another's emotional needs before such loss occurs. The mother figure is portrayed as the center of communication, the emotional bond, and the mediator of family conflict, while the children experience a development of awareness after realizing that family relationships cannot be sustained solely through biological ties, but require continuous and empathic communication. Thus, this study demonstrates that Todorov's narrative structure theory is effective for analyzing the dynamics of family communication in film because it is able to explain how conflict, regret, reconciliation, and changes in

family awareness are constructed through the storyline. These findings affirm that *Bila Esok Ibu Tiada* does not merely present an emotional story about the loss of a mother, but also serves as a reflective medium on the importance of maintaining family communication before relationships experience a belated realization of meaning due to loss.

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