

## THE GRAND SYNTAGMATIQUE OF POPULAR GENRE IN INDONESIAN CINEMA

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the narrative structures of Indonesian popular films using Christian Metz's Grand Syntagmatique framework. Three selected films—*KKN di Desa Penari* (2022), *Dilan 1990* (2018), and *Agak Laen* (2024)—represent horror, romance, and comedy genres that achieved millions of admissions and reinforced the dominance of local cinema in the domestic market. The research employs structural textual analysis, consisting of segmentation, classification, and syntagmatic tabulation. Findings reveal that each genre strategically utilizes specific syntagmatic patterns: horror emphasizes suspense through alternation and bracket sequences, romance highlights intimacy via autonomous shots and ordinary sequences, while horror-comedy combines episodic and parallel sequences to generate humor and tension. These results demonstrate that the success of popular films relies not only on thematic resonance but also on the effectiveness of narrative structures in delivering accessible and engaging cinematic experiences. This study contributes to Indonesian film scholarship by underscoring the significance of formal analysis as a complement to thematic approaches, offering insights into how structural “grammars” shape audience appeal and genre conventions.

**Keywords:** Christian Metz, Grand Syntagmatique, Genre, Indonesian popular cinema, narrative structure

### INTRODUCTION

Since the Reformasi period, the Indonesian film industry has witnessed a significant revival, characterized by an extraordinary increase in domestic box office success. This trend is particularly noticeable in the popularity of genre films such as horror, romance, and comedy, which have consistently attracted millions of viewers and set new records for local film attendance. The films *KKN di Desa Penari* (2022), *Dilan 1990* (2018), and *Agak Laen* (2024) have been chosen for this study due to their outstanding commercial and cultural influence. Referring to [filmindonesia.or.id](http://filmindonesia.or.id) (2025) data, *KKN di Desa Penari*, a supernatural horror movie released in 2022, surpassed 10 million admissions, becoming the top-grossing

Indonesian film at that time. This achievement highlights a strong rebound in movie theater attendance post-pandemic and, more importantly, a significant audience preference for domestic content. This trend indicates a broader reclaiming of market share by national cinemas over international blockbusters, fueled by a renewed appetite for culturally relevant stories and collective experiences after periods of disruption. In line with this trend, *Agak Laen*, a horror-comedy released in 2024, also showed remarkable commercial success, attracting 9,126,607 admissions and ranking as the 3rd highest-grossing Indonesian film to date. This further reinforces the idea that local productions are not just recovering but flourishing in the domestic market. The romantic drama *Dilan 1990*, released in 2018, drew in 6.3 million viewers, making it the best-selling Indonesian film of its year and the 6th highest-grossing local film of all time. The ongoing commercial success of its sequels, *Dilan 1991* and *Milea: Suara dari Dilan*, further highlights a steady interest in the franchise (see table 1).

**Tabel 1. Best-selling Indonesian Movie of all time (until December 2025)**

Rank	Title	Admissions	Year
1	Jumbo	10,171,372	2025
2	KKN di Desa Penari	10,061,033	2022
3	Agak Laen	9,126,607	2024
4	Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss! Part 1	6,858,616	2016
5	Satan's Slaves 2: Communion	6,391,982	2022
6	Dilan 1990	6,315,664	2018
7	Miracle in Cell No. 7	5,852,916	2022
8	Vina: Sebelum 7 Hari	5,815,945	2024
9	Dilan 1991	5,253,411	2019
10	Sewu Dino	4,886,406	2023

Source: Processed by the author (December 2025)

The historical trajectory of this success can be traced back to the early 2000s, a period regarded as the “comeback” era dominated by teen dramas and horror films (Esfandari, 2016). This revival was ignited by Rizal Mantovani and Jose Purnomo’s *Jelangkung* (2001), which triggered a widespread trend where horror productions began to “mushroom” across the industry (Adiprasetyo, 2023; Lestari & Sihombing, 2022). Unlike pre-1998 horror that relied on traditional rural folklore, contemporary Indonesian horror shifted toward urban legends and metropolitan settings. This transformation was driven by a new generation of filmmakers—many of whom were foreign film school graduates with backgrounds in advertising and music videos—bringing a more sophisticated aesthetic and technological precision to the genre (Esfandari, 2016; Lestari & Sihombing, 2022).

However, despite these films commercial success and aesthetic evolution, academic discourse in Indonesian film studies remains heavily skewed toward thematic, sociological, or cultural dimensions. Current scholarship typically examines the “what” of the narrative—exploring myths, social insights, and cultural messages (thematic resonance), while often neglecting the “how” of its creation. While these analyses are crucial for understanding why a story resonates culturally, they do not fully capture how the film, as a formal medium, actively constructs that resonance through its internal cinematic structure.

This research argues that the widespread appeal of contemporary Indonesian cinema is fundamentally rooted in its cinematic syntax. A film's success is not just a result of its themes, but also its foundational structure and the mechanisms that generate meaning. To address this scholarly gap, this study employs Christian Metz’s *Grand Syntagmatique* framework to analyze the narrative architecture of three seminal blockbusters: *KKN di Desa Penari*, *Dilan*

1990, and *Agak Laen*. By shifting the focus from thematic content to formalist structural analysis, this study seeks to decode the “grammars” that shape audience engagement and define modern genre conventions in Indonesian cinema.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Christian Metz remains a seminal figure in film theory, renowned for his foundational conceptualization of *langage cinématographique* (cinematic language). His scholarly project sought to delineate the systematic structures through which cinema communicates meaning, facilitating a transition from impressionistic, subjective critiques toward a more rigorous, scientific approach to the semiotics of narrative cinema.

By applying Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic theories to film, Metz proposed the *Grande Syntagmatique*, a system that categorizes cinematic segments into structural units to decode the formal logic of diverse genres (Bellour & Metz, 2018; Rushton, 2012). A syntagmatic analysis of the *Dollars Trilogy* can reveal the autonomous segments and stylistic unity of the Western genre. By examining the formal structuring codes, one can understand how these films create a cohesive narrative and stylistic identity (Roth, 2014). The utility of this framework is particularly evident in its capacity to deconstruct genre-specific mechanics; in historical dramas—as exemplified by studies of *12 Years a Slave*—the application of Metzian syntagmatic types, often in conjunction with Barthesian codes, illuminates the narrative techniques used to repair stereotypes and convey profound ideological messages (Jitaru, 2020). Ultimately, by treating the film as a formal text governed by discernible rules, Metz provided the essential tools to analyze cinema as a structured discourse rather than mere entertainment.

Recent scholarship demonstrates several concrete applications of Metz’s semiotic theory within the Indonesian cinematic landscape. Devano et al. (2022) utilized Metz’s “Large Syntagmatic Category” to deconstruct Edwin’s *Postcards From The Zoo* (2012), systematically categorizing 63 segments into eight syntagmatic types—including autonomous shots, parallel, and episodic sequences—to map the representation of animal reintroduction. Their analysis identified that 20 specific segments corresponded to distinct narrative phases, proving the method’s precision in tracing thematic progression (Devano et al., 2022). Furthermore, Hutama et al. (2023) applied this framework to investigate how ethnic stereotypes are reproduced through *mise-en-scène*, demonstrating that cinematic techniques can inadvertently reinforce social prejudice (Hutama & Merdhi, 2023). Beyond formal structures, the framework has been extended to audience studies; Robin et al. (2024) argue that meaning-making is a shared interpretive process between creators and viewers, akin to linguistic competence (Robin & Giancinta, 2024). Consequently, contemporary Indonesian film analysis continues to rely on this systematic approach to decode complex cinematic signs (Prabowo, 2024).

The practical lineage of Metz’s theory can be traced back to foundational experiments, most notably Lev Kuleshov’s montage work. Here, syntagmatic units generate meaning through contiguity—as seen in sequences where a neutral face paired with different objects (soup, a revolver, or a baby) evokes distinct emotional responses through minimal structural shifts (McBride, 2016).

Metz’s methodology further transcends conventional boundaries, finding relevance in hypertext and digital media studies. The contextual nature of syntagmatic sequences allows scholars to investigate how larger units convey meaning in non-linear formats (Ekundayo & Akinbobola, 2016). Similarly, documentary analysis has been enriched by Metz’s framework, particularly regarding the integration of musical and visual symbols (Ngong, 2020), drawing on a lineage that includes Wollen, Peirce, and Eco. Current applications also focus on how audiences derive meaning through shared interpretive skills (Robin & Giancinta, 2024).

Finally, Metz's concept of multiplicity informs the study of “imageflow,” where sequences of moving images arranged over time exhibit variation even when event unity is disrupted (Bateman, 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing Christian Metz's (1974) *Grande Syntagmatique* as the primary analytical apparatus to deconstruct the narrative architecture of contemporary Indonesian cinema. Metz's framework is chosen for its capacity to identify the “units of narrative” (*unités narratives*) that constitute the cinematic discourse, moving beyond mere shot analysis to understand the logic of the sequence (Metz, 1974; Stam et al., 1992). The selection of the research corpus follows a purposive sampling strategy, identifying three generic benchmarks (Altman, 1999): the supernatural horror *KKN di Desa Penari* (2022), the romantic drama *Dilan 1990* (2018), and the horror-comedy hybrid *Agak Laen* (2024). These films are selected based on their role in standardizing narrative grammars that define the aesthetic expectations of the modern Indonesian audience.

The analytical core involves a rigorous process of cinematic segmentation, a method long established in semiotic film analysis to dismantle a filmic text into its constituent narrative units (Buckland, 2000; Monaco & Lindroth, 2009). This procedure begins with a macro-segmentation phase, identifying major narrative blocks based on shifts in dramatic action, temporal markers, and spatial transitions. Subsequently, a micro-segmentation is conducted through a meticulous shot-by-shot observation to classify each segment into one of Metz's eight categories of syntagmatic arrangement: the autonomous shot, parallel syntagma, bracket syntagma, descriptive syntagma, alternating syntagma, the scene, the episodic sequence, and the ordinary sequence (Metz, 1974).

The application of this taxonomy in an Indonesian context follows the methodological precedent set by Devano et al. (2022), who successfully utilized the *Grande Syntagmatique* to trace narrative phases in contemporary Indonesian art cinema, and Utama et al. (2023), who employed Metzian analysis to decode cultural codes within filmic structures. Each segment in this study is coded based on its spatio-temporal properties—specifically, how it manages continuity and ellipsis—facilitating a granular comparison between the pacing and structural density of the three films.

The final stage involves a comparative synthesis, where structural data is interpreted against genre conventions. This stage moves beyond descriptive cataloging to investigate how specific syntagmatic choices—such as the dominance of descriptive syntagmas in horror or episodic sequences in romance—generate specific emotional engagements (Robin & Giacinta, 2024). To ensure reliability, the coding process underwent iterative viewing cycles and peer debriefing, a validation technique essential in qualitative film studies to mitigate interpretive bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## RESULTS

Systematic segmentation of the research corpus reveals that Indonesian popular cinema operates through a flexible yet patterned cinematic grammar. Across horror, romance, and comedy genres, the analysis identifies a consistent reliance on specific syntagmatic clusters to construct narrative intelligibility and emotional impact.

### The Syntagmatics of Horror: An Analysis of *KKN di Desa Penari*

The analysis of *KKN di Desa Penari* reveals a strategic deployment of various syntagma to build its horror narrative and atmosphere, effectively generating a pervasive sense of dread and suspense.

1. **Autonomous Shot:** Frequently used for *jump scares* and to highlight crucial mystical or symbolic details, such as close-ups on Dawu's bracelet or the fearful expressions of

characters after supernatural encounters. Extended sequence shots during rituals or Badarawuhi's dance also immerse the audience and build tension gradually.<sup>20</sup> These shots are vital for controlling audience focus and triggering immediate, strong emotional responses, a critical element in horror films.

2. **Scene:** Serves as the primary block for character interactions and plot progression, maintaining unity of time, place, and action. Key examples include Pak Prabu's initial warning, which foreshadows danger and establishes the conflict between modern and traditional worlds, the students' interactions at their lodge, revealing group dynamics and escalating tension, and the pivotal meetings with Mbah Buyut, which unveil supernatural information and mark narrative turning points.
3. **Episodic Sequence:** Crucial for depicting the cumulative impact of supernatural events without strict spatio-temporal continuity. This includes the progression of various supernatural disturbances experienced by the students, the gradual, unsettling changes in Bima and Ayu's behavior, and the repeated, fragmented attempts to seek help. This syntagma effectively builds a continuous sense of pervasive threat, showing how the supernatural gradually infiltrates the characters' lives.
4. **Parallel Syntagm:** Employed to create intense dual tension and highlight thematic connections by intercutting simultaneous events in different locations. Examples include Nur's search for Bima and Ayu juxtaposed with Widya and Wahyu getting lost in the forest, and the intercutting of Badarawuhi's rituals in the spirit world (Angkoromurko) with the deteriorating physical and mental condition of the students in the real world. This visually links supernatural causes to physical effects, reinforcing horror and despair, and emphasizing the omnipresent danger.
5. **Descriptive Syntagm:** Essential for establishing the film's eerie atmosphere and introducing significant locations. This includes the initial shots of the remote, silent village and dense forests, the visualization of the forbidden Tapak Tilas, and close-ups on ritualistic objects or traditional symbols. These elements immerse the audience in the unsettling environment and build anticipation of the supernatural, grounding the horror in a culturally specific, eerie local environment. The visual establishment of the village, Tapak Tilas, and ritualistic objects immerses the audience in a world where the mystical is inherent, suggesting that the film's success in horror is deeply tied to its ability to visually evoke culturally resonant fears.
6. **Bracket Syntagm:** Used for non-linear contextual information. Examples include Bima's dream about Dawu, revealing his connection to the supernatural threat, and Nur's visions of the past, providing crucial background on the curse's origin. The film's epilogue, featuring a documentary interview, also functions as a bracket sequence, framing the main narrative from a future perspective.
7. **Alternating Syntagm:** Builds suspense and highlights moral choices by interspersing contrasting narrative paths. This is evident in the intercutting between the students' deliberate violation of village rules (especially Bima and Ayu) and the immediate supernatural consequences that begin to unfold. It also heightens tension during rescue attempts versus the increasing suffering of the cursed characters, underscoring the struggle between human efforts and overwhelming supernatural forces.
8. **Ordinary Sequence:** Significantly contributes to reinforcing themes and creating a sense of inevitability through repetition, often with slight variations. This includes the repeated appearances of Badarawuhi or the dancer figure, the escalating disturbances at the lodge, and the recurring motif of ignored warnings from local elders. This repetition emphasizes the constant presence of evil and how it gradually claims its victims, building a chilling horror atmosphere and showing that the supernatural entity is becoming bolder and more



powerful. The repetition normalizes the abnormal, making the terror feel inescapable and pervasive.

**Table 2. Syntagmatic Distribution in *KKN di Desa Penari***

Syntagma Type	Observed Frequency / Prominence
Autonomous Shot	High
Scene	High
Episodic Sequence	High
Parallel Syntagm	High
Descriptive Syntagm	High
Bracket Syntagm	Moderate
Alternating Syntagm	High
Ordinary Sequence	High

Source: Processed by the author

The analysis reveals that *KKN di Desa Penari* strategically leverages the *Alternating Syntagm* and *Ordinary Sequence* to create a sustained, escalating sense of dread and pervasive threat. The intercutting of simultaneous dangers (*Alternating*) keeps the audience on edge, while the repeated manifestations of the supernatural (*Ordinary*) normalize the abnormal, making the terror feel inescapable. The *Descriptive Syntagm* is particularly vital for grounding the horror in a culturally specific, eerie local environment. The visual establishment of the village, *Tapak Tilas*, and ritualistic objects immerses the audience in a world where the mystical is inherent, suggesting that the film's success in horror is deeply tied to its ability to visually evoke culturally resonant fears. The *Scene* provides the necessary narrative anchor for character interactions and plot progression, while *Episodic Sequences* efficiently convey the cumulative impact of the supernatural on the protagonists, building a relentless sense of impending doom. This combination of syntagma effectively constructs the core poetics of horror, characterized by dread, suspense, and jump scares.

### The Syntagmatics of Romance: An Analysis of *Dilan 1990*

The analysis of *Dilan 1990* reveals a skillful employment of various syntagma to craft its compelling romance narrative and evoke a strong sense of nostalgia.

1. ***Autonomous Shot***: Used to highlight intimate romantic details, subtle character expressions, and crucial moments that build emotional connections between Dilan and Milea. Close-ups on letters or poems Dilan gives Milea, Milea's smiles while reading them, or Dilan's iconic appearances on his motorcycle convey immediate emotional information, allowing the audience to empathize with their developing feelings and building intimacy.
2. ***Scene***: The most fundamental building block for character interaction and plot development, maintaining unity of time, place, and action. Examples include Dilan and Milea's first meeting, which establishes their unique dynamic and introduces Dilan's character, numerous school canteen interactions, showing their social environment and relationship growth, and Dilan escorting Milea home, deepening intimacy and trust through dialogue. These scenes allow the narrative to progress linearly and logically.
3. ***Episodic Sequence***: Crucial for the romance genre, this syntagma depicts the evolution of Dilan and Milea's relationship over time, often through a series of thematically linked but temporally or spatially discontinuous moments. This includes montages of Dilan's unique approaches, their interactions with friends and family, and the various challenges they face, all contributing to the cumulative development of their love story and building a continuous sense of romance.

4. **Parallel Syntagm:** Utilized to display simultaneous events in different locations, creating comparisons, contrasts, or tension. Examples include intercutting Dilan's school life with Milea's home life, or Dilan's activities with his motorcycle gang contrasted with Milea's interactions with her girlfriends. This highlights their differing worlds yet interconnectedness, and can build tension from external conflicts impacting their relationship, ultimately showing how their love bridges these differences.
5. **Descriptive Syntagm:** Essential for building the film's nostalgic 1990s atmosphere and introducing key settings. This includes sequences showcasing 1990s Bandung cityscapes, the school environment, and close-ups on romantic objects like letters or gifts. These visuals immerse the audience and evoke a sense of authenticity and longing for the past, contributing significantly to the film's cultural appeal.
6. **Bracket Syntagm:** Appears in the form of Milea's future narration, which frames the entire story, providing an adult perspective and reflection on the events. Brief flashbacks also offer context for characters backgrounds or past events, providing important background information.
7. **Alternating Syntagm:** Used to illustrate Milea's internal dilemma and build romantic tension, particularly in her choice between Dilan and Beni. It also highlights the contrasting facets of Dilan's character (gang life vs. school life), showing the complexities of his persona and how he balances his teenage life, which can create tension if his outside actions affect his relationship.
8. **Ordinary Sequence:** Significantly contributes to reinforcing themes and creating nostalgia through repeated motifs. This includes the recurring meetings between Dilan and Milea on the street, the repetition or referencing of Dilan's iconic dialogues, and the frequent scenes of Dilan escorting Milea on his motorcycle. These repetitions build familiarity and become hallmarks of their romance, fostering audience nostalgia and deepening the emotional connection, making the film's romantic "grammar" highly memorable and resonant with its target audience.

**Table 3. Syntagmatic Distribution in *Dilan 1990***

Syntagma Type	Observed Frequency / Prominence
Autonomous Shot	High
Scene	High
Episodic Sequence	High
Parallel Syntagm	Moderate
Descriptive Syntagm	High
Bracket Syntagm	Moderate
Alternating Syntagm	Moderate
Ordinary Sequence	High

Source: Processed by the author

The success of *Dilan 1990* in building intimacy and emotional progression is largely attributable to the prominence of the *Scene* and *Episodic Sequence*. Scenes provide sustained, intimate interactions crucial for developing dialogue-driven romance and character depth, while Episodic Sequences effectively portray the gradual unfolding of their relationship over time, allowing for emotional arcs to develop organically. The *Ordinary Sequence* serves as a powerful tool for reinforcing iconic moments and fostering audience nostalgia. The repetition of specific interactions, lines, and visual motifs creates a sense of familiarity and deepens the emotional connection, making the film's romantic grammar highly memorable and resonant

with its target audience. The strategic use of *Descriptive Syntagma* is also vital for immersing the audience in the nostalgic 1990s setting, which is a significant part of the film's appeal.

### **The Syntagmatics of Comedy: An Analysis of *Agak Laen***

The analysis of *Agak Laen* demonstrates how the film effectively utilizes various syntagma to construct its unique horror-comedy narrative, balancing humor with moments of tension.

1. ***Autonomous Shot*:** Frequently used to create instant comedic or horror effects, or to highlight important details that build atmosphere. Examples include close-ups on shocked or panicked facial expressions of characters after realizing a visitor has died, effectively conveying emotional intensity and the comedic impact of the absurd situation. Close-ups on objects related to the haunting spirit, like moving objects or fleeting shadows, draw attention to symbolic or supernatural elements while eliciting laughter or tension. Single shots showing exaggerated reactions of characters to something scary, or the camera focusing on a silly detail amidst a tense situation, maximize impact and highlight key moments in the horror-comedy plot.
2. ***Scene*:** The clearest narrative building block, maintaining unity of time, place, and action, where most character interactions and plot developments occur. Examples include the visitor's death scene inside the haunted house, which establishes the main conflict and reveals the friends' personalities under pressure. Most of the film features discussion scenes inside the haunted house, where the friends plan how to cover up their crime or deal with disturbances from the haunting spirit. Police interrogation scenes also serve as clear scenes, revealing information about the investigation and the friends' attempts to lie. These scenes allow the narrative to develop linearly and logically, providing clear understanding of events and their reasons.
3. ***Episodic Sequence*:** Used to show narrative development not strictly bound by unity of time and place, but unified by a common theme or purpose. This allows the film to jump in time or location to show the broader impact of events. Examples include the progression of the haunted house's popularity after the victim's spirit haunts it, illustrating the irony of their unexpected success. Various efforts by the friends to cover up the death are also presented episodically, building a narrative of their panic and absurdity. Disturbances from the victim's spirit are also presented episodically, unified by the theme of the spirit's continuous presence and its effect on the house and the friends' mental state.
4. ***Parallel Syntagma*:** Employed to display two or more simultaneous events in different locations, often to create comparison, contrast, or tension. This includes intercutting the friends' activities in the busy haunted house with the police investigation elsewhere, creating dual tension. The film also uses parallel sequences to show the different, often humorous, reactions of each friend when facing difficult situations. Furthermore, it contrasts normal life outside the haunted house with the chaos inside, reinforcing ironic comedy.
5. ***Descriptive Syntagma*:** Used to build atmosphere, introduce locations, or highlight important visual details without directly advancing the narrative. This includes the introduction of the shabby, unkempt haunted house, establishing a gloomy but potentially funny atmosphere. Visualizations of the lively night market provide a dynamic social context. Close-ups on silly horror props or objects related to the haunting spirit provide visual information about the friends' work environment and strengthen the horror-comedy through absurd and eerie visuals.
6. ***Bracket Syntagma*:** Can appear as flashbacks or dream sequences, presenting information non-linearly and discontinuously. Examples include short flashbacks detailing the visitor's death or the friends' panic, providing new perspectives on the chaos. Dreams or visions about the haunting spirit offer important information about its nature. Brief narration from



the police's perspective can also provide additional information about the investigation and increase tension.

7. **Alternating Syntagm:** Used to show different choices or possibilities, or to build tension by displaying two different narrative paths that will eventually converge. This is evident in the intercutting between the friends' attempts to cover up their crime and the police's efforts to uncover the truth, creating intense anticipation. It also contrasts the reactions of haunted house visitors who are genuinely scared by the real horror effects with those who merely laugh, highlighting humorous discrepancies.
8. **Ordinary Sequence:** Used to emphasize specific themes, motifs, or ideas, often with slight variations. This includes the repeated disturbances from the deceased visitor's spirit, which builds a chilling horror atmosphere and shows the spirit becoming stronger. The various absurd attempts by the friends to cover up their crime also become a recurring motif, strengthening the comedic element. The typical panic and absurdity of each character (Bene, Jegel, Boris, and Oki) in tense situations also recur, reinforcing their comedic identities and providing consistent laughter.

**Table 4. Syntagmatic Distribution in *Agak Laen***

Syntagma Type	Observed Frequency / Prominence
Autonomous Shot	High
Scene	High
Episodic Sequence	High
Parallel Syntagm	High
Descriptive Syntagm	High
Bracket Syntagm	Moderate
Alternating Syntagm	High
Ordinary Sequence	High

Source: Processed by the author

The analysis indicates that *Agak Laen* heavily relies on the *Scene* for its comedic effect, particularly for verbal and situational humor arising from the interactions of the four main characters within unified spaces and times. The *Ordinary Sequence* (as a general term for causal progression with ellipses, though the specific examples provided in the snippets lean towards *Ordinary Sequence* for emphasis) is crucial for stringing together the increasingly absurd and causally linked plot points, maintaining a fast narrative rhythm essential for comedy. The *Ordinary Sequence* also plays a significant role in reinforcing character-specific comedic reactions and the escalating absurdity of their predicament, providing consistent sources of laughter. The potential presence of *Bracket Syntagm* in the form of grouped gags or non-chronological comedic bits further supports the film's ability to deliver humor effectively.

### Comparative Discussion: Cross-Genre Cinematic Grammar

A comparative analysis of the syntagmatic profiles across *KKN di Desa Penari* (horror), *Dilan 1990* (romance), and *Agak Laen* (comedy) reveals both commonalities in the fundamental building blocks of narrative and distinct preferences that contribute to genre-specific effects. While all three films extensively utilize *Scene* and *Autonomous Shot* as basic units for character interaction and immediate impact, their deployment and the prominence of other syntagma types vary significantly.

**Table 5. Comparative Syntagmatic Distribution Across Genres**

Syntagma Type	<i>KKN di Desa Penari</i> (Horror)	<i>Dilan 1990</i> (Romance)	<i>Agak Laen</i> (Comedy)
Autonomous Shot	High	High	High
Scene	High	High	High
Episodic Sequence	High	High	High
Parallel Syntagma	High	Moderate	High
Descriptive Syntagma	High	High	High
Bracket Syntagma	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Alternating Syntagma	High	Moderate	High
Ordinary Sequence	High	High	High

Source: Processed by the author

The *Alternating Syntagma* is highly prominent in *KKN di Desa Penari*, serving to build intense suspense by intercutting simultaneous threats or contrasting actions and consequences. In contrast, its use in *Dilan 1990* is more moderate, primarily to illustrate Milea's internal dilemmas or Dilan's dual life, contributing to romantic tension or character complexity rather than overt suspense. Similarly, *Agak Laen* also features a high use of Alternating Syntagma, often to create comedic tension by intercutting the friends' frantic cover-up efforts with the police's unwitting investigation. This demonstrates how the same syntagma can generate different emotional effects depending on the genre's conventions and narrative goals.

The *Scene* is foundational across all genres for dialogue and direct interaction. In *Dilan 1990*, long dialogic scenes are central to building intimacy and the iconic “gombalan” (flirtatious lines) that define the romance. For *Agak Laen*, scenes are crucial for verbal and situational comedy, allowing the four main characters to interact in confined spaces, generating humor through their reactions and dialogue. In *KKN di Desa Penari*, scenes provide the narrative anchor for warnings, escalating fears, and the revelation of supernatural information.

*Episodic Sequences* are vital for depicting development over time. In *Dilan 1990*, this syntagma is critical for showing the gradual progression of Dilan and Milea's relationship through a series of thematically linked moments, fostering a sense of evolving intimacy and nostalgia. In *KKN di Desa Penari*, episodic sequences effectively convey the cumulative impact of supernatural disturbances, building a relentless sense of impending doom without showing every continuous moment. For *Agak Laen*, episodic sequences track the absurd progression of the haunted house's popularity and the friends' increasingly desperate attempts to cover up their crime.

*Ordinary Sequences* are used across all three films to emphasize themes and motifs. In horror, they reinforce the constant presence of evil and the inevitability of fate. In romance, they build familiarity and nostalgia, solidifying iconic moments and character traits. In comedy, they amplify character-specific reactions and the escalating absurdity of situations, providing consistent humor. This highlights a shared grammatical strategy for emphasis and emotional reinforcement, adapted to each genre's specific needs.

The consistent high use of *Descriptive Syntagma* across all three films underscores its importance in establishing the immersive environment crucial for each genre. For horror, it builds an eerie, culturally resonant atmosphere. For romance, it evokes nostalgia for a specific era and setting. For comedy, it sets up the quirky, often dilapidated, environments that become sources of humor. This comparative analysis strongly suggests the existence of a flexible yet patterned cinematic grammar that is intuitively understood and strategically employed by Indonesian filmmakers. The success of these films is not solely attributable to their compelling stories or cultural relevance, but also to their effectiveness in utilizing these fundamental

narrative structures to maximize their genre-specific emotional and narrative impact. This demonstrates how a formalist framework can reveal the underlying structural principles that contribute to widespread popular appeal.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study, through a semiotic analysis utilizing Christian Metz's Grand Syntagmatique, has systematically dissected the narrative structures of three highly successful Indonesian popular films: *KKN di Desa Penari* (horror), *Dilan 1990* (romance), and *Agak Laen* (comedy). The analysis confirms that each genre exhibits a distinct preference for specific syntagma types, which are strategically deployed to achieve characteristic generic effects.

For *KKN di Desa Penari*, the dominance of *Alternating Syntagm* and *Ordinary Sequence* is crucial for building escalating suspense and a pervasive sense of dread, while *Descriptive Syntagm* effectively grounds the horror in culturally specific, eerie environments. In *Dilan 1990*, the prevalence of *Scene* and *Episodic Sequence* facilitates the nuanced development of intimate relationships and emotional progression, with *Ordinary Sequence* powerfully evoking nostalgia and solidifying iconic romantic moments. *Agak Laen* heavily relies on *Scene* for its verbal and situational comedy, and *Ordinary Sequence* for amplifying character-specific humor and the escalating absurdity of the plot. Across all films, *Autonomous Shot* and *Descriptive Syntagm* consistently contribute to immediate impact and immersive atmosphere, respectively.

The comparative analysis further revealed that while fundamental syntagmatic units are shared across genres, their specific functions and prominence are adapted to serve distinct narrative and emotional purposes. This indicates that the effectiveness of these films in captivating mass audiences is deeply rooted in their adept manipulation of cinematic structure.

This research offers several significant theoretical implications. Firstly, it provides empirical evidence for the robust applicability of Christian Metz's Grand Syntagmatique to a contemporary, non-Western cinematic corpus, specifically Indonesian popular cinema. This demonstrates that classical European film theory retains considerable relevance and analytical power beyond its original cultural and historical contexts. Secondly, by focusing on the “how” of cinematic construction rather than solely the “what” of thematic content, this study offers a new analytical lens for understanding Indonesian cinema, complementing existing sociological and cultural critiques. It moves beyond a mere application to a re-affirmation of the theory's enduring analytical power across diverse cultural contexts. Thirdly, the identification of flexible yet patterned “cinematic grammars” within popular genres suggests that successful popular films may intuitively adhere to or strategically manipulate these underlying structural rules, making them highly “legible” and engaging for a broad audience. This implies that the success of these films is not merely due to compelling stories, but also to their effective structural design.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis is confined to three films, limiting the generalizability of the findings across the entire spectrum of Indonesian popular cinema. While the selected films are highly successful and representative of their genres, a broader corpus would provide more comprehensive patterns. Furthermore, while Metz's model offers a rigorous structural framework, it has been criticized for its inherent rigidity and its primary focus on the denotative level, potentially overlooking deeper connotative meanings or the full expressivity of cinematic language. This study also primarily focuses on the arrangement of shots and sequences, and does not delve deeply into other crucial cinematic elements such as *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, sound design, or editing rhythm in exhaustive detail, although their contributions are acknowledged where relevant. The analysis also does not directly measure audience reception, relying instead on the films' box office success as an indicator of popular appeal.

Building upon these findings, several avenues for future research emerge. Future studies could apply this syntagmatic analysis to a wider range of Indonesian films, encompassing other popular genres such as action, drama, or family films, to identify broader structural conventions. Comparative studies could also be conducted, analyzing the syntagmatic structures of Indonesian films against those from other Southeast Asian countries or even global popular cinema, to uncover cross-cultural similarities and differences in cinematic grammar. Furthermore, integrating Metzian structural analysis with audience reception studies, employing methods such as surveys, focus groups, or physiological measurements, could provide valuable insights into how specific syntagmatic patterns directly influence audience engagement and emotional responses. This would bridge the gap between textual analysis and empirical reception, offering a more holistic understanding of cinematic impact.

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