

# THE EXPERIENTIAL MEANING OF LANGUAGE AND VISUALS IN PERFUME ADVERTISING DISCOURSE IN AMERICAN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the nuanced interplay between language and visuals in advertising discourse, examining the experiential meaning in both American English and Vietnamese contexts. The research delves into the distinctive ways these two languages employ linguistic and visual elements to convey messages in advertising. By conducting a comparative analysis, the study aims to unveil the cultural and linguistic nuances that influence the reception and interpretation of advertisements in American and Vietnamese audiences. This study compares the linguistic and visual features in English and Vietnamese advertising using the functional systemic theory by Halliday (1985) and the grammar of visual design by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) to identify characteristics in language and visuals within advertisements. The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the cross-cultural dynamics within advertising discourse and shed light on how language and visuals collaboratively shape the meaning and impact of advertisements in these distinct linguistic and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** experiential meaning, language, visuals, perfume advertising discourse, American English, Vietnamese.

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## 1. Introduction

Advertising language must always contain novel, captivating, easily understandable information and convey a clear message because it serves as a unique means of communication between the author and the viewer who may not coexist and may not use verbal communication, with all information being expressed solely through advertising discourse. Therefore, creators of advertising discourse need to combine both linguistic and non-linguistic elements to effectively communicate the information and message of the product to the audience. Recent studies have begun to pay attention to this combination, though there is limited exploration of the relationship between language and non-linguistic elements in advertising discourse.

In order to understand advertising discourse, the selection of a theoretical framework is crucial for researchers. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a theoretical model introduced

and developed by Halliday (1985). According to his perspective, language and other semiotic resources are the means by which meaning is created in discourse, and the producer of advertising discourse must rely on the context. Thus, SFL focuses on analyzing the functional aspects of language rather than its formal aspects. Both linguistic elements and the system of signs are interrelated to understand the meaningful choices in advertising discourse. Considering these foundations, choosing Halliday's SFL as a theoretical framework for studying advertising discourse characteristics is appropriate.

Following the trend of discourse analysis based on the systemic functional grammar theory, many researchers have chosen different research directions using various methods such as neutral discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and corpus-based discourse analysis (Jones, 2012). A notable example of multimodal discourse analysis is found in the works of Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), who conducted studies on the grammar of image design. Developing the theory of image design grammar, they utilized it to analyze images and multimodal discourses. Subsequently, numerous studies have adopted this framework as a tool to investigate multimodal commercial discourses, such as those by O'Halloran (2004), Royce & Bowcher (2006), Machin (2007), Jewitt (2009), Lick (2015), and others.

The most prominent application of this idea is found in the book 'Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design,' by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Before the release of this book, most analysts believed that explaining images depended on their interaction with language—that images themselves were too 'ambiguous' to be understood independently. In contrast, Kress and van Leeuwen argued that, while in many texts, images and language coordinate with each other, images do not depend on written text. They have their own way of structuring and organizing meaning—their own 'grammar.' This approach has since been applied to other fields such as music (Leeuwen, 1999), architecture (O'Toole, 1994), color (Leeuwen, 2011), multimedia (Djonov, 2007), and mathematical symbols (O'Halloran, 2005).

The relationship between Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the Grammar of Visual Design lies in their shared objective of understanding and analyzing meaning-making systems, albeit in different semiotic modes. Systemic Functional Linguistics, developed by Michael Halliday, primarily focuses on language and its functional aspects. It views language as a social semiotic system, emphasizing how language functions to communicate meanings in context. SFL analyzes how language choices contribute to the realization of different functions,

such as ideational (representing experience), interpersonal (engaging with others), and textual (organizing discourse).

List 1 :Comparative overview of language and virtual images

LANGUAGE		VISUAL IMAGES
<b>Experiential Meaning</b>	<b>Logical Meaning</b>	<b>Representational Meaning</b>
<b>DISCOURSE</b>		<b>VISUAL DISCOURSE/GRAMMAR</b>
IDEATION (Activity Sequences)	CONJUNCTION & CONTINUITY (Logical Relations)	SCENE Movement-Action-Event-Being Sequence (Figures, Objects, Setting) Narrative/Descriptive/Explanative Relations Interplay of Episodes Spatial/Temporal/Causal
<b>GRAMMAR</b>		SUB-SCENES (Episodes) Movement-Action-Event-Being (Figures, Objects, Setting) Narrative/Descriptive/Explanative Relations Spatial/Temporal/Causal Relations
TRANSITIVITY (Processes, participants and circumstance)	LOGICO-SEMANTIC RELATIONS & INTER-DEPENDENCY	COMPONENTS Figures, Objects, Setting
ERGATIVITY (Agency)		
<b>EXPRESSION</b> (Cross-Functional Systems)		<b>EXPRESSION</b> (Cross-Functional Systems)
According to Medium Materiality (e.g. print, drawing, painted, electronic)		According to Medium and Materiality of Visual Image (e.g. print, drawing, painting, electronic)
e.g. Font (Type, Format, Case, Typeface, Size and Colour)		e.g. Colour (Shading, Brightness, Hue)
Layout (Spacing, Justification, Visual Effects and so forth)		Perspective, Framing and so forth

(O'Halloran, 2008)

On the other hand, the Grammar of Visual Design, often associated with Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, extends these principles to the visual mode. It explores how visual elements, such as images, layout, and other non-verbal features, also contribute to meaning-

making in communication. This approach acknowledges that visual communication has its grammar or system of rules, much like language.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study encompasses three key approaches. First, the Descriptive Method is utilized to meticulously examine language features, grammatical structures, and discourse structures. Additionally, this method involves the application of the theory of multimodal discourse analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of various modes of communication within the analyzed data. Second, the Method of discourse analysis, informed by the works of Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) and the language appraisal theory of Martin & White (2005), takes a multimodal approach to investigate and analyze the data. This method involves a detailed examination of the form and content of advertising discourse, unveiling insights into language use, grammatical structures, and the structure of the discourse network. The analysis is specifically focused on ideational/experiential, interpersonal, and textual functions within the advertising discourse. Lastly, the Statistical Method is employed to conduct a quantitative analysis of language data, providing statistical support to enhance the robustness of the findings presented in the thesis. Together, these methodologies offer a comprehensive and nuanced approach to exploring the intricate dynamics of language and visuals in advertising discourse.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Results

#### 3.1.1 American English advertising discourse

##### 3.1.1.1 The experiential meaning of linguistic in American English advertising discourse

The experiential meaning of the text in American English perfume advertising discourse is manifested through the distribution of process types within clauses. Examining six types of experiential processes in 43 American English perfume advertisements yielded the following results:

Table 1 :Experiential processes in 43 American English perfume advertisements

Process	Material	Behaviour	Verbal	Mental	Relational	Existential	Total
	11	9	1	8	9	4	42

Comment [U2]: In bold letters

Ratio (%)	26.2	21.4	2.4	19.1	21.4	9.5	100
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Based on the survey results of American English perfume advertising discourse, all types of processes were found within the discourse. However, these processes are not obligatory in advertising discourse, and they do not have fixed positions. The placement of processes may vary depending on the author's intention and the purpose of the discourse. The most significant processes in American English perfume advertising discourse are material processes (26.2%), behavioral processes (21.4%), and relational processes (21.4%). Other processes will be employed based on the brand type, utilizing different process types.

### 3.1.1.2 The experiential meaning of visuals in American English advertising discourse

In the case of 42 samples of American English perfume advertising discourse, we have collected 42 images corresponding to those samples in the following table:

Table 2 :experiential meaning of visuals in American English advertising discourse

Process	Action	Reactional	Mental	Total
Số lượng	45	12	45	102
Tỉ lệ (%)	44.12	11.76	44.12	100

From the statistical results, it can be observed that action processes and mental processes are commonly employed in American English perfume advertising discourse. Visual images hold narrative significance in perfume advertising discourse through various operative processes: action, reaction, and mentality. Among these, action processes are utilized at a rate of 44.12%, nearly three times more frequently than reaction processes at 11.76%. This indicates that visual images in perfume advertising discourse are predominantly associated with actions and messages, accurately reflecting the essence of advertising discourse aimed at promoting information and product lines of brands in the market.

## 3.1.2 Vietnamese advertising discourse

### 3.1.2.1 The experiential meaning of linguistic in Vietnamese advertising discourse

In Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse, experiential meaning is manifested through the distribution of process types within clauses. After synthesizing and analyzing six types of

experiential processes present in 42 Vietnamese perfume advertisements, the results are as follows:

Table 3 :**experiential meaning of linguistic in Vietnamese advertising discourse**

Process	Material	Behaviour	Verbal	Mental	Relational	Existential	Total
	9	10	0	4	11	8	42
Ratio (%)	21.42	23.80	0	9.53	26.19	19.05	100

Based on the survey results of Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse, only 5 types of processes were found in 42 Vietnamese perfume advertisements. Furthermore, these process types may be placed in different positions within the discourse, depending on the writer's intention and the purpose of the discourse. The most significant processes in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse are relational processes, occurring 11 times and accounting for 26.19%, which dominates over all other process types, including behavioral processes (23.80%), material processes with only 9 occurrences (21.42%), existential processes with 8 occurrences (19.05%), and mental processes occurring only 4 times in the perfume advertisements.

### 3.1.2.2The experiential meaning of visuals in Vietnamese advertising discourse

In the case of 42 samples of Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse, we have collected 42 images corresponding to those samples in the following table:

Table 4 :**experiential meaning of visuals in Vietnamese advertising discourse**

Process	Action	Reactional	Mental	Total
Quantity	37	4	35	76
Ratio (%)	48.68	5.26	46.05	100

From the above results, it can be seen that action processes and mental processes are the most commonly used in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse. Visual images hold narrative significance in perfume advertising discourse through various operative processes: action, reaction, mentality, and transformation. Among these, action processes are utilized at a rate of 48.68%, slightly higher than mental processes (46.05%), and significantly more than reaction processes (5.26%). This indicates that visual images in Vietnamese perfume advertising

discourse are primarily associated with conveying messages, accurately reflecting the essence of advertising discourse aimed at promoting information and product lines of brands in the market.

### 3.1.3 The experiential meaning in language between American English perfume advertising discourse and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse

#### 3.1.3.1 Similarities

- **The experiential meaning of language**

From the survey results, it is evident that American English and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourses share many similarities. The experiential meaning in language encompasses various types of processes that are utilized in both American English perfume advertising discourse and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse.

Table 5 :English perfume advertising discourse and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse

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<b>Processes</b>	<b>American English advertising discourse (%)</b>	<b>Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse (%)</b>
Material	26.2	21.42
Behavior	21.4	23.8
Speak	2.4	0
Spiritual love	19.1	9.53
Relationship	21.4	26.19
Exist	9.5	19.05

Looking at Table 1 above, it can be observed that 5 out of 6 types of processes are consistently used in both American English and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse. These process types include material processes, behavioral processes, mental processes, relational processes, and existential processes. However, the speech process is exclusively utilized in American English perfume advertising discourse and is not employed in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse. This discrepancy can be explained by the cultural nuances and

societal trends that influence the writer's preference in selecting crucial process types to convey the message of the advertisement alongside visual elements.

- The experiential meaning of language

Based on the compiled and analyzed data, the comparison of process types is as follows  
Table 6 :experiential meaning of language

<b>Processes</b>	<b>American English advertising discourse (%)</b>	<b>Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse (%)</b>
Action	44.12	48.68
Reactional	11.76	5.26
Mental	44.12	46.05

In both Vietnamese and English perfume advertising discourse, three types of processes are utilized to convey meaning through visuals: action processes, reaction processes, and mental processes. This can be explained by the nature of advertising, which predominantly uses language for description, making visuals more understandable and impactful. Therefore, transformative processes may be deemed inappropriate. In contrast to the way language creates meaning, visuals use elements such as color contrast, font and image size, and framing to highlight essential information in advertisements. Visuals also help readers distinguish between information conveyed through language and information created through images. Consequently, recipients of advertisements often choose to read the highlighted information in the ad.

### 3.1.3.2 Differences

- \* Language

Despite the similarities in the types of experiential meaning processes in language between Vietnamese and English perfume advertising discourses, there are differences in the types of processes used in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse compared to English perfume advertising discourse.

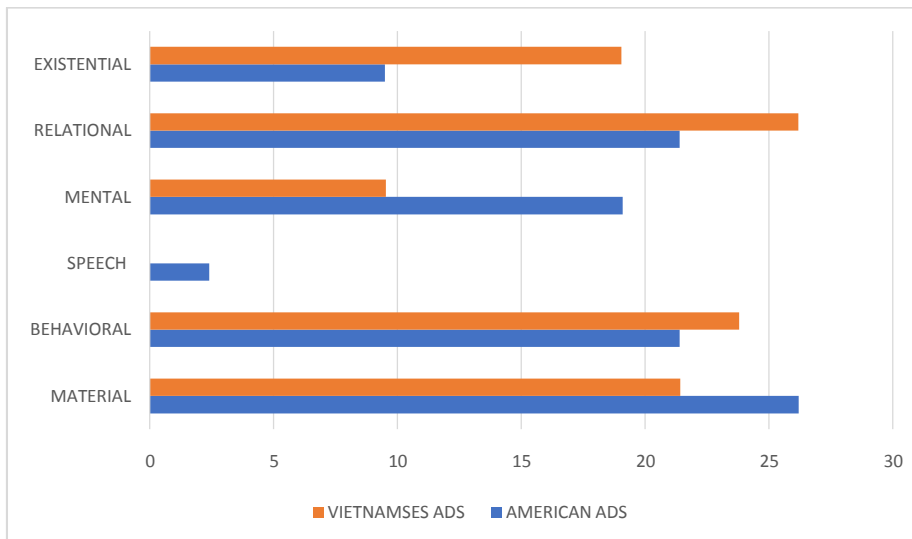


Fig 1 :Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse compared to English perfume advertising discourse.

In the material process type, American English perfume advertising discourse accounts for a slightly higher percentage (26.2%) compared to Vietnamese (21.42%). American English perfume advertising discourse uses more action-oriented verbs in advertisements than Vietnamese. In the behavioral process type, American English perfume advertising discourse shows a significantly lower percentage (21.4%) compared to Vietnamese (23.8%). The expression of behavior in language in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse appears more diverse, while American English is more limited due to differences in language types, resulting in different expressions through vocabulary and grammar. In the speech process, Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse almost does not use it, with only a very low percentage in American English (2.4%). This is because the form of speech does not align well with the written perfume advertising discourse. In the mental process, American English perfume advertising discourse accounts for 19.1%, much higher than Vietnamese (9.53%). This can be explained by the use of adjectives expressing emotions, sensations, perceptions, and understanding. These adjectives appear less frequently in written perfume advertising discourse due to its linguistic

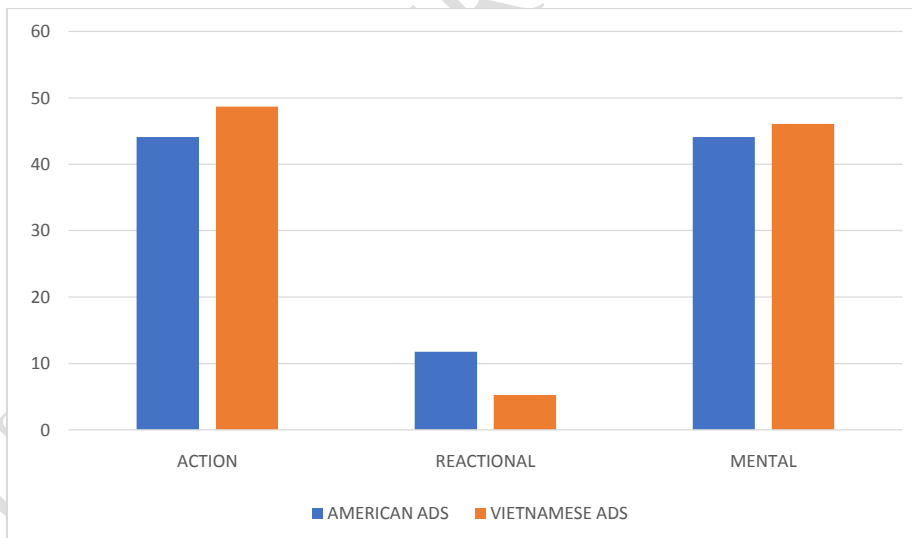
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characteristics. The frequency of existential processes is not equivalent, with 19.05% in Vietnamese and 9.5% in American English. Meanwhile, there is a significant difference in the use of relational processes between the two types of advertising discourse. In Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse, the frequency of relational processes is as high as 26.19%, which is the higher frequency in American English, 21.4%. This suggests that the emphasis on relational processes in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse is higher, with a larger frequency of use to achieve the desired goals and target audience.

- **Visuals**

When comparing statistical data between advertising discourse in American English and Vietnamese regarding experiential meaning, the data is presented in the chart below:

Fig 2 :advertising discourse in American English and Vietnamese regarding experiential meaning



Looking at the chart 1 above, it can be observed that the processes of action and mental processes are most commonly used, with nearly equivalent ratios in both types of fragrance advertising discourses in the two languages: 44.12% compared to 48.68% for action processes,

and 44.12% compared to 46.05% for mental processes. The transformative process is not utilized in either type of fragrance advertising discourse in both languages, indicating its unsuitability for fragrance advertising. It is noteworthy that the action and mental processes in American English fragrance advertising discourse have an equal ratio, while in Vietnamese, they are also nearly equivalent, differing by only about 5.26%.

### **3.2 Discussions**

The relationship between images and language in advertising is closely intertwined. The image-language relationship is a mutually enhancing two-way connection, where language adds meaning to images, and images complement the meaning of language. In online news articles, images supplement detailed descriptive information, contributing to a clearer understanding of the text's content. Conversely, images serve as snapshots captured in events, and the text supplements information to ensure a comprehensive and complete understanding of the images. The content contained in each image, analyzed within a specific framework, plays a crucial role in creating meaning and providing information, working in tandem with the text to fulfill the communicative function of advertising discourse.

### **4. Conclusions**

After collecting and analyzing data from samples of fragrance advertisements in both American English and Vietnamese, we have presented the experiential meanings in Vietnamese and English advertisements, comparing the similarities and differences in experiential meanings between the two languages. The linguistic experiential processes include material, behavioral, verbal, mental, relational, and existential processes. In the visual mode, representational and experiential expressions have been elucidated to make observations regarding the shared characteristics and distinctions in experiential meanings used in both languages.

Concerning linguistic experiential processes, the study found that the verbal process is absent in Vietnamese fragrance advertisements, whereas it appears infrequently in English advertisements. On the other hand, the relational process has a significantly higher frequency in English fragrance ads compared to Vietnamese ones.

Regarding the visual experiential processes, the frequencies of representational and experiential expressions do not differ significantly, showing a substantial difference only when examining the relationship between experiential meanings in language and images

The insights derived from the analysis of experiential meanings in Vietnamese and English fragrance advertisements will assist advertisers in understanding the commonalities and disparities in both languages. This understanding can then empower content creators with the knowledge needed to develop effective fragrance ads that successfully achieve their communicative objectives.

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