

# The Analysis of Family Affection in Movie "Grown-ups"\*

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**Abstract**—The American film "Grown-ups", directed by Dennis Dugan and starring Adam Sandler and Kevin James, is a comedy set in an American town. It was released in the United States on June 25, 2010 and welcomed as a wonderful comedy movie. As far as the narrative style of the film is concerned, "Grown-ups" is in line with the classic narrative mode of comedy movies, and provides a good model for Chinese comedy movies. This paper interprets the theme of family love in the film from three perspectives of flash back narrative, hidden narrative and multi-cue narrative, which shows the various problems of kinship, friendship, love and work that people need to face when people grow up. The film makes people laugh, brings back their memory of childhood and touches people's heart. It is an enviable life comedy, and touches people deeply by the love of the family.

**Keywords**—flash back narrative; hidden narrative; multi-cue narrative; love

## I. INTRODUCTION

The film "Grown-ups" tells a series of interesting things of five friends who meet each other again after 30 years of graduation from high school because of the death of their high school basketball coach Robert. The five protagonists, with their families, returned to a lakeside villa that they had lived in when they were children, and found the precious family affection that had been inundated by daily life. The film is deeply loved by audiences and has reached high artistic achievement. Through the unique narrative ways, Dennis Dugan, the director, fixes the focus of film, captures people's attentions and minds, stimulates people's interest in watching the movie, and achieves the optimization of film narrative effects. This paper analyzes the family love and comedy effect of the movie from three perspectives of flashback narrative, hidden narrative and multi-cue narrative.

## II. FLASHBACK NARRATIVE

There are various inconsistent forms between the story sequence and the narrative sequence of the film. Gerard Genette called this form as "time inversion" [1]. At the beginning, the director used flashback technique presenting an unexpected result to audiences, and then let audiences carefully search for the deep reasons of the result in later

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stories. In other words, the director put the most prominent plots at the beginning of the movie, and then presented the film in normal time sequence and story development. At the same time, in order to achieve dramatic effect and meet the needs of audiences, Dennis Dugan inserted some important events and scenes. From the view of narrative, adopting such way of narrative is mainly for highlighting the theme of the film and creating suspense for audiences, thus receiving unexpected results. A seemingly boring and old-fashioned theme as it is, everything in this film comes so naturally. Audiences, following flashback pictures, constantly recall previous plots. When telling the stories of the film, the director consciously used way of flashback to show the five male protagonists' emotions about their childhood and the games played by them to recall their childhoods in front of audiences. This way also highlights the protagonist's mood of making fun of each other, which greatly attracts audiences. Their behaviors of treating wounded insects and birds while playing games show their humanitarian spirit; their mutual tolerance and mutual support when facing each other's secrets make people feel the value of family and friendship.

By using flashback narrative, the film presents the various problems of kinship, friendship, love and work that people need to face the five protagonists have to face when they grow up. The mutual understanding between the protagonists is the lubricant of these problems, and sincere and ingenious solutions make the perfect ending of this film quite logical. Taking the funeral of the five protagonists' basketball coach Robert as the main line, the film describes their various living conditions when they grow up. Everyone has their own family problems, such as Carlin, an actor of an opera house, is a strange man always with an Elvis-style wig on his head, rearing three daughters, from his former three wives, whose personalities are very different from each other. He finally married an old woman born in the 1920s, while their life was quite sweet. Moreover, the film presents Feder's childhood to audiences at the very beginning. Feder and his four friends love to play basketball, and their ball skills are first-class. In a basketball competition, the five boys won the championship through unity and cooperation. At the celebration dinner, their basketball coach Robert said to the five children: "I want you to pursue your dreams like what you did in today's game. So when the final whistle of life sounds, you will have no regrets." The five protagonists and their families spent a wonderful weekend in the villa. Although the funeral was the main line, the narrative of the

film was not heavy; although there were frictions, the various inconsistencies in daily life did not mean depression. From the first meeting, 30 years later, of the five old friends whose life conditions were very different from each other then, all the audiences jollily watched the film out, recalling their childhoods in jokes and thinking about their present in memories, and then let audiences carefully search for the deep reasons of the result in later stories. In other words, the director put the most prominent plots at the beginning of the movie, and then presented the film in normal time sequence and story development. At the same time, in order to achieve dramatic effect and meet the needs of audiences, Dennis Dugan inserted some important events and scenes. From the view of narrative, adopting such way of narrative is mainly for highlighting the theme of the film and creating suspense for audiences, thus receiving unexpected results. A seemingly boring and old-fashioned theme as it is, everything in this film comes so naturally. Audiences, following flashback pictures, constantly recall previous plots. When telling the stories of the film, the director consciously used way of flashback to show the five male protagonists' emotions about their childhood and the games played by them to recall their childhoods in front of audiences. This way also highlights the protagonist's mood of making fun of each other, which greatly attracts audiences a lot. Their behaviors of treating wounded insects and birds while playing games show their humanitarian spirit; their mutual tolerance and mutual support when facing each other's secrets make people feel the value of family and friendship.

### III. HIDDEN NARRATIVE

When telling the stories of a movie, directors often adopt ways combining the straight narrative and hidden narrative, and use the two ways in parallel. They convert them into the driving force of plots at an appropriate time to render atmosphere and mobilize the audience's emotions, thereby audiences' enjoyment of the film will be enhanced and better artistic effects will be delivered [2]. In the narrative modes of some comedy movies, in order to highlight the themes of films, hidden narrative is often adopted by directors. Audiences often can perceive and discover the using of hidden narrative by some shots of languages and behaviors. Generally, audiences have to attentively appreciate the theme and artistic effect of movies, the plots of which is promoted both by hidden narrative and explicit one. In terms of plots, though Robert did not appear in any scenes of the film, he can be said a well-deserved "protagonist". His outlook on life deeply influenced the five boys. And his teaching changed the five boys' concept on life, so that they grew up on the right way. It was also because of his departure that the male protagonists met each other once again 30 years later. This film is a wonderful presentation of hidden narrative. The film did not show the disputes and reconciliation between friends in accordance with the way used in other movies. Instead, the director arranged the transition that made the funeral of the coach very funny. Of course, this may be the charm of American humor. Dennis Dugan used explicit narrative description to show some sad but romantic pictures with very delicate shots, such as a golden retriever dog that was cut off from vocal cords, the people who confessed to doing

something wrong in the center of the lake, and Feder's selflessness that he gave up his opportunity at the last minute to help others achieve their dreams. Also, through the direct narrative of the five protagonist's body language and daily life trivia, their current life status is presented to the audiences. This explicit narrative art makes audiences' understanding of the story of the movie very much clear. For example, Fader, the most successful one among the five, is a well-known agent in Hollywood, marries a famous fashion designer, and has pampered children with many shortcomings; Eric, a man of vanity and unemployment, disguises himself as a rich man for the sake of his vanity, renting a good car, and his children are also spoiled; and Cote, a house-husband, is laughed at by his mother, bullied by his wife and mother-in-law and looked down on by his kids, while his wife is busy with her career to make money. Those life conditions pave the way for the ridiculous things that happened in the lakeside villa, thus increasing the comedy effect of the film.

In the film, the director concealed the reason why the Golden Retriever's vocals were cut off and the reason of their sincere confession of the past. Feder deliberately failed his last shot, but the joy of losing this shot is far beyond the joy of winning, which is a happy thing for him. The losing is a kind of selfless giving, which shows the children that it is not only victory that can bring happiness, that failures also make up a perfect life, and that everyone deserves the joy of success. Another example is a moving scene. The five men gathered together and bravely shared their little secrets, though there were lies in that. In fact, audiences will find these funny secrets are things that don't matter. As audiences, we can feel happiness in watching this movie with this way of narrative, and sink into thinking about our lives in laughter. Moreover, what the film brings us not only laughter, but also the nostalgia for our pasts and a touched soul. The bidirectional and multi-directional nature of information processing, and highlights the significance of knowledge consultation, reasoning and construction among teaching subjects. In this sense, interaction is regarded as the essence of language use in language teaching activities. The positive meaning of the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981:33) is that a lot of input will benefit the cultivation of new types of thought patterns and language skills. While, the Output Hypothesis shows that inputting is not the sufficient condition for language acquisition and outputting is an indispensable part in language acquisition, which is of great significance for college English teaching. In foreign language teaching, however, second language input mainly comes from the classroom and its quantity and quality is far below the ideal. Meanwhile, learners are unable to pay sufficient attention to the limited second language at any time. All of these reasons lead to more limited information intake. Therefore, given that second language input is severely limited, we should strengthen the salience of input information for the purpose of drawing more attention of learners. All in all, for the new type of interactive foreign language learning mode based on computer networks, input should be enhanced by certain methods, for instance, we can highlight some special items among input information, which can improve effective input by increasing the

probability that targeted items can be noticed perceived. In the positive and negative feedback of teachers and students, the students' innovation, critical thinking and cross-cultural communicative competence can be developed.

#### IV. MULTI-CUE NARRATIVE

Movies are often shot by way of multi-cue narrative. Several scenes, presented by multi-cue narrative, are interlaced with each other, and also interact with each other. Explicit storylines are strung together by a certain prop [3], and hidden ones are connected to each other through a certain topic. Segmented narrative is done by a series of paragraphs, but they are unified by common themes. Former basketball teammates reunited together thirty years later because of Robert's funeral. Their tacit understanding and humor made a lot of jokes at the resort, and also revealed many troubles after growing up. From the whole storyline, we can see that the main narrative line of "Grown-ups" is composed of the five main characters and their families' daily life in that lakeside villa, and the friendship between the characters enriches the content of the story. Dennis Dugan excels at using the unique way of time and space interlacing to make the narrative of the film orderly. The structure of his story, the reunion of the five men, once basketball teammates in high school 30 years ago, and their families at the funeral, not only conforms to the logic of the world but also shows the style of post-modern film art. Taking the coach Robert's death as a clue, the director brought together a group of people who lived in all walks of life when they grew up, presented Robert's funeral with unique American humor, and provided an opportunity for everyone to examine and focus on themselves.

In terms of the story structure of the movie, it can be divided into three parts. First, when Eric played games with his friends at the lakeside villa, he fell down and injured a bird. Second, they were playing in a water park. Finally, they were playing basketball. The screenwriter of the film put highlight in the second part. In this part, several scenes were showed together to increase the comedy effect of the film, such as, the scene of Fader's children jumping into water from a high platform, the scene of the five protagonists' wives flirting with boys at the poolside, and the scene of A middle-aged man being hung upside down when he was diving. These seemingly unrelated scenes just promoted the development of plots. In the backdrop of love, friendship and family affection, these ridiculous scenes were good enough to compose this film, and also made people very relaxed and happy.

The film gives priority to the description of family love, focusing on how a family should maintain the love between family members. When the five protagonists enjoyed their vacation with their family members, they found that they could also experience the goodness of childhood when they grew up. They not only found the feeling of childhood, but also let their wives and children have the chance to share their innocent childhood. For instance, audiences were deeply moved by one such scene. The five male protagonists' childhood friendship was still very good 30 years later, and they all had kids then. They sat at the bank of

the lake chatting about life with children playing around. Their wives also sat together doing their own businesses. This picture was quite warm and harmonious. Among the five, since Feder was busy with his work, his relation with his children became alienated. His two children, influenced by him and his wife, loved to discuss fashion and luxury goods, drinking only pure water from top brands. The games his kids played were violent and bloody. Compared with Feder, the two kids were more willing to talk with their nanny. The two kids, living in a bustling city, were addicted to electronic games, and sent a text message to the nanny when they want to drink coffee. Through this reunion, Feder felt very happy and moved when he saw his children playing with the kids of his friends at the bank of the lake just like the way they did when they were at their children's ages. The family's love, described in the film, means the love from parents. In order to educate their children, the five fathers tried to help the children find the fun of childhood and go out of computer game. They play with the children and take them to get close to the nature. In the movie, the jolly scene of the five old boys playing with their little kids moved all audiences, letting the audiences miss the life of childhood, which showed the success of the narrative of the movie.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Although the film "Grown-ups" makes audiences feel easy and cheerful, it is full of thought-provoking philosophies, leading people to fall into deep thinking about life in laughter. It is not only a movie about family love, but also a movie that touches people's hearts and brings people sweet laughter and a memory of the past childhood. The film adopts four narrative ways, straight narrative, flashback narrative, hidden narrative and multi-cue narrative, to deliver the theme and comedy effect of the film, thus showing the preciousness of family love when people grown up. The simple narrative style, real environment depiction and wonderful character description of the film exert a profound influence on audiences, and also allowed audiences to fully feel the affection of the film.

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