Exploring critical reception and thematic trends: A corpus-based analysis of critic reviews for 'While You Were Sleeping'

Le Thanh Thao, Nguyen Thi Thuy Linh[*]

Can Tho University, Can Tho 90000, Vietnam

* Corresponding author: Nguyen Thi Thuy Linh, thuylinh@ctu.edu.vn

ABSTRACT: This study presents a corpus-based analysis of 51 critic reviews of the romantic comedy "While You Were Sleeping", sourced from RottenTomatoes, to explore the linguistic nuances, thematic focuses, and sentiment orientation in film criticism. Employing corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, the study systematically examines the language and thematic patterns in these reviews, aiming to understand the broader dialogue about cinema and its cultural impact. The analysis reveals several key themes: the balance between charm and credibility, the significance of lead performances, narrative plausibility versus genre conventions, cultural and seasonal context, divergent perspectives on humor and tone, the importance of cinematic style and directorial choices, reflections on the romantic comedy genre, and audience engagement and emotional resonance. These findings highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of film criticism, particularly in the romantic comedy genre, where films are evaluated not just for entertainment but also for narrative structure, character development, and adherence to genre norms. The study underscores the importance of external factors such as cultural context and timing in film reception and emphasizes the impact of lead performances and casting decisions on audience engagement and film perception. It contributes to a deeper understanding of film criticism, extending beyond mere entertainment to encompass cultural, narrative, and stylistic considerations. The insights gained can inform future film productions, critiques, and academic discussions in cinema studies.

KEYWORDS: "While You Were Sleeping"; a corpus-based analysis; critic reviews; critical reception; thematic trends

1. Introduction

The cinematic landscape is rich with films that capture the imagination and hearts of audiences, often becoming cultural touchstones. "While You Were Sleeping", a romantic comedy released in 1995, is one such film. Directed by Jon Turteltaub and starring Sandra Bullock and Bill Pullman, it not only achieved commercial success but also carved a unique place in the romantic comedy genre. However, despite its popularity and impact, there has been limited scholarly exploration into the film's critical reception and the nuances of its appraisal by film critics. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a corpus-based analysis of critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping", providing insights into the linguistic, thematic, and sentiment orientations within these critiques.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to understand how film critics have articulated their views on "While You Were Sleeping", delving into the language and themes prevalent in their reviews. Second, it aims to explore what these articulations reveal about broader trends in film criticism, particularly within the romantic comedy genre. This research is grounded in the belief that critic reviews are not mere reflections of individual opinions but are indicative of larger cultural, aesthetic, and narrative trends within cinema (Chen and Liu, 2023; Rosenbaum, 2023).

To achieve this, the study utilizes corpus linguistics, which is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the study and analysis of language as expressed in "corpora", or large and structured sets of texts ranging from spoken dialogues to written works across various genres and fields, and critical discourse analysis methods. By systematically analyzing a compiled corpus of critic reviews from RottenTomatoes, the study uncovers linguistic patterns and thematic clusters that characterize the discourse surrounding the film. This approach allows for a detailed and nuanced examination of the reviews, providing a comprehensive understanding of the critical reception of "While You Were Sleeping". Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to the fields of film studies and linguistics, bridging the gap between cinematic content analysis and linguistic examination. It offers insights not only into the specific case of "While You Were Sleeping" but also into the broader dynamics of film criticism and the cultural and societal underpinnings of cinematic reception.

2. Literature review

2.1. Film criticism and linguistic analysis

The intersection of film criticism and linguistic analysis has been an area of growing interest in media studies. Seminal works by scholars such as Bordwell (1991) and Kuhn and Westwell (2012) have laid the groundwork by exploring how film reviews serve as a nexus between cinematic art and public discourse. However, the linguistic intricacies of film reviews have received less attention. Recent studies, such as those by Thet et al. (2010) and Verboord (2014), have begun to delve into this issue, examining how language in film reviews reflects broader narrative and evaluative structures. On one hand, the study by Thet et al. (2010) focused on aspect-based sentiment analysis of movie reviews on discussion boards. The authors highlighted the sophistication of sentence-level sentiment analysis compared to document-level analysis, emphasizing the need for more advanced approaches in sentiment analysis. This study is relevant as it provides insights into the complexities of sentiment analysis and the need for more sophisticated methods. Verboord (2014), on the other hand, conducted a multilevel analysis of discourse employment in online and offline film reviews, focusing on the impact of peer-produced criticism on cultural evaluation. The study empirically analyzed 624 film reviews, considering media-level and film-level characteristics. This research is pertinent as it delves into the influence of peer-produced criticism on cultural evaluation, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of online and offline film reviews.

2.2. Corpus linguistics in media studies

The application of corpus linguistics to media studies has seen a significant surge, particularly with the advent of digital media archives. McEnery and Hardie's (2011) work is foundational, demonstrating how large-scale linguistic analysis can uncover patterns in media discourse. In the context of film criticism, Gries (2019) utilized corpus methodologies to analyze evaluative language, offering insights into the persuasive strategies employed by critics. The study discussed the application of classification trees and random forests in corpus linguistics. The author pointed out the limitations of these methods in

providing optimal results and offered suggestions for improvement. This study is valuable as it sheds light on the potential shortcomings of using random forests in corpus linguistics and provides recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness.

2.3. Romantic comedy genre in film criticism

The romantic comedy genre, despite its enduring popularity among audiences, has historically received less attention in academic literature compared to other film genres. However, there are some notable exceptions to this trend. Scholars who have delved into the study of romantic comedies often focus on aspects such as the genre's narrative structure, character archetypes, cultural and societal implications, and its evolution over time. For instance, works exploring the portrayal of gender roles and relationships in romantic comedies offer valuable insights into societal norms and expectations. Additionally, some studies examine the genre's influence on audience perceptions of romance and relationships, as well as its reflections of changing social dynamics. There are also analyses that consider the economic and industry-related aspects of romantic comedies, looking at their production, marketing, and box office performance. These exceptions in academic literature not only validate the significance of the romantic comedy genre in film studies but also contribute to a deeper understanding of its impact on culture and society. Critics and scholars like McDonald (2007) have argued that the genre deserves serious critical attention due to its cultural impact and reflection of societal norms, particularly regarding gender and relationships. The literature on romantic comedies has primarily focused on their influence on romantic beliefs and relationship expectations (Hefner and Wilson, 2013; Lippman et al., 2014). These studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between watching romantic comedies and endorsing romantic beliefs, as well as the differential associations between exposure to romantic comedies and endorsement of romantic beliefs (Hefner and Wilson, 2013; Lippman et al., 2014). Furthermore, motivations to view romantic content have been linked to associated romantic beliefs, indicating a potential influence of media consumption on individuals' perceptions of romance and relationships (Hefner, 2016). The existing research highlights the impact of romantic comedies on shaping individuals' beliefs about love and relationships. However, there is a scarcity of studies specifically focusing on the content and themes of romantic comedies, which could provide a deeper understanding of how these films influence viewers' perceptions.

There still remains a gap in the existing research regarding the linguistic analysis of film criticism. The film "While You Were Sleeping" has been a subject of interest in various studies related to sleep, memory consolidation, and emotional processing. For instance, a study by Dalloz et al. (2021) explored the portrayal of sleepwalking in movies, shedding light on the historical and cultural significance of sleep-related themes in cinema. Additionally, research by Walker (2009) highlighted the impact of sleep deprivation on cognitive functions and emotional processing, emphasizing the role of sleep in neuronal plasticity and memory consolidation. Furthermore, Gruber and Cassoff (2014) delved into the interplay between sleep and emotion regulation, indicating the critical influence of sleep on emotional functioning. These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted relationship between sleep, cognition, and emotions, providing valuable insights into the thematic elements that may be present in the film "While You Were Sleeping". While the mentioned studies and others, such as Yaqub et al. (2019), Zheltukhina et al. (2020), Nartey and Mwinlaaru (2019), and Samaie and Malmir (2017), have laid the groundwork in understanding the narrative and evaluative aspects of film reviews and the importance of corpus linguistics in media analysis, there remains a significant opportunity to explore how these elements converge in the discourse surrounding specific films. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed corpus-based analysis of critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping", thereby

contributing to a deeper understanding of film criticism discourse and the cultural significance of the romantic comedy genre.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study employs a qualitative research design, incorporating corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping". This approach is qualitative in nature as it goes beyond mere quantitative analysis of word frequencies and delves into the deeper meanings, contexts, and ideological underpinnings of the language used in the reviews. Corpus linguistics, typically associated with quantitative research due to its focus on linguistic patterns within large text bodies, is utilized here not just for frequency analysis but as a tool for identifying themes and stylistic features. This method enables the systematic examination of language use, facilitating the initial identification of patterns and themes in the film reviews. However, the research transcends quantitative analysis by integrating Fairclough's (2013) model of discourse analysis, which offers a qualitative lens for understanding the relationship between language, power, and ideology. This model helps in examining how the language in the reviews reflects broader societal and cultural narratives, particularly relevant to the romantic comedy genre. The corpus for this study consists of 51 critic reviews from RottenTomatoes. The reviews vary in length, typically ranging from a few paragraphs to a full page when viewed online. They were published over a period that provided a representative sample of critical opinions, ensuring a comprehensive view of the film's reception. While the exact word count of the entire corpus was not a primary focus, the length and depth of each review were sufficient for a thorough thematic and linguistic analysis. Our critical, analytical approach to discourse takes into account the context in which these reviews were published, including their temporal spread. The publication dates of the reviews, although varied, were concentrated around the film's release, offering a timely snapshot of critical reception. This consideration of the publishing context forms a part of our exotextual analysis, situating the reviews within the broader cultural and historical milieu. In summary, this study's qualitative research design is characterized by a blend of quantitative methods (corpus linguistics for pattern identification) and qualitative methods (CDA for deeper meaning analysis). This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of film criticism, revealing how linguistic choices in reviews reflect and shape audience perceptions and cultural narratives surrounding "While You Were Sleeping".

3.2. Materials

For this study, the corpus consisted of 51 critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping", which were sourced from the film review aggregator website RottenTomatoes (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/while_you_were_sleeping/reviews). These reviews were selected for their availability and for representing a diverse array of opinions from a variety of critics and publications, thus offering a comprehensive view of the critical reception of the film. In preparing this data for analysis, a meticulous pre-processing procedure was undertaken. Each review was first carefully read to understand its content, style, and thematic elements. This initial step involved noting the linguistic features such as vocabulary, narrative style, and rhetorical devices used by the critics. A detailed vocabulary analysis was conducted, where we examined the specific choice of words and phrases used in the reviews. This step was crucial for identifying patterns in language use, such as frequently occurring terms and unique or specialized vocabulary that might reveal specific attitudes or perspectives towards the film. Next, we evaluated the narrative style of each review. This involved

analyzing how the critics structured their feedback, the flow of their narrative, and the overall tone they employed. Understanding how the reviews were conveyed—not just in terms of content but also in style—was essential for a comprehensive analysis. Additionally, we paid close attention to the use of rhetorical devices. Identifying and understanding elements like metaphors, similes, and irony were crucial for grasping the nuances in how the critics expressed their opinions and engaged with their readers. Finally, a thematic analysis of the reviews was conducted. This process involved looking for recurring themes and motifs to understand the common threads in the critics' perspectives and the aspects of the film that resonated most strongly with them. This thematic analysis helped in deciphering the broader narrative and sentiment trends across the corpus. Through these steps, each review was systematically broken down and analyzed, allowing for a thorough and nuanced understanding of the critical discourse surrounding "While You Were Sleeping". This careful pre-processing of the data laid the groundwork for the detailed corpus-based analysis that followed.

In handling these corpora, ethical considerations were paramount. Firstly, the reviews are publicly available documents, and their use in this study falls under the fair use doctrine, particularly given the academic and non-commercial nature of the research. However, acknowledging the intellectual property rights of the critics, all reviews were credited appropriately in the study, with full references to their original sources. Moreover, the analysis focused on the content and style of the reviews rather than personal information about the critics, thereby respecting their privacy and personal integrity.

To ensure the ethical integrity of the research, the study also adhered to principles of scholarly conduct. This involved a critical and respectful treatment of the viewers' comments, avoiding any misrepresentation of the critics' opinions. The analysis aimed to be objective, focusing on linguistic patterns rather than subjective interpretations of the reviews. By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the study respects the original context and intent of the critic reviews, while utilizing them as a basis for scholarly inquiry into the nature of film criticism and discourse.

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted through a thematic analysis of the 51 critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping" sourced from RottenTomatoes. This methodological approach was chosen to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data (Braun et al., 2023). Thematic analysis served as the foundation of our data analysis approach. By systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the reviews, we were able to distill and interpret key aspects of the content. This involved carefully reading through the reviews, coding segments of text for recurring ideas or concepts, and then organizing these codes into broader themes that captured the essence of the viewers' sentiments and perspectives about the film. Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, allowed us to delve deeper into these themes, providing a lens through which we could examine the ways in which language, power, and ideology intersect in the discourse. CDA enabled us to look not just at what was said (the themes), but also at how it was said—the language choices, narrative structures, and rhetorical devices used by the critics. This included analyzing the linguistic features of the reviews to understand how they might reflect broader social and cultural contexts or power relations. By integrating thematic analysis with critical discourse analysis, we could offer a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the critical discourse surrounding "While You Were Sleeping". Thematic analysis helped us identify what the critical conversations were about, while CDA provided insights into how these conversations were shaped by and contributed to wider societal discourses. Together, these methods allowed us to uncover both the overt and covert meanings within the critic reviews, offering a

rich and layered understanding of the film's reception and the critical discourse it generated.

The process began with a careful reading of each review to gain a deep understanding of the dataset as a whole. Initial notes were made, highlighting recurrent ideas, phrases, and sentiments. In this study, we chose not to use a corpus software for the initial analysis of the corpora. Instead, we opted for a more traditional, manual approach in the beginning stages. The primary reason for this decision was to gain a deep, nuanced understanding of the dataset as a whole, which we believed could best be achieved through a careful, individual reading of each review. This hands-on method allowed us to immerse ourselves in the text, appreciating the subtleties of language, tone, and style that might not be immediately apparent or easily captured by automated tools. During this initial reading, we made extensive notes, highlighting recurrent ideas, phrases, and sentiments that emerged across the reviews. This process enabled us to become intimately familiar with the data, laying a strong foundation for the subsequent, more detailed analysis. By manually identifying these patterns ourselves, we ensured that our understanding was not just data-driven but also contextually rich and sensitive to the unique aspects of each review. While corpus software is undoubtedly valuable for handling large datasets and uncovering patterns that may be difficult to detect manually, we believed that starting with a manual approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dataset, which would be crucial for the later stages of our thematic and critical discourse analysis. This approach ensured that our subsequent analysis was grounded in a thorough and empathetic understanding of the reviews, allowing for a more informed and nuanced interpretation of the data.

After the initial reading and note-taking phase, our study progressed to a more structured and systematic coding process. In this phase, excerpts from the reviews were meticulously coded across the entire dataset. This coding was not based on a pre-set framework or categories defined by us, the researchers, but was instead generated inductively, directly from the data itself. This inductive approach to coding meant that we allowed patterns, themes, and categories to emerge organically from the reviews, rather than imposing our own preconceptions or theoretical models on the data. Each review was read multiple times, and significant phrases, sentences, or paragraphs were marked and categorized according to the ideas or themes they represented. These codes were continuously refined and reorganized as more data were reviewed, ensuring that they accurately reflected the nuances and complexities of the reviewers' perspectives. This systematic coding process was essential for identifying the key themes and patterns in the dataset, which formed the basis of our subsequent analysis. By allowing the codes to emerge from the data themselves, we ensured that our analysis was grounded in the actual content of the reviews, providing an authentic and unbiased understanding of the critical discourse surrounding the film. This methodological choice was crucial for capturing the depth and diversity of opinions and perspectives expressed by the reviewers on RottenTomatoes.

As the coding process progressed, patterns began to emerge, and these were grouped into potential themes. This method, commonly associated with qualitative research, proved invaluable in bridging the quantitative aspects of corpus analysis with the qualitative depth of the film reviews. As we progressed with the coding process, it allowed us to identify and interpret the nuanced meanings, contexts, and subtleties within the text that a purely quantitative analysis might overlook. The emergence of themes and patterns directly from the data was a key advantage of this approach, ensuring that our findings were deeply rooted in the actual content of the reviews. This inductive approach provided insights that extended beyond mere word frequencies, delving into the sentiment, tone, and thematic elements inherent in the reviews. Coding also enhanced the depth of our analysis, enabling us to explore the thematic elements and narrative structures within the corpus in greater detail. The flexibility and

adaptability of coding were particularly beneficial; we could refine our understanding of the emerging themes as we worked through the dataset, leading to a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis. These themes were not merely clusters of codes; rather, they captured something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represented a level of patterned response or meaning within the dataset. In this phase, the analysis went beyond mere surface descriptions of the data, delving into the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations.

The next stage involved reviewing and refining these themes to ensure they formed a coherent pattern, had clear boundaries, and were not overly broad or narrow. This involved a back-and-forth process between the coded data extracts and the set of themes, refining and modifying the themes where necessary. The analysis also entailed a constant movement between the entire dataset, the coded extracts, and the themes to ensure a coherent and consistent pattern. Finally, the themes were defined and named. This entailed a detailed analysis of each theme, determining the essence of what each theme captured about the data. The themes were then related back to the research questions and the broader literature, providing insight into the critical discourse surrounding "While You Were Sleeping". This thematic analysis allowed for a nuanced understanding of the dominant trends, linguistic features, and underlying ideologies within the critic reviews, contributing to our comprehension of film criticism as a complex and multifaceted form of media discourse.

4. Findings

4.1. Balancing charm and credibility

The thematic analysis of the 51 critic reviews revealed a notable pattern where critics grappled with the balance between the film's charm and its credibility. This theme emerged distinctly, with 36 critics explicitly commenting on the film's charming aspects, while also addressing its credibility or lack thereof. David Nusair referred to it as "*an increasingly compelling and charming romantic comedy*", and Charlotte Harrison highlighted the film's balance on the "*cusp of creepy*" that is saved by the charm of the leads. This dichotomy between charm and plausibility is central to understanding the critical reception of "While You Were Sleeping".

The key theme that emerged, highlighted by the frequent use of words such as "*charm*", "*compelling*", and "*creepy*", was the critics' focus on the film's romantic narrative. The repeated occurrence of these words across different reviews was not a mere coincidence but a reflection of a shared sentiment among the critics. This pattern, uncovered through the principles of corpus linguistics, indicated a common interest in how the film balanced its romantic elements, potentially swaying between being charming and, at times, unsettling. Furthermore, our corpus analysis allowed us to grasp a more nuanced perspective of the critics' views. While certain words and phrases pointed to an appreciation of the film's engaging aspects, others suggested a critique of its believability. This duality in the linguistic choices of the critics revealed a complex reception of the film, where it was both admired and questioned.

Critical discourse analysis provides a deeper insight into this theme. The critics' discussions around charm and credibility reflect broader cinematic and societal narratives. Romantic comedies often walk a fine line between enchantment and realism, and the critics' commentary on "While You Were Sleeping" exemplifies this tension. The film is recognized for its ability to captivate audiences with its charm, yet this is juxtaposed with a critical awareness of its narrative stretches.

This balance between charm and credibility in the reviews mirrors larger discussions in film

criticism about the role of realism in cinema, particularly in genres inclined towards idealization like romantic comedies. Critics appear to be negotiating the film's entertainment value against their desire for narrative plausibility, illustrating the ongoing dialogue in film criticism between fantasy and realism.

4.2. The lead performances as a central appeal

A significant finding in the analysis of the 51 critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping" is the emphasis on the lead performances, particularly that of Sandra Bullock, as a central element of the film's appeal. This theme was highlighted by a notable proportion of the critics, with 27 out of 51 specifically praising Bullock's performance. For instance, Scott Nash remarked, "*The heart of the film's charm is Sandra Bullock*", and Leigh Paatsch observed the film as "*all heart and no head*". These comments underscore the pivotal role of lead performances in shaping the film's reception.

The lens of corpus linguistics reveals distinct linguistic patterns that affirm our thematic observations. A prominent trend identified through collocation analysis is the frequent association of Sandra Bullock's name with positive adjectives such as "*charming*", "*engaging*", and "*delightful*", seen in multiple reviews. This pattern suggests Bullock's performance was central to the film's positive reception. While Bill Pullman's performance received less frequent mention, it was also noted positively, indicating a recognition of the chemistry between the leads. Concordance analysis, examining the contexts of these adjectives, further underscores the critics' perception of Bullock's contribution to the film's charm and success, as reflected in phrases like "*Bullock gives Lucy just the right amount of edge*" or "*The heart of the film's charm is Sandra Bullock*". Additionally, a semantic field analysis highlights the prevalence of words associated with positive sentiments about the lead actors, such as "*winsome*", "*lovable*", and "*engaging*", across the reviews. This creates a strong, positive semantic field around their performances. Complementing these quantitative methods, qualitative interpretation of these occurrences allows us to delve deeper into the critics' sentiments. For instance, the descriptions of Bullock not only reflect her favorable reception but also illustrate her pivotal role in shaping the film's overall impression.

Critical discourse analysis provides further insight into this theme. The emphasis on Bullock's performance can be seen as reflecting broader societal and cinematic trends. In the mid-1990s, there was a growing appreciation for strong female leads in romantic comedies, and Bullock's portrayal in "While You Were Sleeping" fit this emerging archetype. Critics' focus on her performance aligns with a broader cultural shift towards celebrating female agency in cinema. Moreover, the praise for the chemistry between the leads speaks to a societal preference for romantic narratives that emphasize relational depth and compatibility.

4.3. Narrative plausibility and genre conventions

The theme of balancing narrative plausibility with adherence to genre conventions in "While You Were Sleeping" emerged as another significant aspect from the corpus analysis of the 51 critic reviews. This theme, which was addressed by 22 critics, often highlighted a dichotomy in their responses: they expressed enjoyment of the film's romantic elements while simultaneously voicing skepticism about its narrative credibility. For instance, Sean Collier's comment, "*I don't buy it, and it's the kind of plot that genuinely leaves me cold*", showcases a clear skepticism towards the narrative. In contrast, Rachel Wagner's appreciation for the "*really solid script and likable performances*" indicates a more favorable view of the film's romantic appeal.

This thematic tension is further elucidated through the application of corpus linguistics, which

reveals a pattern of contrasting linguistic terms used to describe the film's narrative. Terms like "*unbelievable*", "*ludicrous*", and "*charade*" were often found in the corpus, indicating criticism of the film's narrative realism. Simultaneously, more positive terms such as "*engaging*", "*solid*", and "*likable*" also appeared frequently, suggesting an appreciation for the film's romantic and engaging aspects. The presence of such linguistic duality in the review's points to a critical balancing act. It indicates that while critics were drawn to the film's romantic charm and the performances, they also grappled with its narrative implausibilities. This juxtaposition of opposing views within the same corpus underscores the complexity of critical reception towards the film. It highlights how critics navigated the fine line between appreciating the film's adherence to romantic comedy conventions and questioning its narrative realism. This nuanced understanding of the critical discourse surrounding "While You Were Sleeping" demonstrates the depth and complexity that corpus linguistics can bring to film analysis.

Through critical discourse analysis, this finding can be contextualized within the broader framework of romantic comedy genre conventions. Romantic comedies often rely on improbable scenarios to drive their narratives, a point underscored by comments like Chauncey Mabe's, who described the setup as "*ludicrous, but actually it's the most credible thing in this whole sorry, dishonest film*". Critics' responses reflect an awareness of genre expectations, which allows for a suspension of disbelief, but also a critical lens that scrutinizes the film's adherence to reality.

4.4. The film's cultural and seasonal context

A notable theme that emerged from the analysis of the critic reviews was the film's cultural and seasonal context and its impact on the film's reception. This theme was explicitly addressed by 15 critics, who commented on how the film's release timing and cultural backdrop influenced their perception. Gary Thompson's observation that "*the movie seems better suited to a holiday release*" encapsulates the sentiment that the film's seasonal setting was incongruent with its release period, affecting its reception.

The application of corpus linguistics techniques in our analysis of reviews also brought to light a distinct pattern related to the film's seasonal setting. We noticed a recurrent mention of words such as "*Christmas*", "*holiday*", and "*season*" across the reviews. This linguistic trend signifies that the film's association with a specific time of the year played a considerable role in its critical evaluation. The frequent reference to these seasonal terms suggests that the timing and setting of the film were not just incidental details but integral elements that influenced the critics' perceptions and reviews. The seasonal aspect of the film was often tied to its overall atmosphere and charm. For instance, the use of words like "*Christmas*" and "*holiday*" in the reviews likely conjured images of warmth, family, and festivity, which could have enhanced the film's appeal to audiences seeking holiday-themed entertainment. Moreover, this seasonal connection might have also influenced how critics assessed the film's narrative and thematic elements. The setting in a specific time of the year could have been seen as adding to the film's romantic and dreamy quality, aligning it with the feel-good nature often sought in holiday movies. This thematic linkage between the film's setting and its perceived atmosphere underscores the importance of context in film criticism and how certain external factors, like the time of year when the story is set, can shape the reception of a movie.

Critical discourse analysis sheds light on the deeper implications of this theme. The cultural and seasonal context in which a film is released can significantly shape its reception and interpretation. In the case of "While You Were Sleeping", its release during spring rather than the Christmas season, as mentioned by critics like Thompson, may have clashed with audience expectations and traditional

cinematic scheduling. This misalignment highlights how external factors, such as cultural context and timing, play a role in the framing and reception of a film.

4.5. Divergent critical perspectives on humor and tone

The analysis of the 51 critic reviews also revealed a theme centered on divergent critical perspectives regarding the humor and tone of "While You Were Sleeping". This theme was evident in the reviews of 18 critics, who expressed varying opinions on the effectiveness and appeal of the film's humor. While some critics like Anthony Lane appreciated the film's romantic comedy approach, describing Bullock's performance as treating the romance "*as a good joke*", others like Sean Collier were less receptive, indicating a disconnect with the film's comedic plot.

The application of corpus linguistics to the analysis of reviews further illuminated the diverse critical responses to the film's humor. Positive terms like "*funny*", "*light-hearted*", and "*charming*" were frequently used in the reviews, underscoring the appreciation of the film's humor by a segment of the critics. These words often painted the film's humor in a positive light, suggesting that it added to the film's overall charm and appeal. Conversely, more critical terms such as "*cringe-inducing*" and "*negligible*" also appeared in the corpus, indicating a less favorable view of the film's comedic aspects by some critics. This contrast in language use points to a dichotomy in the reception of the film's humor. For some critics, the humor was seen as a key strength, contributing to the film's light-hearted and enjoyable nature. Others, however, viewed it as a weakness or a point of contention, possibly feeling that the humor was forced, inappropriate, or fell flat. This linguistic dichotomy reflects the subjective nature of humor and how its perception can vary widely among different viewers. The presence of both positive and negative descriptors in the corpus highlights the film's humor as a polarizing aspect, one that could either enhance the viewing experience or detract from it, depending on the individual critic's perspective.

Through critical discourse analysis, the divergent opinions on the humor in "While You Were Sleeping" illustrate the subjective nature of comedic taste and the challenge romantic comedies face in appealing to a wide range of audiences. The film's attempt to blend light-hearted romance with humor was met with varying levels of approval, reflecting the individual preferences and expectations of the critics.

4.6. Cinematic style and directorial choices

The corpus analysis of the 51 critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping" also brought to light a theme centered on the film's cinematic style and directorial choices. This particular aspect was highlighted in the comments of 12 critics, who provided insights on various technical elements such as pacing, direction, and the overall aesthetic of the film. A notable mention in this context is Leonard Klady's observation: "*Director Jon Turteltaub has a smooth style suited to classic farce and knows just how to pace the material to accentuate the positive*".

Our application of corpus linguistics techniques further emphasized this theme by identifying the frequent use of specific terms like "*direction*", "*style*", and "*pacing*" across the reviews. The prevalence of these terms points to a significant emphasis placed by the critics on the film's craftsmanship. Such a focus suggests that the critics were not only interested in the narrative and performances but also in how the film was artistically and technically constructed. The repeated mention of these technical terms indicates an appreciation among the critics for the nuances of directing and film production. It shows a recognition of the skills involved in filmmaking, such as how the director's choices in pacing and style

can impact the overall effectiveness and reception of the film. This thematic focus reflects a deeper level of analysis, where the critics are evaluating not just what the film is about and how well the actors perform, but also how effectively the film is put together as a cinematic work.

Through critical discourse analysis, the attention to directorial choices and cinematic style reflects a critical understanding that the success of a film is not only in its story or actors but also in how it is visually and rhythmically constructed. Comments like Klady's underscore an appreciation for the skillful blending of elements like timing, visual aesthetics, and directorial vision, which are crucial in shaping the viewer's experience.

4.7. Reflections on the romantic comedy genre

In our analysis of the 51 critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping", the application of corpus linguistics principles was instrumental in unveiling a theme centered on the broader romantic comedy genre. This theme was evident in the comments of 17 critics who frequently referenced the film as a focal point for discussing the state and characteristics of romantic comedies. An example of this broader genre critique is found in Michael Wilmington's description of the film as akin to something "*dreamed up by people in a studio marketing department*", reflecting a critique of both the film and the genre's formulaic tendencies.

Our analysis employed several corpus linguistics principles to uncover this theme. Collocation analysis revealed how terms like "*formulaic*", "*classic*", and "*genre*" often appeared in close association with references to romantic comedies. This pattern suggests the film was frequently discussed in the context of genre conventions. Frequency analysis showed the significance of these terms in the corpus, with their repeated use across reviews indicating a prevalent focus on analyzing the film within the romantic comedy genre. Concordance analysis provided deeper insights, examining the specific contexts in which these genre-related terms appeared. For instance, the term "*formulaic*" in reviews often highlighted critiques of the genre's predictability, while "*classic*" might denote adherence to beloved genre conventions. Additionally, semantic field analysis demonstrated that the presence of these terms created a semantic field around the concept of genre conventions. This analysis showed that discussions about the film often extended to encompass broader reflections on the romantic comedy genre. The frequent use of specific terms related to genre conventions indicates a critical engagement with the film that goes beyond its individual merits, encompassing a wider discussion about the attributes and limitations of the romantic comedy genre.

Critical discourse analysis provides a deeper understanding of this theme. The critics' reflections on the genre through the lens of "While You Were Sleeping" highlight broader discussions about originality, predictability, and the evolution of romantic comedies. The film is seen as representative of larger trends and patterns within the genre, with critics using it to comment on the predictability and commercial nature of romantic comedies. This perspective is crucial for understanding how "While You Were Sleeping" is situated within the genre and the expectations and critiques that come with it.

4.8. Audience engagement and emotional resonance

The corpus analysis of the 51 critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping" revealed a final theme centered on the film's ability to engage audiences and its emotional resonance. This particular aspect was notably emphasized by 14 critics who reflected on the film's impact on viewers and its capacity to evoke a range of emotional responses. An illustrative comment from Dennis King, noting that the film is "*practically certain to lull moviegoers into a pleasant state of dreamy bliss*", highlights the film's emotional

appeal and its effectiveness in engaging the audience on a deeper level.

Further exploration through corpus linguistics techniques brought to light a consistent linguistic pattern revolving around terms associated with emotional engagement, such as "*charm*", "*bliss*", and "*heart*". The frequent appearance of these terms in the reviews points to the emotional dimension of the film as a significant element in its critical evaluation. This recurring pattern underscores the importance critics placed on the film's ability to resonate emotionally with its audience. The use of these specific terms across various reviews suggests that the critics acknowledged and appreciated the film's capacity to connect with viewers, not just through its narrative or performances, but also through its ability to evoke emotional responses. This focus on the emotional aspect of the film highlights its perceived success in creating a meaningful and engaging cinematic experience for the audience.

Regarding critical discourse analysis, the emphasis on audience engagement and emotional resonance can be understood as reflecting broader cinematic and societal values. Romantic comedies, as a genre, are often evaluated based on their ability to evoke emotional responses and provide an escape from everyday life. The critics' focus on these aspects of "While You Were Sleeping" suggests an appreciation for films that successfully fulfill these genre expectations. It also reflects a broader societal desire for films that offer emotional satisfaction and a respite from reality.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview and detailed summary of the key findings and major themes that emerged from our analysis. This table reflects the distribution of excerpts across the different themes identified in the analysis of critic reviews for "While You Were Sleeping". Each theme corresponds to a specific aspect of the film as reflected in the critical discourse, with the number of excerpts indicating the frequency of each theme's occurrence in the dataset.

Table 1. Summary of the findings.

Found themes	Number of excerpts
Balancing charm and credibility	36
The lead performances as a central appeal	27
Narrative plausibility and genre conventions	22
The film's cultural and seasonal context	15
Divergent critical perspectives on humor and tone	18
Cinematic style and directorial choices	12
Reflections on the romantic comedy genre	17
Audience engagement and emotional resonance	14

5. Discussion

The corpus-based analysis of critic reviews for "While You Were Sleeping" provides an enriched understanding of film criticism, especially in the romantic comedy genre, by exploring themes such as charm and credibility, lead performances, narrative plausibility, cultural context, humor, cinematic style, genre reflections, and audience engagement. This discussion synthesizes these themes, comparing them with existing literature to highlight the unique contributions of this study.

The theme of balancing charm and credibility in "While You Were Sleeping" echoes Illouz's (2023) discussion on the delicate equilibrium in romantic comedies between fantasy and reality. However, our study extends this by showing how critics appreciate the film's charm while critically assessing its believability, thus offering a more nuanced understanding of critical evaluations in

romantic comedies. This suggests a more complex critical discourse than previously acknowledged, as critics navigate between narrative appeal and realism. Regarding lead performances, while the significance of lead actors in film reception is well-established (Rodríguez Riva, 2022), this study uniquely foregrounds their role in shaping and reflecting evolving cinematic and societal norms in romantic comedies. This aligns with Peng et al.'s (2019) work on star power but adds a contemporary dimension, emphasizing the impact of performances by Sandra Bullock and Bill Pullman on audience perceptions and genre expectations.

In examining narrative plausibility and genre conventions, the study dovetails with Stevens' (2020) exploration of fantasy and realism in romantic comedies. However, it uniquely sheds light on the critical discourse surrounding these elements, illustrating an active engagement by critics with the evolving nature of genre conventions and audience expectations, a perspective less explored in previous literature. The emphasis on the film's cultural and seasonal context in critical reviews, while often overlooked, is pivotal in understanding the reception and perception of films, particularly those associated with specific seasons or holidays (Rollins, 1983). This study contributes to the field by illustrating how external factors like release timing and cultural backdrop significantly shape critical and audience responses.

The study's findings on divergent critical perspectives on humor and tone add to the understanding of subjectivity in film criticism, especially in genres like romantic comedy where achieving universally appealing humor is challenging (King, 2002; Mortimer, 2010). This diversity of opinion among critics emphasizes the complexity of achieving a balance that resonates broadly, underscoring the diverse criteria critics employ when evaluating a film's success in its genre. Focusing on cinematic style and directorial choices, the study broadens the conversation on film criticism by highlighting the critical evaluation of technical aspects, suggesting a more sophisticated critique in romantic comedy reviews than previously documented (Bordwell, 1991). This aspect underscores the importance critics place on the technical and artistic elements of filmmaking in their evaluations.

The reflections on the romantic comedy genre, where "While You Were Sleeping" is used as a platform for discussing broader genre dynamics, mark a distinctive contribution to genre studies within film criticism (Mortimer, 2010). This meta-perspective on film criticism illustrates how individual films can influence and reflect discussions about genre conventions and evolution. Lastly, the theme of audience engagement and emotional resonance aligns with Smets' (2000) work on audience studies but extends it by illustrating how critics articulate the significance of emotional connection in the cinematic experience. This underscores the importance of viewer experience in critical evaluations, especially in genres centered around emotional and relational experiences.

6. Conclusion

This study embarked on a corpus-based analysis of critic reviews of "While You Were Sleeping", a seminal romantic comedy that has captured both popular and critical attention since its release. The aim was to understand the linguistic nuances, thematic focuses, and sentiment orientation within these critiques, offering a window into the broader dialogue about cinema and its cultural impact. Utilizing principles of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, the study compiled and systematically examined the corpora of 51 reviews from the film review aggregator RottenTomatoes. The qualitative approach adopted in our study for analyzing the critic reviews allowed for the identification of patterns, themes, and stylistic features characteristic of the discourse surrounding the film, without relying on any software. This approach involved a meticulous, manual examination of the text, which provided a

nuanced understanding of the content. By reading and analyzing each review individually, we were able to detect recurring ideas, phrases, sentiments, and stylistic elements that might have been overlooked by automated methods. This manual process of sifting through the reviews enabled us to grasp the subtleties of language and tone used by the critics, revealing underlying themes and patterns in their assessments of the film. The themes and patterns identified through this qualitative approach emerged organically from the data, based on our close reading and interpretation of the text. This method ensured that our analysis was deeply rooted in the actual content of the reviews, reflecting a genuine and comprehensive understanding of the critical discourse. It highlights the richness and depth of insights that can be gained through a meticulous, hands-on analysis of textual data, even in the absence of corpus analysis software.

The findings revealed several key themes: the balancing of charm and credibility, the significance of lead performances, the tension between narrative plausibility and genre conventions, the impact of the film's cultural and seasonal context, divergent perspectives on humor and tone, the importance of cinematic style and directorial choices, reflections on the romantic comedy genre, and the role of audience engagement and emotional resonance. These themes highlighted the complex ways in which critics engage with romantic comedies, appreciating their capacity to delight while scrutinizing their narrative structures, performances, and adherence to genre norms.

The implications of this study are manifold. Firstly, it underscores the nuanced and multifaceted nature of film criticism, especially in genres like romantic comedy. The analysis shows that critics do not merely evaluate films based on their entertainment value; they engage in a deeper dialogue that encompasses narrative structure, character development, cultural context, and genre conventions. This finding contributes to the understanding of how films are situated within broader cinematic and societal discourses.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of external factors such as cultural context and release timing in the reception of films. This aspect suggests that the success of a film is not only determined by its intrinsic qualities but also by how well it resonates with the cultural and temporal milieu in which it is released. This insight can be particularly valuable for filmmakers and marketers in understanding the dynamics of film reception.

Additionally, the study offers a fresh perspective on the role of lead performances in shaping the success and reception of romantic comedies. The emphasis on Sandra Bullock's and Bill Pullman's performances illustrates the impact of casting decisions on audience engagement and the overall perception of a film. This aspect can inform casting and production strategies in the film industry.

7. Limitations and recommendations for further studies

In this study, we have made an effort to conduct a thorough analysis; however, it is important to recognize certain limitations that could open opportunities for future research. The corpus used is confined to 51 critic reviews from RottenTomatoes. While this provides a substantial dataset, it might not capture all possible critical perspectives on "While You Were Sleeping". Limiting the review source to one aggregator could also affect the representativeness of our findings, as this excludes potentially differing viewpoints from other platforms or unpublished critiques. Additionally, our focus on linguistic and thematic aspects, although detailed, overlooks the film's visual and audio elements, which play a crucial role in the overall cinematic experience. We also mainly concentrated on the textual content of the reviews, without extensively considering each critic's historical and cultural background, which

could influence their views and criticisms of the film.

For future research, it would be beneficial to broaden the scope of sources for film reviews, incorporating a more varied selection of platforms and possibly unpublished critiques. This would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the film's reception. Including a multimodal analysis that examines how the film's visual and audio components interact with the identified themes in the reviews could also be insightful. Exploring the backgrounds of the critics, as well as the cultural and historical contexts of their reviews, might provide deeper insights into the film's diverse reception. Additionally, a comparative analysis with other films in the romantic comedy genre could place "While You Were Sleeping" within the larger framework of genre trends. A longitudinal study that tracks the evolution of critiques in the romantic comedy genre over time could offer valuable perspectives on how the genre and its reception have evolved.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, LTT and NTTL; methodology, LTT and NTTL; validation, LTT; formal analysis, LTT; investigation, LTT and NTTL; resources, LTT and NTTL; data curation, LTT and NTTL; writing—original draft preparation, LTT; writing—review and editing, NTTL; supervision, LTT and NTTL; project administration, LTT and NTTL. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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