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FRAMING AND SOAP OPERAS

Abstract

We understand the world around us by categorizing it. We can categorize things either using the notion of similarity or the notion of framing. Since reality does not come in a structured form but we make it structured we can encounter different ways of categorizing the reality. While in some cultures the similarity notion is the major principle it is by no means the general rule. This paper sets out to analyze the ways in which the frame analysis could be applied to various issues in culture, the ways in which the classification systems of some cultures could be explained using the frames and the role of frames in explaining the structure and understanding literary works. The focal point of this paper will be the application of the notion of frames in explaining the great popularity of soap operas. The results of a survey carried out show that people find soap operas interesting to watch in a similar way in which the readers enjoy reading some of the most popular literary works.

Key words: *categorization, frame, soap operas*

TEORIJA OKVIRA I SAPUNICE

Sažetak

Kategorizacijom svijeta oko nas mi ga razumijemo. Možemo se koristiti pravilom sičnosti ili pravilom okvirnog grupisanja kada kotegorizujemo stvari oko sebe. Kako stvarnost ne karakteriše uređena forma, I kako smo mi ti koji stvarnost uređujemo možemo naići na različite načine kategorizacije realnosti. Dok se u nekim kulturama pravilo sličnosti dosljedno sprovodi, u drugima to nije slučaj. Cilj ovog rada jeste da pokaže kako se teorija okvira (frame

analysis) može primjeniti na različite aspekte kulture, kako se način klasificiranja može objasniti koristeći okvire, te da objasni kako se ova teorija primjenjuje na razumijvanje književnih tekstova. Zadatak rada je pokazati i primjenu teorije okvira na razumijvanje velike popularnosti sapunica. Rezultati sprovedene ankete pokazuju da ljudi smatraju sapunice interesantnim na sličan način na koji se pokazalo da čitatelji uživaju u čitanju popularnih književnih djela.

***Ključne riječi**: kategrizacija, okviri, sapunice.*

1. Introduction

We can encounter different ways of categorizing the reality around us. We can categorize things either using the notion of similarity[1] or the notion of framing[2]. Since reality does not come in a structured form and we make it structured we can encounter different ways of categorizing the world. While in some cultures the similarity notion is the major principle it is by no means the general rule. This paper will deal with the notion of frame. It will start from the fact that people from different cultures might experience the world around in different ways.

This does not surprise us since experience comes structured by culturally-given frames (Lakoff, 1997). Therefore, it is understandable why Eskimos experience snow differently than people from Florida. However, some general conclusions can be drawn about the ways in which people categorize reality (Lakoff, 1997). In each category we have some members that are considered to be central members, in addition to which there are also peripheral members sharing some but not all characteristics of the central members. Although there are good reasons for categorizing members of each group there are always some cases that do not follow the rule, and which have to be learned item by item. To understand the categorization employed by a certain culture we need to delve deeply into the issue, to study the culture, its roots, environment and way of living.

1 for example if we go to the supermarket we will see that nails are usually placed on the neighbouring shelves. We put close things we find similar.

2 for example if we look for nails we look for them near frames, hooks, glass, that is all we need to hung a picture on the wall

An interesting example of a very peculiar categorization has been noticed in the Australian aboriginal language Dyirbal (Lakoff, 1997). They categorize their nouns in five groups:

1. bayi: men, kangaroos, possums, bats, most snakes, most fishes, some birds, most insects...
2. balan: women, bandicoots, dogs, platypus, echidna, some snakes, some fishes, most birds...
3. balam: all edible fruit and the plants that bear them, tubers, ferns, honey, cigarettes, wine, cake.
4. bala: parts of the body, meat, bees, wind, yamsticks, some spears, most trees, grass, mud....

Although at first sight it seems there is no general pattern, they follow some rules while categorizing the reality. All words related to males and animals are assigned to the first group. Words describing females, water, fire and fighting are in the second group. In the balam group they classify all words describing nonflesh food, while all other words are grouped in the bala category.

Lakoff (1997:94) considers the following two principles major for their classification:

Principle 1: "If some noun has characteristic X (on the bases of which its class membership is expected to be decided) but is, through belief or myth, connected with characteristic Y, then generally it will belong to the class corresponding to Y and not that corresponding to X."

Principle 2: "If a subset of nouns has some particular important property that rest of the set does not have, then the members of the subset may be assigned to different class from the rest of the set to 'mark' this property; the important property is most often 'harmfulness'."

These principles account for the fact that birds although animals are in group II together with stone fish and gare fish. Birds are believed to be the spirits of dead human females, and the stone fish and the gar fish are considered harmful.

We see that framing is a very important aspect of thinking about the world. Employing different frames influences our way of thinking.

"All of this is possible because we have a flexible conceptual system, which can give rise to a number of different ways of conceptualising or framing the 'same' situation. Categorisation, together with framing, is a way of thinking about the world, one of our most important 'construal operations'." (Koveches, 2006:58)

Since speaking is one way of expressing our thoughts the relationship between framing and linguistic relativity has been considered an interesting area of research for years. Let us analyze the gender markers in different languages. It is not unusual to use gender markers with inanimate words. Surprising is the fact those gender markers are different in different languages. For example word *key* is masculine in German and feminine in Spanish; also word *bridge* is feminine in German and masculine in Spanish. When speakers of the languages were asked to describe these words using adjectives, they used different ones as the following table shows. Therefore, if the noun has a feminine gender marker in their language they use adjectives that fit the stereotypes of females, and if it has a masculine gender marker they use adjectives that fit the stereotypes of males.

Table 1. The use of adjectives in relation to different gender markers

	key	*bridge*
German	hard, heavy, jagged, metal, serrated, useful...	beautiful, elegant, fragile, peaceful, pretty, slender...
Spanish	golden, intricate, little, lovely, shiny, tiny...	big, dangerous, long, strong, sturdy, towering...

It seems that after all the relationship between thinking and speaking is not so straightforward. The question that arises is whether it is the way we think that influences our language or it is vice versa. Since there is no consensus among researchers regarding this issue it might be that the influence is mutual: the language influences to certain degree the way we think, but also the way we think affects our language.

Another good example of the strong relationship between language and the way of thinking is the word *abortion*. Should we be against it we will talk about killing an unborn child, but if we are in favor of it, we will talk about fetus. People choose to talk about fetus, because it seems to be something different from the child, and people will not feel like they are killing *somebody*. In everyday debates we use different words in order to influence people. Similar examples are euphemisms. People choose to talk about collateral damage rather than to talk about massive killing, because they do not want people to consider them murderers.

We can see that although reality is more or less similar humans conceive and express it differently. However great difference between their categorization is, it is possible to understand it provided we delve deeply into different cultures, since experience comes structured by culturally-given frames.

2. Frames and literature

The notion of frame as defining prototypes can also be applied in the study of literary texts (Koveches, 2006). When considering some universally popular stories we would see that they are built on the cross-culturally emotion frames. They all seem to confirm the following four hypotheses proposed by Hogan (2003):

1. Emotion terms are prototype-based in both their eliciting conditions and their expressive/actional consequences.
2. Prototypical narratives are generated largely from prototypes. They prominently include the prototype eliciting conditions for emotions.
3. Romantic union and social or political power are the two predominant prototypes for eliciting conditions of happiness.
4. Two structures of literary narrative are especially prominent cross-culturally. These are romantic and heroic tragi-comedy. Romantic tragi-comedy is derived from the personal prototype of happiness (achieving romantic reunion) and heroic tragi-comedy is derived from the social prototype for happiness (achieving social/political power)

The analyzed works were *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella.* Of course, we can try to analyze Bosnian famous folktale *Hasanaginca*[3] to see if all these hypotheses could be confirmed. *Cinderella* would be romantic since in the end the characters achieve personal happiness in the romantic reunion. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hasanaginca* are romantic tragedies. All three are based on many emotions, but love is the main one. We share their emotions, since we also feel happy, when the characters are happy; we feel sad when the characters are sad. Some of us even cry, when Juliet or Hasanaginca cry. Therefore, these stories are full of emotions, but they also make the readers feel happy, sad. We are happy at the end of *Cinderella* because it ends with the romantic union, and she marries a rich man, so she will be the queen. This proves that romantic union and social and political power are the two predominant prototypes for the eliciting conditions of happiness. We would as well be happy if Hasanaga forgot everything, if he repented and went to take his wife, the mother of his children, back. We would as well be happy if Romeo and Juliet could live together forever with their two rich families enjoying their happiness. Therefore, we can conclude that all four hypotheses are confirmed.

In these stories we can talk about the agents who do many things in order to achieve the final goal. On the way of achieving the goal there are different emotions:

- junctural emotions (fear, disgust, anger, wonder, mirth) – these emotions are typical for the way agent has to go through in order to achieve the goal.

-outcome emotions (happiness and sorrow)- final evaluation points for junctural emotions

sustaining emotions (romantic love and heroic perseverance) –they are called sustaining because they sustain the plot, fighting for them characters are ready to go through many things.

[3] It is a story about a woman, who lives with her husband's family and her children. She is a good mother, but also a shy woman raised in a patriarchal family. Her husband is wounded, but she is too shy to visit him. Her mother-in-low uses it to talk to her son against his wife, whom she never liked. It makes him mad, he tells her to leave his house. She does not want to leave her children, but her brother, forces her to do so. Her family as well as her husband's family is rich and well known family. To save their pride her brother decides to marry her again. Although she does not want to marry, she has to, because man are those who make decisions. She goes to her new husband, and on the way she asks them to stop to see her children. She cannot leave them, and she dies telling goodbye to them.

So the ideal happiness - based sequence would be as follows:

Sexual attraction – romantic love – romantic union – enduring happiness

Each of these stages leads into the following and the fulfillment of them brings people ideal happiness. This is the idealized frame underlying the stories. All universally popular stories may not follow this path, but they are seen in the light of this idealized frame. And the fact that they are not following this path can lead to an aesthetic and emotional effect that a story has on the readers.

3. Soap operas and framing

3.1. Introduction

We saw that there is an idealized frame underlying cross-culturally famous stories. The aim of this paper is to show the popularity of soap operas in the light of framing. First we will go through a brief history of soap operas, and then through a short research tapping into the popularity of soap operas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will see that they are undoubtedly popular, which is proved by the number of them being shown on our TV screens, and by the survey.

It seems that generally soap operas follow the above-mentioned path of achieving enduring happiness. It will be shown that the underlying frame for cross-culturally popular stories is as well a frame for now so popular soap operas. It appears that people with time watch fewer soap operas, and a possible reason could be that they almost always follow the same path, they do not surprise viewers with their content.

3.2. A brief history of soap operas

This genre was introduced in the 1930s as radio program lasting for 15 minutes. The term soap operas was coined by the media, so the word soap was used because they were sponsored by soap manufacturing companies, and word opera was used to suggest the ironic comparison of these domestic narrative concerns with the real operas. The aim of these programs was to promote the selling of soap

products, so they were made to be listened to mostly by women who bought the products, mostly working class women having enough time to listen to them.

In 1950s they were introduced on TV screens, and step by step they were expanded to last up to one hour. Viewers of soap operas also have changed. Up to 1980s it was considered those were mostly working class housewives. However, Compesi's study in 1980s shows that the viewers of the soap opera *All My Children* were mostly highly educated, with the mere exception of 9%. Still the dominant viewers were women, but also more men and teenagers started to watch them.

We can divide them in two groups:

a) open soap operas (Dallas, Dynasty, All My Children)

b) closed soap operas (those common for Latin America)

Most research was done to reveal the reasons for such a popularity of soap operas and we can see some of them in the next table.

Table 2. Overview of studies analyzing the popularity of soap operas

Researchers	Details about the research	The results of the research
Compesi (1977)	He asked 52 persons to complete the following sentence:"I like to watch All my children because..."	These are the three most often repeated answers: 1. for entertainment 2. out of habit 3. so that I could participate in the talk about them with my friends
Ien Ang (1980)	A research about the reasons people watch Dallas	Most people watch this soap opera to release tension and to escape from the pressure of everyday life as they delve into the world of the soap opera.

Paula Lewis	25 persons were asked the following question: "Why do you watch soap operas?"	These are the three most often repeated answers: 1. they are relaxing to watch 2. because they are at a convenient time 3. just to fill time

Soap operas have been popular since they appeared. It seems like everyone knew for two popular American soap operas: Dallas and Dynasty. They were the first American soap operas to be successfully marked internationally. Dallas was seen even in 57 countries by 300 million viewers. However, nowadays we have so many channels offering different soap operas, and each of them has its audience. However, they are by no means as popular as Dallas or Dynasty were.

3.3. Framing and soap operas

When we talked about framing and literature we mentioned that those cross-culturally known stories are based on the shared emotion frames. It appears that soap operas are in a similar way based on the shared emotion frames. Hogan's four hypotheses proved true when it comes to universally popular stories, so let us now see if they are true for soap operas as well.

Soap operas are based on very strong emotions. The typical plot is as follows: two persons meet, they fall in love, but they cannot be together, because they do not belong to the same social class and/ or some secrets from the past are separating them. Many are against their happiness, so they do all possible evil things to prevent the two from being together. Two people in love have to go through so many things, have to cry so much, have to lose so much in order to be together in the end in the eternal happiness. All kind of emotions are present there.

Agents are two main characters, who fall in love with each other, their goal is to be together. On the way of achieving that, they, as well as those who oppose to their love feel fear, anger, wonder. At certain points they are very happy and sometimes very sad, but in the end the main characters are happy because they have finally completely

fulfilled their romantic love. All types of emotions associated with popular literary works are present here: junctural emotions, outcome emotions and sustaining emotions. The viewers feel emotions their characters feel. The viewers are sad when the characters are sad, and they are happy when the characters are happy. We can hear very often that somebody cried watching some of the scenes of her/his favorite soap opera. The whole plot is based on strong emotions of the characters eliciting the strong emotions of the viewers. Not rarely are we angry with those evil characters who do everything to hurt the good ones, and we cannot even imagine those people not being evil in the real life. Definitely the first two hypotheses associated with the cross-culturally popular stories are typical for the popular soap operas as well. In them emotion terms are prototype-based in both their eliciting conditions and their expressive consequences. The plot of the soap operas is mostly about the eliciting conditions of emotions.

According to the third hypothesis romantic reunion and social or political power are the two predominant prototypes for the eliciting conditions of happiness. These are the goals that characters in stories try to achieve. These are exactly the goals that characters of soap operas try to achieve all the time. They are in love, but many things prevent them from being together, and they are sad all the time when they are not together. They fight to be together, but it is not so easy to achieve. On certain points they are together and they are happy, but then again something separates them, all until the very end when they are united forever. Usually one of the two persons in love is very rich and respected person, (s)he is a member of rich family, but (s)he is usually a doctor, a lawyer, a successful businessman/businesswoman. The other person is usually poor, but in the end they are united and they both achieve social power as well.

However, we know that many are sad in the end and reason is usually the death of the beloved or the complete loss of social or political power. In soap operas some characters are rich and successful, but very evil, and in the end for justice to be complete they lose all their wealth and social power. Viewers know that only losing wealth and social power will make those characters sad, so viewers are satisfied when it happens. To make the soap operas more realistic everybody cannot be happy. Usually there are also other two persons in love, who are not united even in the end, because

one of them dies. The death of the beloved and the complete loss of social and/or political power are two predominant prototypes for the eliciting conditions of sorrow in universally popular stories, but also in soap operas as well.

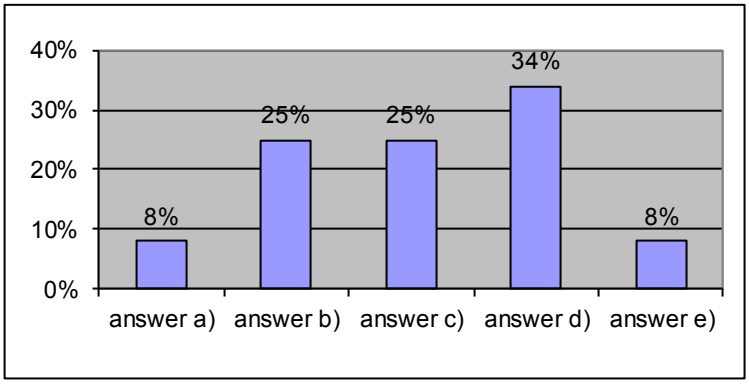
According to the fourth hypothesis there are two structures of literary narratives prominent cross-culturally: romantic tragi-comedy (derived from personal prototype of happiness-achieving romantic reunion) and heroic tragi-comedy (derived from the social prototype of happiness-achieving social/political power). So we see that there are two universal eliciting conditions for happiness: romantic union and social domination. When it comes to soap operas they are mostly romantic comedies, as the final goal is fulfilled when two persons are finally together forever. So the main sustaining emotion is romantic love, as it is something that helps characters to go through all problems to achieve it in the end. However, the achieving of social domination is not completely excluded. Usually when the soap opera starts, one of the two in love is poor but in the end s(he) becomes a successful and respected member of a society.

Since all four hypotheses are confirmed when soap operas are in question, we can say that as cross-culturally popular stories are based on emotion frame, soap operas are also based on the shared emotion frame. However, the author of stories go beyond this frame, and very often we read the stories that do not follow the same frame, but that are set against the idealized version of reality. Therefore, stories like Hemingway's "A very short story" surprise us with the ending, where neither of the characters achieve their happiness. We expected, we hoped that they will be together and happy at the end, but ending it in a different way author creates aesthetic and emotional effect on the readers. When it comes to the soap operas we are almost never surprised by the ending. It is the happy end, and it is very predictable. That makes viewers with time bored with them, as they all follow the same path, in the end almost everybody gets what he/she deserves, with the exception of few characters who may die or in the end they may be still looking for happiness. These few characters remind us that reality is sometimes cruel. However, it may not be so cruel to make the main characters unhappy.

4. Survey analysis

A survey was carried out in order to prove the popularity of soap operas, to check the reasons for watching soap operas and to see which emotions are, according to the viewers, most present in them. 40 persons (aged 20-49), randomly chosen, were included in the survey. 10 of them are male, and 30 are female.

Answers to the first question proved that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina watch soap operas (see graph 1). So 3 persons (8%) watch more than one soap opera, 10 (25%) watch only one soap opera, 10 (25%) watch it from time to time, 14 (34%) watched them earlier, but now they do not watch them, and only 3 persons (8%) state that they have never watched soap operas.



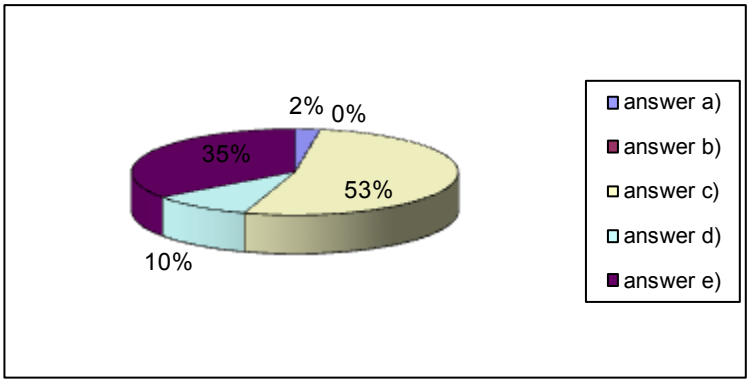
Graph 1. Do people in B&H watch soap operas?

Only 8% have never watched soap operas, and even 34% watched them earlier but not anymore. One of the reasons for this is explained earlier. They watched them, but due to the predictability of events people become tired of them with its similar plot.

The second question was asked in order to check why people watch soap operas (see graph 2)

1 person (3%) states that the reason for watching soap operas is the fact they are about characters fighting for their happiness. None of the people (0%) state that the reason is because they recognize themselves or some people around them in the characters of soap

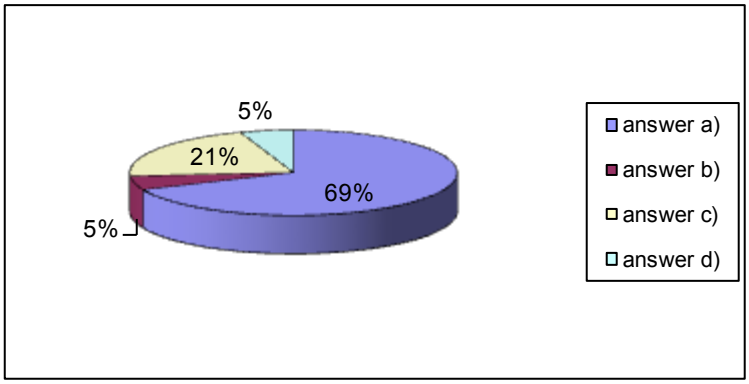
operas. 21 persons (52%) state that they watch soap operas because they help them to get out of the rut. 4 persons (10%) watch soap operas because of everything mentioned above. And 14 persons (35%) do not state their reasons because they do not watch soap operas.



Graph 2. Why people watch soap operas?

These results show that persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina are tired of their reality, and they enjoy watching other reality on TV screens. They watch characters fighting for their happiness, they share the happiness with characters as they achieve personal happiness in the end. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the economic situation is very difficult, so people rarely live happily, having everything they need. So they relax watching their favorite characters having all they need in the end, and people hope to experience the same destiny.

The third question was to state which of the offered emotions is most present in soap operas, and graph 3 shows the results.



Graph 3. Which emotions are present in soap operas?

26 persons (69%) think that love is most present emotion in soap operas, 2 persons (5%) think it is rage. 8 persons (21%) think it is sorrow, and 2 persons (5%) think it is happiness. Two persons could not find among these emotions the one that is most present, so they state that all of these emotions are equally present in soap operas. Earlier we said that romantic love is the sustaining emotion in soap operas, and this survey proves that people share the same opinion. While filling the survey people stated that this is not easy question, because there are so many emotions strongly represented in soap operas, but if they had to choose most of them chose love. Love is the sustaining emotion, and it gives the characters strength to go through so many things. Viewers recognized sorrow as the second most present emotion, and we know that it is together with happiness most common outcome emotion. Out of junctural emotions only rage was offered, and 2 persons even find this one the most present in soap operas. Definitely emotions are very important in soap operas, and viewers are aware of it.

5. Conclusions

It seems that soap operas are popular nowadays, but of course we cannot talk about the popularity in terms of the popularity of Dallas or Dynasty. People are getting tired of so many soap operas offered by numerous channels. However, people still do watch them, as the results of the survey indicate. The popularity of soap operas can be associated with the framing. All soap operas are based on shared emotion frame, the one very similar to the frame characteristic for cross-culturally popular stories.

The plot of the soap operas is based on emotions, characters feel strong emotions, and viewers share those emotions. When we talk about stories, we can talk about two types: romantic and heroic tragi-comedies. When we talk about soap operas we can talk about romantic comedies, as in the end characters achieve the personal happiness in romantic union. We should not forget it is followed by achieving social power as well. The tragic element typical for the stories like *Romeo and Juliet* is usually excluded from soap operas[4].

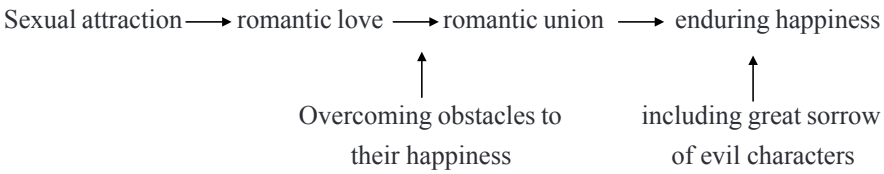
[4] However, there are some soap operas of Turkish origin including the tragic end, the reunion is missing, or even one of the main characters dies.

It could be destiny for two minor characters but not for the main characters. It is relaxing to watch them when you can predict that in the end they will be happy. So when you are free why not to watch a soap opera, and the results of the survey show that people watch them mostly to get out of the rut.

The results also show that people watched them more earlier than they do now. The possible reason is the fact that they always follow the idealized frame:

Sexual attraction ⟶ romantic love ⟶ romantic union ⟶ enduring happiness

Stories are set against this idealized frame, and many do not follow it making greater effect on us. We all like happy ends, but if all soap operas follow the same idealized happiness frame. It could be presented as follows.



And this is the predictable frame underlying soap operas. No matter how predictable it is, people still watch them, because they like to watch emotional stories.

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