HORROR EFFECT TECHNIQUE THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF 'FILM LANGUAGE' ON FOUR SELECTED HORROR FILMS

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Abstract – **This research is to describe the application of 'Film Language' in four selected horror films. This analysis refers to method done by the filmmakers in creating horror effect to audience through the use of 'Film Language'. Research scope was limited to four horror films that were produced in 2007 and 2008. The four horror films were selected based on two selection criteria, i.e. the achievement of box-office collection and questionnaires. The research result found that four components in 'Film Language' i.e. cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, editing and audio have played big role in horror film genre not only from the technical aspect but also could influence the development of story plot of a horror film.**

Keywords - **film language, story plot, horror film, box-office, four components**

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of horror films in Malaysia had started in the late 50's, in parallel with the rapid development of horror films worldwide. At the beginning, the development of Malay horror films were mostly influenced by the success of Western horror films. Films using the element of vampire as ghost had been widely adapted into the earliest Malay horror films such as the film directed by B.N Ra entitled *Pontianak* (1957), followed by *Dendam Pontianak* (1957) and *Sumpah Pontianak* (Muhammad Hatta, 2002:12). Year 2007 and 2008 had witnessed the development of the growth of horror genre films in Malaysia.

However, despite the producers'passion in making horror films, 'Film Language'is still less discussed. The fear in watching horror film is not merely by the appearance of its ghost character but the fear can also be created by the role of 'Film Language'itself. If the ghost character is not decorated with the element of 'Film Language'i.e. costumes and makeup, it will not be capable to yield the fear and horror feelings among audience (Monaco, 1981: 45). In horror film, the unification of 'Film Language'will form a message. Then, the message will be delivered through visual and auditory to audience's brain and audience will decipher the message to form a concept. This concept will create fearful feeling while watching a horror film (Chandler, 2007: 60).

This research focused on four categories of 'Film Language'namely cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, editing and audio. Four horror films produced in 2007 and 2008 were chosen based on two selection criteria which are must achieve box-office collection and through questionnaire. The chosen horror films were *Jangan Pandang Belakang, Congkak, Susuk* and *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam*.

II. MALAYSIA HORROR FILMS

In a context of the rise of local horror films, besides of the leniency of Film Censorship Board of Malaysia (LPFM), it is also influenced by the encouraging development of horror genre films from Thailand, Korea and Japan. The making of *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam* (2004) by Shuhaimi Baba was the outcome from amazing response received by Thailand horror film, *Nang Nak* (Nonze Nimibutr, 1999) which was also taken from the plot line of vampire legend in Thailand society that is not much different from Malay society. The spectacular growth of horror films from Thailand, Korea and Japan had eventually influenced not only film production, but also the type of horror films made by filmmakers in this country. The rise of local horror films was pretty late because the genre of Asian horror films is now declining since horror films produced by local filmmakers had merely repeating almost the same concept and approach.

The success of the film entitled *Jangan Pandang Belakang* which had recorded gross collection of RM7.2 million proved that horror film is among the genre that has been getting good response in Malaysia. It is undeniable that society nowadays is intrigued when it comes to the matter that is out of the box or beyond the edge. Hence came the idea to portray the existing of ghost in various appearance in order to create the horror sense among audience. Some reckoned that horror films that are made these days are pure entertainment. Hollywood has also produced similar film genre yet Western society has been doubting a mystical existence in their respective life and surely they can assume that those type of films are merely an entertainment. This is in contrary with local society nowadays because the belief on matters related to ghost or supernatural is still exist. The existence of ghost such as *toyol*, *pontianak* or *pocong* is very synonym with Malay people regardless of modernization. That is why the service of shaman is still required because he is believed to be able to heal a person's illness or expel demons. If we scrutinize film category that has been classified by Brigid Cherry, Malaysia horror films are classified in supernatural, occult and ghost films. Horror films in Malaysia cinema history began in 1957 with the production of a horror movie by Kris Cathay entitled Pontianak directed by BN Rao. In the same year, a sequel to the film was contrived and given the title of *Dendam Pontianak*. Apart from that, in the same year, another horror film entitled *HantuJerangkung* was produced by Malay Film Production. As the outcome from the production of these three horror films, the filmmakers back then were taking steps to produce horror films. The following year, an acceleration of horror films began to dominate the film industry at that time. Seven horror films were produced and two of the horror films were on the motive of *Pontianak* which are *Anak Pontianak* and *Sumpah Pontianak* while the other three films were on the motive of *Orang Minyak* which are *Orang Minyak, Serangan Orang Minyak* and *Sumpah Orang Minyak*. The other two horror films are *HantuKubur* and *Orang Licin*. The production of horror films stopped in 1991 until 2002 due to strict requirements of film production by Film Censorship Board

(LPF) and the acceptance of romance and comedy genre films by Malaysian audience at that time.

It's hard to deny that horror film genre has most of the attention lately either among the filmmakers nor the local audience. Eeriness that revolves around the various ghosts, supernaturals and mysterious events that appear on the silver screen ever received overwhelming response from the audience. This phenomenon can be seen when practically every cinema do not want to miss behind in showing local or imported horror films. If the horror films that aired were mostly taken from Hollywood, Hong Kong, Thailand and Japan previously, but the trend is now also hitting the local film world. (Abd. Aziz Ittar, 2007: 6)

At the same time, our producers and directors also do not want to miss producing horror films to boost the trend. Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam, *Cermin, Jangan Pandang Belakang, Dukun, Puaka Tebing Biru* and *Orang Minyak* are among local horror films which were screened in local cinemas. The enthusiasm of the local producers in producing horror films now is just on the right time as there are overwhelming responses from the audience. For example, the success of *Jangan Pandang Belakang* in grossing RM410,000 tickets on the first day it premiered on last April 5 might be used as a yardstick for the response of the genre. The film which was produced by Metrowealth Movies Productions broke the record as the first local film which grossed the highest ticket collected on the first day it aired. Indirectly, this success might stimulate producer to produce more horror films in the future. If the trend continues, it seems giving more benefits to the film producers rather than the diversity of film genres that should be enjoyed by the audience. David Teo, a local film producer stated that the horror genre films never stale but continues to be in the public interest around the world, and in terms of value, it is easy to be sold in the international market. Most importantly, to make a horror film, a filmmaker should be doing it according to the customs, culture, tradition and religion of a nation (Berita Harian, 2008: 5).

III. FILM LANGUAGE

Wharton and Grant (2005) defined 'Film Language'as a medium that would create a message through cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, editing, sound and special effects. Delivering messages in 'Film Language'technique is not sustainable and will change from time to time. In addition, the 'Film Language'is also not universal because it depends on where it is used. For example, the technique of 'Film Language'in the horror movie used by Hollywood is different from the technique used by Japan. Applying 'Film Language'technique is important to give the impression of horror to the audience. The use of suitable 'Film Language'technique is able to produce sense of horror, shock and disgust in the audience.

'Film Language'is a medium that allows the film to convey an information to the audience through moving images and audio. It is also the main medium for the directors and publication crews to produce a film. A script that has been generated will be interpreted into visual and audio form via the 'Film Language'. Without the knowledge, skills and understanding, visual and audio produced by filmmakers, the film will certainly not attractive and worse yet, not understood by the audience. The four components of 'Film Language'are the cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing and audio (Chandler, 2007: 53).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Balance in processing 'Film Language'

The effect of eeriness is difficult to be created if using only one element. For example, if the director only concerns about camera shot aspect and ignores other 'Film Language'aspect, this gives less effect of horror to the audience. It must be balanced by the other 'Film Language'elements in order to achieve the effect of horror at optimum levels. Director and production team should be wise in balancing the 'Film Language' elements to provide high eeriness and satisfaction to the audience.

B. Props as story support

Props in horror films is to support the development of a narrative. For example, in the film of *Jangan Pandang Belakang*, props that support the story is a bottle that was found by Rose during a picnic on the beach. Audience were given an overview of the existence of the bottle and its role on the development of the story. In the film of *Congkak*, props had played a huge role, especially when producers and directors named the film based on the main props used, which was *Congkak*. The audience were given an initial overview of the supporting elements to this story. In the film of *Susuk*, the role of props also gave a huge impact in the film. This proves that 'Film Language' gives a big role to a film not only from the technical standpoint but also affects the plot of a horror film.

C. The Role of Film Language

Overall, in the process of filmmaking, 'Film Language'is the main key for a producer to produce a film. Researcher found out that the production technique in a horror film is different with the production technique of a different genre film. This is because a horror film should result in a strong impact on the audience's satisfaction which is to feel the scary experience. If the audience do not feel afraid then the horror film is considered unsuccessful in achieving its objectives. The elements of 'Film Language'should be able to provide role in giving the effect of eeriness to the audience.

a) Cinematography Summary
1) The Use of Camera

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF THE AMOUNT OF SHOT SIZE BETWEEN SCENE 41 IN THE FILM *JANGAN PANDANG BELAKANG*, SCENE 26 IN THE FILM *CONGKAK*, SCENE 38 IN THE FILM *SUSUK*, AND SCENE 53 IN THE FILM *PONTIANAK HARUM SUNDAL MALAM*

Film / Shot size	JPB	Congkak	Susuk	PHSM
Long Shot	18	20	7	30
Medium Shot	11	15	7	86
Close-Up Shot	7	13	8	40

In terms of the use of camera angles, two horror films of *Jangan Pandang Belakang* and *Congkak* were using the same technique while the film of *Susuk* and *Pontianak HarumSundalMalam* were using distinctive technique. The film of *Jangan Pandang Belakang* and *Congkak* were using the same technique as those two had been directed by the same director, which is Ahmad Idham. Ahmad Idham used more camera movements and shot size of Long Shot in his film. This was proven in scene 41 of *Jangan Pandang Belakang*

when Ahmad Idham used 18 Long Shots compared to only 7 shots for close-up. The same situation occured in the film of *Congkak* when Ahmad Idham used Long Shot in 20 shots, compared with 13 shots for the close-up. Meanwhile in the film entitled *Susuk,* it used different technique when it used more close-up rather than Long Shot and Medium Shot. If we look at scene 38 of the film, the use of close-up was more onto the victim and there was no close-up that leads to the ghost. This is to give an eerie feeling to the audience through facial expressions and feelings of the characters when confronted with the ghost. The film of *Pontianak HarumSundalMalam* also used different methods in giving the impression of horror to the audience. Scene 53 of this film used more Medium Shot compared to Long Shot and close-up. In the opinion of the researcher, the director of this film, DatinPadukaSuhaimi Baba wanted to pitch out the idea of eeriness through expression and combined with the character's action, especially the character of*pontianak*.

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF THE AMOUNT OF CAMERA MOVEMENT BETWEEN SCENE 41 IN THE FILM *JANGAN PANDANG BELAKANG*, SCENE 26 IN THE FILM *CONGKAK*, SCENE 38 IN THE FILM *SUSUK*, AND SCENE 53 IN THE FILM *PONTIANAK HARUM SUNDAL MALAM*

Film / Camera movement	JPB	Congkak	Susuk	PHSM
Pan Left/Right	8	6	2	6
Track Left/Right	8	4	0	0
Tilt up/Down	2	1	0	6
Dolly In/Out	7	4	2	0
Handheld	0	1	3	15

Camera movement technique is a technique that was oftenly used by the director, Ahmad Idham in both of his horror films, *Jangan Pandang Belakang* and *Congkak*. In scene 41 of *Jangan Pandang Belakang*, Ahmad Idham used camera movement technique in 25 shots in the scene. The movement technique that oftenly chose by him were Pan and Track. Scene 26 in the film of *Congkak* used this technique in 16 shots and the technique which was oftenly used was Pan. In scene 38 in the film of *Susuk*, the camera movement technique was used in only 7 shots and the technique that was mostly used was Handheld while 27 shots in scene 53 in the film of *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam* was using the technique. The scene in this movie also used many Handheld technique. Overall, in a horror scene, camera movement technique is also used by directors to increase the impact of the horror scene to the audience.

TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF TOTAL CAMERA ANGLE BETWEEN SCENE 41 IN THE FILM *JANGAN PANDANG BELAKANG*, SCENE 26 IN THE FILM *CONGKAK*, SCENE 38 IN THE FILM *SUSUK* AND SCENE IN OF THE FILM *PONTIANAK HARUM SUNDAL MALAM*

Film / Camera angle	JPB	Congkak	Susuk	PHSM
High Angle	8	9	9	25
Eye Level	15	36	8	104
Low Angle	14	3	6	32

2) Lighting

The lighting used in horror scenes in all four films was gloomy lighting. Gloomy lighting technique in horror film can represent hidden meanings which are darkness, sombre and death. A right technique of ratio dividing in lighting application between bright and dark in horror films can create fear impact in audience's emotion. The shadow produced acts as connotation. It can symbolize a mystery of a particular matter.

b) Mise-En-Scene

TABLE 4: *MISE-EN-SCENE* COMPARISON BETWEEN SCENE 41 IN THE FILM *JANGAN PANDANG BELAKANG (JPB)*, SCENE 26 IN THE FILM *CONGKAK*, SCENE 38 IN THE FILM *SUSUK* AND SCENE 53 IN THE FILM *PONTIANAK HARUM SUNDAL MALAM (PHSM)*

Film / Mise-En-Scene	JPB	Congkak	Susuk	PHSM
Set	-Living hall -Kitchen	-Bedroom -Kitchen	-Bedroom -Balcony	-Living hall -Yard
Props	-Bottle	-Congkak	-Charm needle	-head wearer
Ghost costume	-worn out white shirt -color of yellow soil	-Sarong -worn out white bu kurung	-All black long cloth	-white inner shirt -long purple outerwear -long white skirt
Ghost makeup	-dark face -white eyes	-dark face	-dark face	-white face -red eyes

1) Set and Props

The set that was built in the film of *Jangan Pandang Belakang, Congkak, Susuk* and *Pontianak Harum Sundal malam* was normal setthat could be found in people's daily routines. Nevertheless, props played a big role in all the four involved films. As a conclusion, sets in these four films were less successful in creating horror effect to audience. This is different with the props that had been the conflict source in those films. Although they were not very successful in creating horror effects to audience but they were capable to lift up the story plot and made the story more interesting.

2) Costume and makeup

Costume and makeup can give horror effect to audience through the making of ghost characters in those films. Ghosts that were made up in the studied films had fulfilled the scary and beastly features as suggested by Noel Carrol in Thought Theory. In conclusion, without the scary and beastly features in making the ghost character through costume and makeup, then audience will not feel horror.

c) Editing

Editing technique in the four studied films could provide horror effect to audience. Tempo and space applied in the editing of the studied films could express tense and suspense feelings of the horror scenes among the audience. The editing technique that was used in all of those four films was Fast Cut. A slow tempo at the starting scene and then became faster could raise audience's mood and create horror effect. In researcher's view, this technique is appropriate in the making of an horror film.
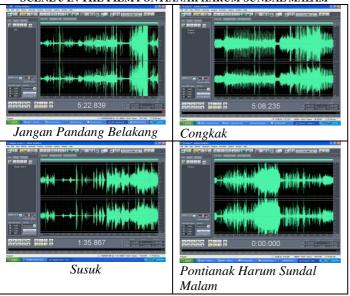
d) Audio

Audio that was blended in the horror scenes of those studied films could give horror mood to audience. The utilization of

Diegetic and Non-Diegetic sound in those films were precise and associated with editing technique to give suspense and tense to audience.

DIAGRAM 1: COMPARISON OF AUDIO WAVE FORM BETWEEN SCENE 41 IN THE FILM *JANGAN PANDANG BELAKANG*, SCENE 26 IN THE FILM *CONGKAK*, SCENE 38 IN THE FILM *SUSUK* AND SCENE 5 IN THE FILM *PONTIANAK HARUM SUNDAL MALAM*

Jangan Pandang Belakang

Congkak

Susuk

Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam

Overall, all horror films utilized almost the same 'Film Language'. What distinguishes them is the creativity of the production team in creating more horror effect to the audience with new technology. Audience in Malaysia are not exposed to the literacy in 'Film Language'. Therefore, director plays an important role in preserving the quality of 'Film Language'. Directors in Malaysia produce a film based on instinct and experience. Film with highest ticket collection does not necessarily to be the best film. This is because researcher's perspective and audience's perspective are different.

V. CONCLUSION

An horror scene is not only defined as a scene that possess two elements as stated by Noel Carrol i.e. beastly and scary, but also a character's psychological game and also a manipulation of the 'Film Language' itself. Horror scene in the form of 'Film Language' manipulation can be done through the outcome of the combination of skill and creativity of the director in forming a visual audio without the necessity to create the ghost character at first. Each horror scene in a film can be started with a symptom. This symptom is created through the application of 'Film Language'. Thus, paradigm and syntagm for 'Film Language' have to be suitable to create horror mood among the audience. The director can use the suspense element in raising the audience's fear to the high level. Sam Raimi stated that suspense can give an effective horror impact to audience. If there are many suspense elements, then the higher the suspense and tense effects in an horror film. Therefore, the director and production team must be capable to put suspense element into an horror scene to escalate the level of horror of the film.

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