

**THE STUDY OF SYMBOLS AS REFLECTED IN THE *KARATE KID* BY  
ROBERT MARK KAMEN: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS**

**TIARA ERLINDA FATIMAH**

tiaraerlindaf@gmail.com

English Education Departement

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

---

**ABSTRACT**

This paper entitled The study of symbols as reflected in the *Karate Kid* by Robert Mark Kamen A Semiotic Analysis the objectives of the paper are: (1) to explain the plot of the *Karate Kid* novel by Robert Mark Kamen, (2) to explain the meaning of symbols in the *Karate Kid* novel by Robert Mark Kamen, and (3) to explain the moral values that can be taken from the novel. This paper can be categorized into library research and applies descriptive qualitative method. The findings are: First, the plot of the novel is progsrvice plot Second, the characteristic of the main character semiotic are: karate symbolyzes brave, karate symbolyzes independent, and karate symbolyzes streght. Third, the moral values that can be taken from the novel are: (1) Fight hard because you will respect not only the power (2) key to success is independent (3) key to success is brave (4) focus with the purpose of we want (5) In life we will always drop or beat.

---

Keywords: *karate kid, plot, semiotic approach, symbols.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

An English student must have activity reading an English short stories, poem or novel the writer of this research purpose understanding deeper on the story through a signs or symbols which contain message. It means that the writer will get knowledge about semiotic from the story.

*Webster's Dictionary* (1968:2316) states that a symbol is something that stands for suggests resemblance a visible sign or invisible sign. In language, words are lowest symbols but in literature a symbol is an object is real and concrete but the meaning of it is absurd even more abstract in a short story, the reader should understand not only the symbolism itself but also the meaning outside the symbol. Usually the meaning is unprecise and it has no relationship at all

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

Kothari (2004:1), said that research method in common parlance refers to a search for knowledge. One can be define research as scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific.

In collect the data, the researcher takes some ways to collect as follows:

1. The first step is prepare the laptop, source books, note, pencil and the novel Speak.
2. The second step is reading the novel page by page anytime to understand what happen in the novel and take the quotation as proof why that happened.
3. The third step is put the source related to the topic bullying, the researcher will note what is the most important to take.
4. The fourth step is collect the bibliography, the researcher takes from library sources and online sources. The library source is the most dominant than online source.

According to Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge (2009: 6) qualitative research focused on description and interpretation and might lead to development of new concepts or theory, or an evaluation of the organizational process. Sharan

B. Merriam in his book *Qualitative Research* (2016: 195) stated that qualitative data is a bit misleading because collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **A. Theory of Plot**

Subhan (2010; 23) argues: “Plot can be defined as the necessarily chosen order of a faction. The story in novel consist of many events that should be arranged in such a way that the story becomes coherent, meaningful, and interesting”

Besides, Subhan (2010:24) has divided the plot into two kinds. They are:

1. The progressive plot

The progressive plot usually employs foreshadowing. It means that the story starts from the beginning and finishes to ending. The steps of this kind of plot are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

2. The regressive plot

This plot is called flashback because the story begins from resolution, and then followed by the events and problems of the story. This structure conveys information about events that occurred earlier. It permits author to begin the story in midst of the action but later fills in the background for a full understanding of the present events. Flashback can occur more than once and in different parts of a story.

Tennyson in Subhan (2010: 24) said that the plot has a structure which contains five parts. They are:

#### **B. LITERARY REVIEW**

Avoiding the same research, it is important that the researcher pays attention to the previous study. So, the researcher tries to find the past

studies which have studied about *Karate Kid* in digilib UAD. There is one research that has studied about this novel. Ayu Wirdani Maulidya (2017), wrote a thesis entitle “American-Chinese Acculturation as seen in the film *Karate Kid*”. Aisah Sholihah (2012), wrote a thesis entitle “The using of Politeness Strategies on FTA in *Karate Kid’s* Dialogue” and Khoirunnisa Nina (2011), wrote a thesis entitle A Pragmatics Study of Illocutionary Acts in the *Karate Kid* (2010) Film Directed by Harald Zwart”

#### **D. SEMIOTIC APPROACH**

According to Roland Barthes (Subhan, 2001:60) he suggest that the meanings of the text can be plural (more than one) when two or more different readers are involved in the semiotics. Barthes (1990:169) says:

We know that the text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.

From the quotation above, the writer concludes that Barthes assure. The importance of critical reading toward the plural text (a text that has multiple meanings). Barthes introduces five codes for the reader as follow:

1. The proairetic or narrative code (a code for understanding successive meanings).
2. The semic code (a code for understanding connotations in relation to characters, setting, or objects).
3. The hermeneutic code (a code for understanding enigma, an unknown thing, a mystery).
4. The cultural code (a code for understanding the meaning that is always related or referred by the text).

5. The symbolic code (a code for understanding the meaning that is related to antithesis such as: life and death, men and women, living, creatures and dead creatures, old and young; the code is also used for understanding “explosive shock” like a meeting between a young person and an old person, between a girl and boy, a man (woman) and a spirit etc.

#### 4. ANALYSIS

The aims of the paper are: (A) to explain the plot of the *Karate Kid* novel by Robert Mark Kamen, (B) to explain the meaning of symbols in the *Karate Kid* novel by Robert Mark Kamen, and (C) to explain the moral values that can be taken from the novel.

##### A. The plot of the *Karate Kid* novel by Robert Mark Kamen

###### 1. Exposition

Exposition is the beginning of a story. The plot of the *Karate Kid* novel begins with the introduction part. It introduces the character, characterizations, and the description of their background in the novel.

It can be proven from the quotation below:

“Where you from?” Freddy asked.

“New Jersey” Daniel said.

“Wow! What cha doing here?”

“My mom got a job with a company out here. Rocket

“Computers. Flight to the future.” He said

“Never heard of it.

“It is up and coming.” (Kamen, 1984:3)

The quotation above shows that Daniel tells about background. He tells about hometown

.

###### 2. Rising Action

This part is the moment where conflict starts in the story. The conflict starts when Daniel is playing football with Freddy, Alan,

Chuckie, and Billy. Daniel also meets Ali. It can be proven from the quotation below:

“He is clearly the best of the bunch. The ball is kicked high out of bounds onto a blanket where a group of girl sit around a radio giggling and chatting. As Daniel jogs over to retrieve the ball, Ali, cute as a button, picks it up ready to toss it to him. Their eyes meet, ALI smiles. ALI tosses him the ball. Daniel catches in on his knee, bounces it to his other knee, then to his head, then to his instep, then up to his hand. Ali’s eye twinkle. She is duly impressed. Her friends rise and they all run to the water. ALI looks over her shoulder once more before hitting the surf. DANIEL’S friends jog up.”

“Who’s that?” Daniel asked

“The hills.” Freddy said

“What’s the hills.” Daniel asked

“Rich.” Alan said (Kamen, 1984:10)

From the quotation above, it explains that Daniel is playing football with Freddy, Alan, Chuckie, and Billy.

### 3. Climax

The climax is the high point of the story. It is the danger part or the main point of the problem that the character faces. The climax of the novel is when Daniel and Jonny are yelling over the noise of the radio. His anger mounting turns it off in Ali’s arms. It can be proven from the quotation below:

“ I don’t want to talk.” Ali asked

“Defiantly, Ali switches it back on. Now all attention is on the Johnny takes the radio away

from Ali and throws it. It hits the sands and goes of just as DANIEL comes cover. DANIEL bends down to pick it up.”

“Don’t touch it” Jonny said

Daniel picks it up anyway and goes to hand it to Ali.

Jonny rips it from Daniel’s hands

“You deaf?” Johnny asked

“Let him have it.” Ali said (concerned). (Kamen, 1984:14)

From the quotation above, Johnny and Ali are fighting because of the radio. Johnny touches his nose and looks at his red-tipped fingers, almost dispassionately. Daniel stands his ground and gasps for breath. His hand is raised in a defensive position

#### 4. Falling action (winding down)

The climax starts to slowly wind down. It means that the problem will be solved soon. In this part, Daniel's first match is lost against his opponent. It can be proven from the following quotation:

“Hey man, he told me he knew the stuff. “ Freddy said

“You sure pick cool people to be friend with as the kids drift off Ali rushes to the still prostrate” Daniel asked

“Are you ok? Humiliated , hurting he wants to be left alone.” Ali said

“Leave me alone.” Daniel said

“Let me help you.” Ali asked

“She goes to touch him. He pulls away I just wanna be alone” Daniel said (Kamen, 1984:13)

From the quotation above Daniel asks Ali to leave because Daniel feels he is helpless at that time. The main character, Daniel, has suffered defeat in the match and he began to fight for victory.

#### 5. Catastrophe/resolution (the end)

Resolution is when the character solves the main problem/conflict or someone solves it for him. Finally Daniel wins the competition after ups and downs against his opponents. It can be proven from the following quotation:

“Daniel finally holds the trophy he dreamed of. In the midst of the glittering hardware are two photographs. One of JOHN KREESE, granite jawed, hard eyed in Green Beret fatigues with the caption CAPT. JOHN KRESE. IN PARRIS ISLAND, U.S.M.C and the other also of kresse in a black gi and black belt holding the biggest trophy imaginable and captioned ALL AMERICAN OPEN KARATE CHAMPION 1970-73.” (Kamen, 1984:33)

#### B. The meaning of symbols in the novel

Abrams (1985:206) reveals that symbol is not only an image. However, as anything that signifies something else in discussing literature, the term symbol is applied to a word or phrase that signifies an object even that represents something else. There are three symbols that are found in the novel. They will be explained as follows:

##### 1. Karate symbolizes brave

Someone who has the karate knowledge usually feels excited for a difficult time. The bravery in the novel starts when Daniel is playing the ball and Ali's radio is loud and bold. Then Ali turns off the radio. It can be proven from the following quotation:

“ANGLE ON ALI. SHE LOOKS UP THE HILL AT THE IMPENDING head-lights knowing what is coming. Hoping to avoid trouble, she kicks the Bali hard toward the ocean. Oblivious, DANIEL happily runs to retrieve it and does so. At the water’s edge he turns and does ALI in conversation with JOHNNY who has dismounted. Disappointed by not wanting to interfere, he heads back to his own group where ALI’S friends and the dirt bikers have Ali gathered. Suddenly, the blasting of ALI’S radio turns DANIEL’S attention and everyone else to ALI and JOHNNY. POV DANIEL-JOHNNY is yelling over the noise of the radio. His anger mounting turns it off in ALI’S arms” (Kamen, 1984:13)

From the quotation above, Ali blows up his radio so that he looks away at Daniel and finally Daniel is angry at Ali. Finally Johnny and Daniel fight but Daniel loses in the competition

## 2. Karate symbolizes independent

Someone who has the karate knowledge usually he or she can go alone at night without being accompanied by others. Daniel tries to restore what have happened to what have happened to his friend, Lucille. It can be proven from the following quotation:

“Play resume. As Bobby jogs off, he flips Daniel the bird. Daniel limps off the field, dejected, past ALI and the other aspiring cheerleaders sh..... and shaking away. He dose not raise his eyes.

Daniel sits on a couch, pensive, burdened by the events of the last two day. The door opens. Lucille rushes in. Daniel cover with a big smile, as if he didn’t have a care in the world” (Kamen, 1984:19)

From the quotation above, the independent attitude that Daniel has is when he does not care about Ali's response.

### 3. Karate symbolizes strength

Someone who has the karate knowledge feels strong in facing anything. Daniel and Johnny fight and try while Daniel tries hard competition. It can be proven from the following quotation:

For a second DANIEL does not move. Without warning he lunges upwards punching. JOHNNY leans back. DANIEL'S fist grazes his nose drawing blood. The crowd goes silent. JOHNNY touches his nose, looking at his red-tipped fingers, almost dispassionately. DANIEL stands his ground, gasping for breath his hand raised in a defensive position. (Kamen, 1984:40)

From the quotation above, although Daniel is injured in his nose and is bleeding but Daniel remains strong and brave to fight Johnny who have injured. There can be seen that people should not underestimate the other's power.

### C. Moral Values

There are several moral values that can be taken from this novel. They are explained as follows:

1. From the *Karate Kid* novel above, we can achieve the first key to success is brave or braverage because to achieve the word of success there must be the brave of many experiments present.
2. Second key to success is independent because to achieve the word of succes there must independent she or he can go alone at night without being accompanied by others.
3. Fight hard because you will respect not only the power
4. key to success on the objectives of the novel Daniel is always given to Ali every time being focus in the competition. Success in this novel is

analogous when Daniel takes part in the karate competition. Without being aware, sometimes we are often blocked by our own mental blocks, which makes us so obstructed to move forward in our lives. We often dream or arrange planning for a better life. However, it will become a plan or dream in broad daylight, for fear of starting steps taking action to make it happen.

5. We also learn the name of personal mastery. In the novel Daniel was often beaten by his peers until he wins the karate competition. Certainly, he can master all these martial arts step by step. In the novel, we can see how Daniel is trained by Ali. At the beginning of the training, he seems giving up but due to his perseverance and self-discipline which eventually led Ali to become a karate champion, even though he is injured because he is cheated by his opponents.
6. In life we will always drop or beat but we can choose whether we want to rise or not. When we fall into adversity, we can choose to feel victimized and to blame a truly unfair life. Consequently, we will not be able to change anything because we have developed an attitude of resignation without wanting to do anything to solving the problem.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

There are three main or major characters in the *Karate Kid* novel namely: Daniel as the protagonist (brave, independent, streght), (2) Johnny (not sportive, like to muck) as the antagonist, and Mr. Ali (patient, inferiority) as the companion the protagonist. first key to success is brave or braverage because to achieve the word of success there must be the brave of many experiments present. Second key to success is independent because to achieve the word of succes there must independent she or he can go alone at night without being accompanied by others. Fight hard because you will respect not only the power

## 5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M.H. 1985. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. America: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College.
- Bartness, Roland. 1970. *S/Z Essay*. France: Tell Quel
- Boulton, Mark. 2005. *Icons, Symbols and a Semiotic Web*. [Colophon](#).
- Britania Raya. 1978. *The Oxford University Press*. Oxford.
- Chandler, Daniel. 2007. *The Basic Semiotic*. Francis. Francis: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Hornby, As. 2009. *Oxford Advances Learners Dictionary of Current of English*: Oxford University.
- Hurwitz and Leeds Wendy. 1993. *Semiotics and Communication: Sign, Code, Culture*. Parkside: University of Wisconsin
- Kamen, Robert, Mark. 1984. *Karate Kid*. United States: Jerry Weintraub.
- Kenny. 1966. *How to Analyze Fiction*. New-York: Monarch Press.
- Kress, Gunther. 2010. *A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nuryanto, Burhan. 1984. *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*.
- Subhan, Bustami. 2015. *Understanding Literary Criticism*. Yogyakarta: LPPDMF.
- Subhnan, Bustami. 2015. *A Guide to Literary Criticism*. Yogyakarta: LPPDMF.
- Webster, Merriam. 1. *Webster's Dictionary*. United States: Reference books.
- Electronic Source:  
<http://.articleally.org/symbol>  
[https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Karate\\_Kid](https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Karate_Kid).  
[https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Mark\\_Kamen](https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Mark_Kamen)