

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SHOKO NISHIMIYA AND SHOYA ISHIDA IN THE ANIME FILM A SILENT VOICE: A ROLAND BARTHES SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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Keywords

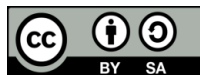
*nonverbal communication;
Roland Barthes' semiotics;
A Silent Voice;
disability;
reconciliation;*

Abstract

The anime *A Silent Voice* (Koe no Katachi, Kyoto Animation, 2016) constructed most of its narrative through nonverbal signs — sign language, facial expression, eye contact, and visual symbolism — in the interaction between Shoko Nishimiya, a deaf student who experienced bullying, and Shoya Ishida, her former bully who sought to make amends. Prior studies examined this film through a single character or a single theme in isolation, leaving the dyadic dynamics of nonverbal signs between the two characters underexplored as an interacting sign system. This study aimed to analyze how nonverbal signs in the dyadic interaction of Shoko and Shoya shaped their process of reconciliation, applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework across three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. The study used a constructivist paradigm with a descriptive qualitative approach. Thirteen key scenes were selected through purposive sampling based on the presence of narratively significant sign language or gestures, shifts in emotional relations, and recurring or dramatically weighted visual symbols. The findings showed that nonverbal gestures evolved from patterns of violence and avoidance in the early scenes, toward renegotiation through sign language and reciprocal gestures, culminating in moments of crisis and emotional catharsis in the later scenes. These findings indicated that nonverbal signs in *A Silent Voice* functioned not merely as aesthetic decoration but as an active sign system that shaped the direction and quality of the characters' relationship, while also challenging prevailing social myths about disability and the responsibility for cross-difference communication.

E-ISSN: 2541-5263

P-ISSN: 1411-4380



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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process through which meaning is constructed and exchanged using diverse symbolic systems, including verbal, visual, and gestural forms. In interactions between Deaf communities and hearing people, communication challenges cannot be reduced solely to differences in hearing ability, as differences in language systems and communication access also shape the quality of social relationships. Deaf communities develop communication practices grounded in visual experience, sign language, facial expressions, body orientation, and other visual resources. When hearing people lack the competence or willingness to adapt their communication practices, these differences may lead to miscommunication, exclusion, and barriers to social participation (Mawardiningsih & Wijayanti, 2018; Olivia & Mulyadi, 2022). Deafness, therefore, should not be understood exclusively from the perspective of biological impairment, but also as a social experience closely associated with language access, identity, and communicative relations.

Audiovisual media constitute an important arena in shaping public understandings of disability and deafness. Films and animation do not merely reflect social realities; they also select, organize, and assign meaning to representations of disability through narrative, cinematography, dialogue, body language, and visual symbolism. Representations that focus excessively on limitation may perpetuate stereotypes of persons with disabilities as objects of pity, whereas representations that foreground agency, identity, and communicative experience can offer more equitable perspectives. Garnita and Suryanto (2025) emphasize the importance of examining representations of disability in anime as constructions of meaning that are inseparable from broader social ideologies, while Ramadhani et al. (2025) demonstrate that the representation of sign language in film plays an important role in introducing audiences to the communication practices of Deaf communities. Within the broader context of communication accessibility, the use of sign language is also associated with efforts to strengthen Deaf people's access to education and public services (Rajabani & Juhana, 2025).

One audiovisual work that places deafness and communication at the center of its narrative is *A Silent Voice* (Koe no Katachi, 2016). The film portrays the relationship between Shoko Nishimiya, a Deaf student who experiences bullying, and Shoya Ishida, her former bully, who later attempts to rebuild their relationship. Their interactions are depicted through a combination of sign language, spoken language, facial expressions, eye contact, touch, body posture, and visual symbolism. In this study, sign language is not treated merely as gesture or as a form of nonverbal communication, but rather as a visual-manual language system that must be conceptually distinguished from nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and touch. This distinction is important to avoid reducing the language used by Deaf communities to a collection of bodily movements. At the same time, it enables the study to examine how sign language and nonverbal signs interact in the construction of the relationship between Shoko and Shoya.

Previous studies of *A Silent Voice* have approached the film from various perspectives, yet relatively limited attention has been devoted to the dyadic interaction between its two central characters. Pramesti (2024) focuses on the "X" symbol as a representation of Shoya's isolation and relational barriers, while Hidayat (2019) examines representations of friendship using Peircean semiotics. Other studies have positioned the film as a medium of social critique and explored the issues of bullying and social experience represented within its narrative (Sastriawati & Pribadi, 2025). These studies provide an important foundation for understanding the film's symbols, characters, and social themes; however, they have not specifically traced how the signs produced by Shoko and Shoya respond to one another across sequences of dyadic interaction. Accordingly, the research gap addressed in this study lies in the limited examination of the development of their relationship as a process of sign exchange involving sign language, nonverbal behavior, and visual symbols in an integrated manner.

To examine this process, the study employs Roland Barthes' semiotics as its primary analytical framework. Barthes distinguishes signification into the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth, thereby enabling audiovisual signs to be interpreted not only in terms of what is literally represented but also through the cultural and ideological meanings attached to them (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2017). This framework is complemented by Knapp, Hall, and Horgan's (2012) conceptualization of nonverbal communication, particularly for identifying kinesic, oculesic, haptic, and facial-expression cues. However, Knapp's classification is applied exclusively to nonverbal behavior and is not used to categorize sign language as a form of nonverbal gesture. This distinction allows the study to maintain conceptual accuracy by treating sign language as a linguistic system and nonverbal behavior as an additional source of signs within interaction. Furthermore, the level of myth in Barthes' framework is used to identify how the film constructs discourses surrounding deafness, communication access, relationships between Deaf and hearing individuals, and responsibility for creating more accessible communication, without presupposing that the film necessarily challenges or reinforces particular social myths.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of interaction between Shoko Nishimiya and Shoya Ishida in *A Silent Voice* through visual and communicative signs at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth within Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. More specifically, the study examines how sign language, nonverbal behavior, and visual symbols are employed across sequences of interaction between the two characters, as well as how these signs construct relational meanings and representations of deafness and communication across differences. The research question guiding this study is: How are the dynamics of sign interaction between Shoko Nishimiya and Shoya Ishida in the anime *A Silent Voice* interpreted at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth within Roland Barthes' semiotic framework? The novelty of this study lies in positioning the Shoko-Shoya relationship as a dyadic unit of analysis and examining the development of their interaction across

scenes, in contrast to previous studies that have tended to focus separately on particular symbols, characters, or themes. In doing so, this study is expected to extend scholarship on media semiotics by connecting the analysis of signs with issues of Deaf representation and communication accessibility in audiovisual narratives.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm, a descriptive qualitative approach, and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The constructivist paradigm is employed because the study views meaning as a socially constructed outcome emerging from the relationship among signs, narrative context, and social interpretation, while Barthes' semiotics enables signs to be examined through three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2017). The unit of analysis is the dyadic interaction between Shoko Nishimiya and Shoya Ishida in the anime *A Silent Voice*. Thirteen scenes were purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) the presence of sign language and/or nonverbal behavior with narrative relevance; (2) evidence of changes in the interactional pattern or relationship between the two characters; and (3) the presence of recurring visual symbols or symbols that play an important role in the development of the narrative. In this study, sign language is not categorized as nonverbal communication but is treated as a visual-manual language system with its own linguistic functions. The term nonverbal communication is used specifically to refer to facial expressions, eye contact, body posture and movement, and touch that accompany or interact with sign language and verbal communication.

The analysis was conducted in stages through repeated viewing and close examination of each selected scene. The data were first recorded in an analytical worksheet containing the scene number and timestamp, interactional context, visual signs, use of sign language where applicable, nonverbal behavior, and relevant symbolic objects. At the denotative level, the researcher described factually what was visible and audible on screen without introducing psychological interpretations that were not explicitly supported by the data. At the connotative level, relationships among signs, scene context, character positioning, and narrative development were examined to interpret emotional and relational meanings. At the level of myth, the analysis focused on the broader social discourses represented in the film, particularly those concerning deafness, communication accessibility, relationships between Deaf and hearing individuals, and responsibility in communication across differences (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2017). To strengthen the identification of nonverbal behavior at the denotative stage, the study employed the classification proposed by Knapp et al. (2012), including kinesics, oculesics, haptics, and facial expressions, together with the functions of repeating, complementing, substituting, regulating, and contradicting. This classification was applied exclusively to nonverbal behavior and was not used to categorize sign language as gesture, thereby maintaining a clear conceptual distinction between linguistic systems and nonverbal signs.

The trustworthiness of the interpretation was strengthened through methodological, source, investigator, and theoretical triangulation. Methodological triangulation was conducted by cross-checking the visual reading of each scene against the film's dialogue and subtitles to ensure that interpretation did not rely on a single type of data. Source triangulation involved comparing the analytical findings with previous studies of *A Silent Voice*, particularly those addressing overlapping scenes or symbols, in order to identify similarities and differences in interpretation (Hidayat, 2019; Pramesti, 2024). Any differences in interpretation were documented in a comparative matrix containing the sign object, initial interpretation, alternative interpretation, and the rationale supporting each reading. Scenes that generated divergent interpretations were then rewatched and discussed collectively with reference to visual evidence, narrative context, and the theoretical framework until an interpretive agreement was reached. Where disagreement remained, alternative interpretations were retained as part of the analytical record rather than being forced into a single reading. Finally, theoretical triangulation was conducted by using Knapp et al. (2012) to identify nonverbal behavior and Barthes' framework to interpret denotative, connotative, and ideological meanings, thereby making the interpretive process more transparent and traceable.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The anime film *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no Katachi*), produced by Kyoto Animation in 2016, centers on Shoya Ishida, a teenager who, during elementary school, bullied his Deaf classmate, Shoko Nishimiya. When the school intervenes, Shoya is singled out and blamed by his own peers. Shoko eventually transfers to another school, while Shoya spends the remainder of his school years experiencing social exclusion that proves even more painful than before.

The film is more than a story about bullying. Its central narrative unfolds several years later, when Shoya, now a high school student, attempts to find Shoko again—not to justify his past actions, but to apologize for them. The film primarily focuses on their reunion and the complex, often uneasy process of reconciliation that follows, demonstrating that past wounds do not simply disappear because remorse arrives years later.

What distinguishes *A Silent Voice* from many films addressing similar themes is director Naoko Yamada's extensive reliance on visual and embodied forms of communication in constructing the narrative. Shoko's deafness is not merely a narrative characteristic; it becomes a crucial element shaping the relationship between the two characters and the communication barriers that emerge between them. Sign language, facial expressions, bodily gestures, and visual symbolism carry much of the emotional meaning embedded in their relationship. The following analysis therefore focuses on the visual and communicative signs that emerge within the dyadic interactions between Shoko and Shoya, interpreted through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework.

Scene Analysis Using Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Stage 1 — Violence and Avoidance (Scenes 1–4).

The following four scenes depict the initial stage of Shoko and Shoya's relationship: an awkward attempt at connection, physical aggression involving the removal of Shoko's hearing aids, a courageous offer of friendship from the victim, and Shoko's reflexive avoidance of Shoya several years later. At this stage, the pattern of signs is dominated by closed and defensive bodily behaviors, as well as gestures of rejection, which consistently reinforce the unequal nature of their relationship at the beginning of the narrative.

Scene 1. Shoko Invites Shoya to Become Friends



The scene takes place outside the classroom near the school's metal railing. Shoko stands facing Shoya, who is seated below her, and attempts to show him how they can communicate as friends.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	Shoko's standing position contrasts with Shoya's seated position; her hands are clenched near her chest, and her facial expression suggests that she is holding back tears.
Knapp Category	Kinesics (standing-seated posture and clenched hands) and facial expression (holding back tears). These cues perform substituting and complementing functions: they both substitute for and reinforce the expression of Shoko's intention to establish friendship when that intention is difficult to convey fully through spoken communication between a Deaf person and a hearing person.
Denotation	Shoko stands with her hands clenched and an emotional expression on her face. Shoya sits below her and looks up at Shoko.
Connotation	Shoko takes the initiative despite being the victim of bullying; her standing posture signifies the courage required to confront the situation. Shoya's seated position reflects social awkwardness and discomfort, which foreshadow his subsequent rejection of her attempt at connection.
Myth	Communicative power is not determined solely by the ability to speak.

Scene 2. Shoya Pulls Out Shoko's Hearing Aid



The scene takes place in the classroom during recess. Shoya forcibly removes Shoko’s hearing aid while their classmates look on.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	Shoya’s raised hand; Shoko’s turned-away posture as she covers her ear; Shoko’s outstretched defensive hand; and the shocked expressions of the two witnesses.
Knapp Category	Aggressive haptics (the forcible removal of the hearing aid) and kinesics (the raised hand). The act is not accompanied by verbal speech and functions as contradicting , as it violates the norms of appropriate social interaction between classmates.
Denotation	Shoya stands with his arm raised after forcibly removing Shoko’s hearing aid. Shoko turns away, covers her ear, and extends one hand defensively. Two other students witness the incident with shocked expressions.
Connotation	The forcible removal of the hearing aid constitutes an act of violence that disrupts Shoko’s access to communication. Her hand movement functions as an instinctive gesture of self-protection, while Shoya’s action produces a profound emotional impact on her.
Myth	The hearing aid functions as a symbol of the perceived dependence of Deaf people on technology in order to be “accepted” within the hearing world. Removing it therefore signifies not merely taking away an object, but symbolically denying Shoko’s right to communication.

Scene 3. Shoko Offers to Be Shoya's Friend



The scene takes place outdoors, where Shoko directly asks Shoya to become her friend for the first time through sign language.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	The index finger makes contact with the other hand; an extreme close-up frames only the hands, excluding the characters’ faces; the subtitle conveys a request for friendship; and the scene is set outdoors.
Knapp Category	The hand movement used to convey the request is treated as sign language rather than as kinesic or haptic behavior within Knapp’s nonverbal classification . The communicative act functions linguistically as a complete substitute for spoken language because Shoko’s entire request for friendship is expressed through sign language without any spoken words. Any accompanying bodily movement may be read as complementary nonverbal behavior, but the sign itself remains part of a visual-manual language system.
Denotation	Shoko produces a sign involving contact between her index finger and the other hand. Neither character’s face is visible in the frame. The subtitle conveys the question, “Can you and I be friends?”
Connotation	Shoko initiates an offer of friendship despite having repeatedly experienced humiliation from Shoya. The tightly framed shot directs attention away from facial expression and toward the

Aspect	Description
	signing hands, emphasizing the communicative act itself. The visual composition consequently foregrounds Shoko's willingness to establish connection despite the unequal and painful history of their interaction.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that meaningful reconciliation must be initiated through spoken communication. Shoko's use of sign language positions a visual-manual language as a legitimate medium of agency, relationship-building, and reconciliation, while also disrupting the expectation that a victim must remain passive in the face of previous mistreatment.

Scene 4. Shoko Runs Away Upon Seeing Shoya



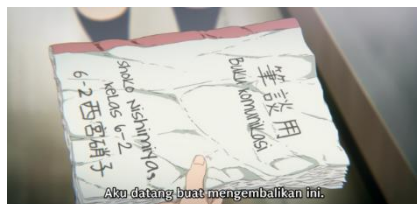
The scene takes place in a high school corridor, five years after the elementary school incident. Shoya approaches Shoko hesitantly ("U-um..."), but as soon as Shoko recognizes him, she immediately turns away and attempts to leave.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	Shoko's hair moves dynamically as she turns away abruptly; her eyes are tightly closed; her body is turned away from Shoya; and Shoya remains in the background with his mouth open.
Knapp Category	Kinesics (the reflexive turning movement) and oculusics (closed eyes and avoidance of eye contact). These cues function as both contradicting and regulating : Shoko's bodily response rejects and effectively terminates the interaction unilaterally, contradicting conventional expectations of socially accommodating behavior.
Denotation	Shoko quickly turns her back on Shoya, with her hair still moving from the sudden motion and her eyes tightly closed. Shoya stands behind her with his mouth open, calling out, "Nishimiya?"
Connotation	Shoko's abrupt movement can be interpreted as an immediate avoidance response in which her body reacts before any verbal exchange can develop. Her tightly closed eyes intensify the sense of withdrawal, suggesting more than ordinary embarrassment. Shoya's visible surprise indicates that he did not anticipate such a strong reaction to his presence.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that good intentions and the passage of time are sufficient to erase the effects of past harm. Shoko's involuntary bodily response suggests that painful experiences may continue to shape communication long after the original event, even before an apology can be expressed.

Stage 2 — Renegotiating the Relationship through Sign Language and Reciprocal Gestures (Scenes 5–9).

The following five scenes mark a shift in the direction of Shoko and Shoya's relationship. Shoya begins to demonstrate his intentions through a meaningful object—the communication notebook—and through a newly acquired communicative competence in sign language. Shoko, in turn, responds through expressions of gratitude, sustained eye contact, and an attempt to communicate her feelings which, although not successfully understood, nevertheless demonstrates her growing willingness to become emotionally vulnerable. At this stage, the pattern of signs shifts from avoidance and rejection toward gradually developing forms of reciprocal communication, although the process remains uneven and occasionally marked by misunderstanding

Scene 5. Shoya Shows Shoko Her Old Communication Notebook



After catching up with Shoko, who has tried to leave, Shoya takes out her old communication notebook—the same notebook he had thrown away years earlier—and explains why he has come to see her.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	A close-up of the worn notebook cover; the handwritten labels “Communication Notebook” and “Shoko Nishimiya, Class 6-2”; Shoya’s fingers holding the edge of the notebook; and the subtitle, “I came to return this.”
Knapp Category	Kinesics (the act of raising and presenting the object). The gesture functions as substituting for an explicit verbal apology, as the object itself carries the symbolic weight of remorse and acknowledgment without requiring Shoya to state an apology directly.
Denotation	The camera presents a close-up of a worn and visibly aged notebook bearing Shoko’s name and class information on its cover. Shoya holds the notebook in his hand and raises it toward Shoko.
Connotation	The notebook’s worn physical condition suggests a long history: it was once discarded, later recovered, and preserved for years. Shoya’s act of showing the notebook before returning it functions as an implicit acknowledgment of his past wrongdoing. The object thus becomes a material link between their shared past and his present attempt to reconnect with Shoko.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that an apology is meaningful only when expressed through direct verbal statements. Here, a preserved object from the past becomes a symbolic medium of remorse, suggesting that acknowledgment and responsibility may also be communicated through actions and material signs rather than words alone.

Scene 6. Shoya Uses Sign Language, Shoko Reacts with Surprise



Instead of explaining himself through spoken words, Shoya suddenly uses sign language—a communicative competence he has learned during the five years since their elementary school days. Shoko, who does not expect this, reacts with visible surprise.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	Shoya raises one hand near his forehead with his fingers spread; he wears an awkward smile and appears slightly nervous. Shoko turns toward him with her mouth open and points toward his signing hand. The subtitle reads, “How do you know sign language?”
Knapp Category	Shoya’s hand movement is treated as sign language rather than as kinesic behavior within Knapp’s classification , since it functions as part of a visual-manual linguistic system. His awkward smile and visible nervousness, however, may be categorized as facial-expression cues that complement the signed message. The use of sign language fully substitutes for spoken language and simultaneously marks a reversal in communicative competence between the two characters.

Aspect	Description
Denotation	Shoya, shown in profile, raises his hand near his forehead with his fingers spread as he produces a sign. In the following shot, Shoko turns toward him in surprise, her mouth open as she points toward Shoya's signing hand.
Connotation	Shoya's use of sign language marks a significant reversal in their earlier relationship. As the former bully who once interfered with Shoko's access to communication (see Scene 2), he now actively enters her preferred communicative space. This shift signifies an attempt to reduce the communication asymmetry that previously characterized their relationship. Shoko's surprised reaction further underscores how unexpected this change is, indicating that Shoya's effort exceeds what she had anticipated from him.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that the burden of communicative adaptation should fall primarily on Deaf individuals, who are often expected to speak, lip-read, or adjust to hearing-centered forms of interaction. By learning sign language, Shoya reverses this expectation and positions the hearing person as responsible for adapting as well. The scene therefore contests the myth that communication accessibility is solely the responsibility of the minority group and instead frames it as a shared relational responsibility.

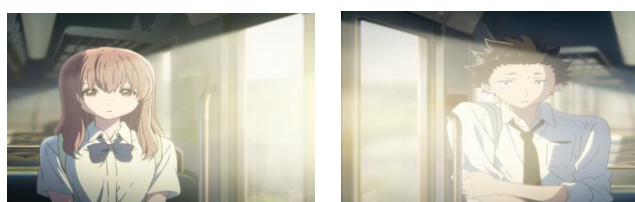
Scene 7. Shoko Expresses Gratitude for the Return of Her Communication Notebook



The scene takes place outdoors against the backdrop of blooming cherry blossoms. Shoko holds her old communication notebook and thanks Shoya for returning it.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	The notebook is held with both hands in front of Shoko's chest; she wears a faint smile; blooming cherry blossoms appear in the background; and the subtitle conveys her expression of gratitude.
Knapp Category	Facial expression (a faint smile) and kinesics (the way Shoko holds the notebook close to her chest). These cues function as complementing , reinforcing the warmth and sincerity of her verbal expression of gratitude.
Denotation	Shoko stands against a backdrop of blooming cherry blossoms, holding her old communication notebook with both hands in front of her chest. She smiles faintly while thanking Shoya for returning it.
Connotation	The way Shoko holds the notebook close to her chest, rather than merely carrying it, suggests that the object has regained personal significance as part of a past experience that had once been taken away from her. Her verbal expression of gratitude also indicates a growing sense of comfort in engaging in two-way communication with Shoya. The blooming cherry blossoms further reinforce the impression of a new phase emerging in their relationship.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that reconciliation occurs immediately once good intentions are expressed. The interval between Shoya first presenting the notebook (Scene 5) and Shoko's fuller acceptance of it in this scene suggests that restoring communication across differences is a gradual process rather than a single, completed transaction.

Scene 8. Shoya and Shoko Awkwardly Make Eye Contact



Inside a public vehicle, Shoya and Shoko accidentally make eye contact. No dialogue or sign language is exchanged; the interaction consists solely of a brief sustained gaze before both characters become visibly awkward.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	Direct eye contact without dialogue; Shoya's tense posture with his arms crossed; Shoko's slightly open mouth; and warm golden light entering through the window.
Knapp Category	Oculusics (sustained eye contact without dialogue) functions as the dominant nonverbal code, supported by kinesics (Shoya's crossed arms). These cues perform a substituting function by conveying meaning in the absence of verbal interaction, while also regulating the psychological distance between the two characters.
Denotation	Inside a public vehicle, Shoya and Shoko look directly at one another without speaking. The camera alternates between close views of their faces, both showing mild surprise and awkwardness.
Connotation	Their sustained eye contact within the confined public space suggests a new threshold of interpersonal comfort, contrasting sharply with Scene 4, when Shoko immediately avoided looking at Shoya. Shoya's crossed arms may be read as a residual defensive posture, indicating that although greater closeness has developed, emotional restraint and uncertainty remain present.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that silence signifies an absence of communication. Here, shared silence becomes a meaningful form of nonverbal exchange, demonstrating that eye contact alone can carry relational significance in a relationship previously characterized by violence, avoidance, and communicative distance.

Scene 9. Confession of Shoko's Misunderstood Feelings



Shoko gathers the courage to shout from a bridge, attempting to say “Suka” (“I like you”) to Shoya, who is standing some distance away. However, because of the distance and the lack of clarity in her articulation, her voice sounds like “Suqa,” which Shoya mishears as “Buka.” This misunderstanding prevents Shoko’s confession from being fully understood.

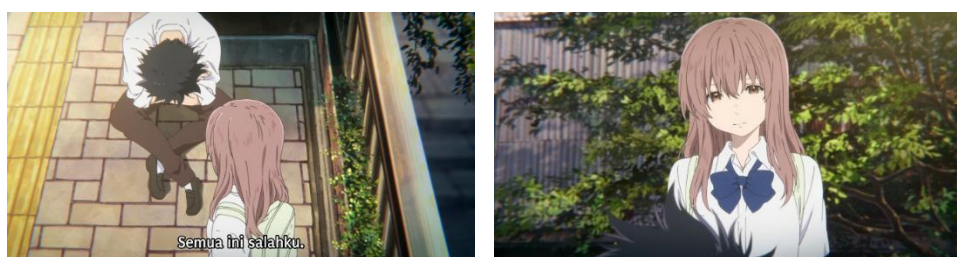
Aspect	Description
Signifier	Shoko's hesitant expression before shouting; her forward-leaning posture as she calls out from the bridge; the unclear utterance “Suqa”; and Shoya's confused expression as he interprets it as “Buka.”
Knapp Category	Facial expressions (hesitation and confusion) and kinesics (Shoko's forward-leaning posture while shouting). These cues function as complementing the verbal attempt, although the spoken message itself is not accurately decoded by the receiver.
Denotation	Shoko shouts to Shoya from a distance while standing on the bridge. Her utterance is unclear and is heard as “Suqa.” Shoya responds by asking, “Buka?” indicating that he has misunderstood what she intended to say.
Connotation	Shoko's decision to raise her voice from a distance reflects a deliberate effort to communicate her feelings through spoken language despite the difficulty of producing an utterance that Shoya can clearly understand. Her posture, hesitation, and vocal effort emphasize the emotional risk involved in the confession. Yet the combination of physical distance and unclear articulation results in another communicative breakdown, revealing that willingness to communicate does not automatically guarantee mutual understanding.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that communicative success depends primarily on the speaker's effort to make themselves understood. Shoko's failed confession suggests that communication across hearing differences requires more than individual persistence; it also depends on shared communicative strategies, mutual adaptation, and accessible conditions for

Aspect	Description
	understanding. Her effort itself nevertheless carries relational meaning, even though the intended verbal message is not successfully received.

Stage 3 — Crisis and Emotional Catharsis (Scenes 10–13).

The final four scenes present the dramatic culmination of Shoko and Shoya's relationship: self-blame, an attempted suicide interrupted through physical intervention and sacrifice, the visual symbolism associated with that sacrifice, and an emotional release that signals the beginning of recovery. At this stage, the pattern of signs shifts into a crisis that opens a space for catharsis, providing a narrative resolution to the process of reconciliation that has gradually developed since Stage 1.

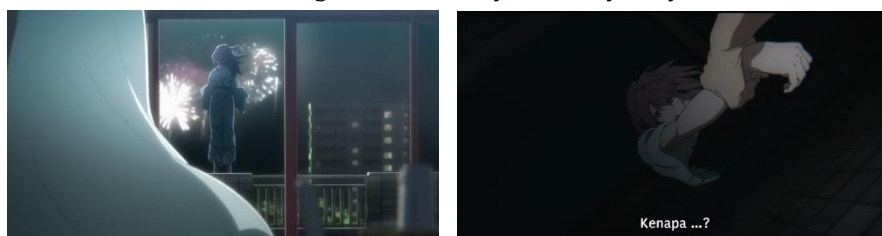
Scene 10. Shoya Blames Himself



The scene takes place after the conflict that erupts among their circle of friends on the night of the fireworks festival. Shoya sits in a deeply collapsed posture, his body completely bent inward, repeatedly expressing regret and self-reproach. Standing nearby, Shoko displays a sad and anxious expression.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	Shoya's closed posture (his face obscured and his body bent inward); Shoko's gloomy and anxious expression; and the background of an old building surrounded by overgrown plants.
Knapp Category	Kinesics (closed posture and bent body) and facial expression (sadness and anxiety). These cues function as repeating , reinforcing Shoya's repeated verbal expressions of self-blame through bodily signs.
Denotation	Shoya sits hunched over, repeatedly blaming himself. The camera then shifts to Shoko's face, which appears sad, with slightly furrowed brows as she looks toward Shoya.
Connotation	Shoko's sadness signifies more than simple sympathy; it reflects a form of helpless care, as she is unable to stop Shoya's spiral of self-reproach through facial expression alone. This emotional setback is therefore not borne by Shoya alone. Shoko also carries its weight, even though she is not the one at fault.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that support is valuable only when it successfully "fixes" someone. Simply sharing another person's sorrow and remaining present, even without the power to resolve it, is represented here as a meaningful form of care.

Scene 11. Shoko on the Verge of the Balcony, Saved by Shoya



After realizing that Shoko intends to end her life, Shoya rushes toward her despite stumbling along the way and manages to grasp her hand just before she falls completely from the balcony. In the midst of the panic, the only verbal response Shoya is able to utter is the brief question, "Why...?"

Aspect	Description
Signifier	A close-up of Shoko’s hand gripping the edge of the wall; tense fingers; a dark brick wall and metal railing in the background; and a blurred facial silhouette at the corner of the frame.
Knapp Category	Haptics (the hand grip during the rescue) functions as the dominant nonverbal code. It performs a substituting function by replacing the verbal explanation that cannot be articulated in the urgency of the moment; physical contact carries nearly the entire communicative weight of the scene.
Denotation	The camera focuses on Shoko’s hand being held firmly by Shoya at the edge of the wall, with visibly tense fingers.
Connotation	The tightly held hand signifies both the shock of the moment and the immediate struggle for survival. At the same time, it suggests that Shoko’s safety is secured through Shoya’s physical intervention, which places his own body at risk. The physical contact therefore becomes a highly charged relational sign, expressing urgency, protection, and sacrifice in the absence of extended verbal communication.
Myth	The scene challenges the assumption that an act of rescue is necessarily without consequence for the rescuer. Shoya’s physical intervention demonstrates that care and responsibility may involve personal risk, while bodily action itself becomes a powerful form of nonverbal communication when words are insufficient.

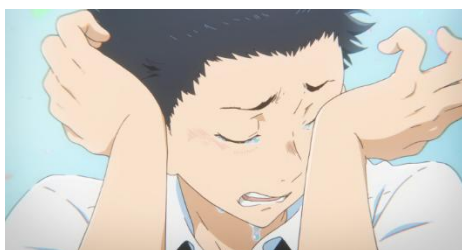
Scene 12. Representing Shoya’s Sacrifice through the Symbol of the Broken Egg



After Shoya falls as a consequence of saving Shoko, the film inserts a visual symbol of a broken egg to represent his physical and emotional condition.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	A close-up of a raw egg broken inside a glass bowl; the yolk remains intact while the egg white spreads around it.
Knapp Category	The broken egg functions as a cinematic symbol or visual object rather than as direct bodily behavior. It therefore falls outside the four core nonverbal codes applied from Knapp’s framework—kinesics, oculusics, haptics, and facial expression. Accordingly, Knapp’s classification is not applied to this scene, and its interpretation relies primarily on Barthes’ semiotic reading of visual symbolism.
Denotation	The camera shows a broken egg inside a transparent container. The egg white spreads outward, while the yolk remains intact at the center.
Connotation	The broken egg functions as a visual representation of Shoya’s fall. The ruptured form signifies the damage to his physical condition and the drastic disruption of his life following his attempt to save Shoko. At the same time, the intact yolk suggests that although his body has been injured, his underlying humanity and willingness to sacrifice himself remain preserved.
Myth	The scene invokes the cultural idea that sacrifice and rescue may come at a significant personal cost. Within the film’s visual discourse, the broken egg also evokes the fragility of human life and the possibility of transformation emerging through suffering.

Scene 13. Shoya Cries Upon Realizing Everything Is Okay



For the first time, Shoya dares to look up at the faces of the people around him without the “X” marks that had previously obscured them—a recurring symbol of his inability to form social connections because of guilt and self-isolation. At that moment, he breaks down in tears.

Aspect	Description
Signifier	Both hands are raised beside his head with fingers spread; his eyes are tightly closed; tears stream down his face; his mouth is open as he sobs; and the background is rendered in pale blue with particles of light.
Knapp Category	Kinesics (raised hands and spread fingers), oculusics (closed eyes), and facial expression (crying). These cues function primarily as substituting by conveying emotional release without the need for verbal explanation, while also contradicting social expectations that intense emotion must be verbally articulated in order to be recognized as meaningful.
Denotation	Shoya raises both hands beside his head with his fingers spread, closes his eyes tightly, and cries openly as tears stream down both cheeks.
Connotation	His open fingers, rather than clenched fists or hands covering his face, suggest release rather than self-protection. This contrasts with the closed and avoidant bodily patterns associated with Shoya throughout much of the film. His tears function as the culmination of an emotional release from years of social isolation, which had previously been visualized through the recurring “X” marks covering the faces of people around him.
Myth	The scene offers an alternative representation to the masculine norm that associates crying with weakness. Here, tears signify emotional release and the possibility of self-recovery rather than personal collapse.

Nonverbal Interaction as a Three-Stage Process

The analysis of the 13 selected scenes shows that the interaction between Shoko Nishimiya and Shoya Ishida develops through three main patterns: violence and avoidance, the renegotiation of communication, and crisis followed by emotional catharsis. In the first stage, Scenes 1–4 are dominated by closed postures, avoidance of eye contact, aggressive haptic behavior, and unequal access to communication, particularly when Shoko’s hearing aid is forcibly removed and when she avoids Shoya upon their later reunion. In the second stage, Scenes 5–9 demonstrate a change in their interactional pattern through the return of the communication notebook, Shoya’s use of sign language, more sustained eye contact, increasingly open facial expressions, and the emergence of reciprocal gestures. In the third stage, Scenes 10–13 show an intensification of the relationship through bodily postures that express sadness, physical contact during moments of crisis, the visual symbolism of the broken egg, and Shoya’s crying near the end of the narrative. At the denotative level, these changes reveal a shift from bodily behaviors that tend to close off or terminate interaction toward increasingly reciprocal patterns of communication. Sign language in the second stage is treated as an independent visual-manual language system, whereas facial expression, eye contact, body posture, and touch are analyzed as nonverbal sign resources accompanying the interactional process.

At the interpretive level, these changes suggest that reconciliation in *A Silent Voice* is constructed not through a single decisive communicative act, but through an accumulation of signs that gradually change across the narrative. In the early stage, the forcible removal of Shoko’s hearing aid can be read not only as a physical act but also as the temporary deprivation of one of her means of accessing communication. Within Barthes’ framework, the denotative meaning is relatively straightforward—the hearing aid is forcibly removed—whereas at the connotative level, the act signifies an unequal communicative position between Shoko and Shoya. This interpretation becomes particularly relevant when situated within disability-representation discourse, which emphasizes that communication

barriers do not necessarily reside within persons with disabilities themselves but may also be produced by social environments that fail to provide equitable communication access (Garnita & Suryanto, 2025; Olivia & Mulyadi, 2022). Accordingly, the unequal relationship depicted in the first stage is more appropriately understood as a representation of unequal communication access than as evidence of a specific psychological condition that cannot be verified solely through visual gestures.

The second stage marks an important shift in which responsibility for communication is no longer placed solely on Shoko. Shoya's use of sign language becomes the clearest sign of this change because the hearing character begins to enter the linguistic system used by Shoko. At the denotative level, the film simply shows Shoya using sign language and Shoko responding to him. At the connotative level, however, this act can be interpreted as a form of communicative accommodation that alters the structure of their previous interaction. This reading is consistent with studies of communication involving Deaf communities, which show that the quality of interaction is strongly influenced by the willingness of both parties to reduce communication gaps, rather than by the ability of Deaf individuals alone to adjust to hearing-centered communicative norms (Mawardiningsih & Wijayanti, 2018). The representation of sign language is also important because its visibility can broaden public understanding of communicative diversity and accessibility (Rajabani & Juhana, 2025; Ramadhani et al., 2025). The development of the Shoko-Shoya relationship, therefore, is better understood not as an absolute "reversal of communicative competence," but as a shift toward a more accommodative and reciprocal form of communication.

This shift is also evident in the nonverbal codes accompanying their interactions. In the framework of Knapp et al. (2012), eye contact, facial expressions, touch, and body posture may function to complement, regulate, substitute for, or even contradict verbal messages. During the first stage, the regulating and contradicting functions are particularly prominent when bodily behavior is used to reject, terminate, or restrict interaction. By contrast, in the second and third stages, complementing and substituting functions become increasingly salient, as eye contact, the way the communication notebook is held, hand contact, and facial expressions convey relational meanings that are not fully expressed through speech. This development supports a Barthesian reading in which meaning does not reside in isolated signs but emerges through the relationship between signs and their social and narrative contexts (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2017). Silence in several scenes, therefore, cannot be reduced to an absence of communication. Instead, the film uses visual channels to regulate interpersonal distance, indicate changes in relational orientation, and establish continuity of meaning across scenes.

At the level of myth, the three-stage sequence can be read as the film's way of representing and negotiating broader social assumptions concerning deafness, communication access, and reconciliation. However, this textual reading should not be treated as empirical evidence that the film itself has actually "changed" or "challenged" such myths in society. For example, Shoya's decision to learn sign language can be interpreted as an alternative representation to the assumption that Deaf individuals must bear the primary burden of communicative adaptation. Likewise, the return of the communication notebook and the gradual development of reciprocal gestures suggest that reconciliation is constructed as an incremental process rather than through a single verbal act. This reading extends previous studies that have focused more narrowly on particular symbols, friendship, or social criticism in *A Silent Voice* (Hidayat, 2019; Pramesti, 2024; Sastriawati & Pribadi, 2025). The contribution of the present study lies in its longitudinal reading of Shoko and Shoya's interaction as an interconnected sequence of signs: from unequal access to communication, through accommodation and reciprocity, to the development of a more open relationship by the end of the narrative. Nevertheless, because this study is based on textual analysis, the meanings concerning deafness and communicative responsibility identified here remain interpretations of the film's representation. Their broader social validity should therefore be examined further through audience-reception research that involves Deaf viewers as active subjects in the meaning-making process.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the interaction between Shoko Nishimiya and Shoya Ishida in *A Silent Voice* develops through three main stages: violence and avoidance, the renegotiation of communication, and crisis followed by emotional catharsis. Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis demonstrates that the transformation of their relationship is represented through sign language as a visual-manual language system, nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions, eye contact, body posture, and touch, as well as

objects and visual symbols that acquire distinct meanings at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. These interconnected signs reveal a shift from unequal access to communication toward more accommodative and reciprocal patterns of interaction, while simultaneously representing broader discourses surrounding deafness, communication accessibility, communicative responsibility, and reconciliation. However, meanings identified at the level of myth remain textual interpretations of representations within a single film and therefore cannot be generalized as reflections of Deaf communities' lived experiences or as evidence that the film directly transforms social attitudes toward disability. This study is further limited by its focus on one film and 13 purposively selected scenes. Future research should therefore compare similar representations across other audiovisual works and develop audience-reception studies that directly involve Deaf viewers, enabling interpretations of deafness, accessibility, and communicative responsibility to be examined from the perspectives and lived experiences of the audiences being represented.

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