

# **An Exploration of Experiential Meaning in Verbo-visual Contexts of Perfume Advertising Discourse in English and Vietnamese**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the nuanced interplay between language and visuals in advertising discourse, examining the experiential meaning in both English and Vietnamese contexts. The research delves into the distinctive ways these two languages employ linguistic and visual elements to convey messages in advertising. 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, English, Vietnamese.

### **1. Introduction**

Advertising language conveys 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 a 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 (2006), Royce & Bowcher (2006), Machin (2007), and Jewitt (2009).

The most prominent application of this idea is found in the book 'Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design,' by Kress and Leeuwen (2006). Before the release of this book, most analysts believed that explaining images depended on their interaction with language and 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 and their own 'grammar.' This approach has since been applied to other fields such as music (Leeuwen, 1999), architecture (O'Toole, 1994), 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)

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) According to Medium and Materiality of Visual Image (e.g. print, drawing, painting, electronic) e.g. Colour (Shading, Brightness, Hue) Perspective, Framing and so forth
<b>EXPRESSION</b> (Cross-Functional Systems) According to Medium Materiality (e.g. print, drawing, painted, electronic) e.g. Font (Type, Format, Case, Typeface, Size and Colour) Layout (Spacing, Justification, Visual Effects and so forth)		

(O'Halloran, 2008)

**Table 1: Comparative overview of language and virtual images**

On the other hand, the Grammar of Visual Design, often associated with Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), 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.

Recent studies have begun to pay attention to this combination, though there is a limited exploration of the relationship between language and non-linguistic elements in advertising discourse. Therefore, this research which is built upon the theoretical foundation of Halliday's SFG, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) embarks on a captivating exploration into the realm of experiential meaning embedded within the verbo-visual contexts of perfume advertising discourse, with a comparative focus on English and Vietnamese cultural and linguistic dimensions. Perfume advertisements serve as intriguing linguistic and visual landscapes where subtle nuances of language and imagery converge to craft compelling narratives. This study delves into the intricate interplay between linguistic elements, such as text and slogans, and visual components, including images and design, within the specific cultural and linguistic frameworks of English and Vietnamese perfume advertisements. This research seeks to unravel the nuances that contribute to the experiential meaning, shedding light on the unique ways in which these advertisements evoke sensory and emotional experiences in their respective audiences. The investigation holds promise in providing valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of verbo-visual communication in the advertising discourse of two distinct cultural and linguistic contexts.

## **2. Methodology**

The data collection involved a total of 84 perfume advertising posters, with 42 posters each from English and Vietnamese contexts. The sample size was carefully chosen to ensure a representative and balanced exploration of experiential meaning in both linguistic and visual elements of perfume advertisements in the two languages. The sampling technique employed a purposive selection process, considering factors such as cultural nuances, linguistic characteristics, and visual aesthetics specific to English and Vietnamese perfume advertisements. To analyze the collected data, a mixed-methods approach was used. 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) 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

#### 3.1 English advertising discourse

##### 3.1.1 The experiential meaning of Linguistics in English advertising discourse

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

Process	Material	Behaviour	Verbal	Mental	Relational	Existential	Total
	11	9	1	8	9	4	42
Ratio (%)	26.2	21.4	2.4	19.1	21.4	9.5	100

**Table 2: Experiential processes in 43 English perfume advertisements**

Based on the survey results of 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 English perfume advertising discourse are material processes (26.2%), behavioural processes (21.4%), and relational processes (21.4%).

Other processes will be employed based on the brand type, utilizing different process types.

### 3.1.2 The experiential meaning of visuals in English advertising discourse

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

Process	Action	Reactional	Mental	Total
	45	12	45	102
Percentage (%)	44.12	11.76	44.12	100

**Table 3: Experiential meaning of visuals in English advertising discourse**

From the statistical results, it can be observed that action processes and mental processes are commonly employed in 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.

## 3.2 Vietnamese advertising discourse

### 3.2.1 The experiential meaning of Linguistics 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:

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

**Table 4: Experiential Meaning of Linguistics in Vietnamese advertising discourse**

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 behavioural 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.

### 3.2.2 The 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:

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

**Table 5: Experiential meaning of visuals in Vietnamese advertising discourse**

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.

### **3.3 The experiential meaning in language between English perfume advertising discourse and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse**

#### **3.3.1 Similarities**

- **The experiential meaning of language**

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

<b>Processes</b>	<b>English advertising discourse (%)</b>	<b>Vietnamese Perfume Advertising Discourse (%)</b>
Material	26.2	21.42
Behavioural	21.4	23.8
Verbal	2.4	0
Mental	19.1	9.53
Relational	21.4	26.19
Existential	9.5	19.05

**Table 6: English perfume advertising discourse and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse**

Looking at Table 6 above, it can be observed that 5 out of 6 types of processes are consistently used in both English and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse. These process types include material processes, behavioural processes, mental processes, relational processes, and existential processes. However, the speech process is exclusively utilized in 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 visuals**

Based on the compiled and analyzed data, the comparison of process types in the experiential meaning of visuals is as follows.

<b>Processes</b>	<b>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

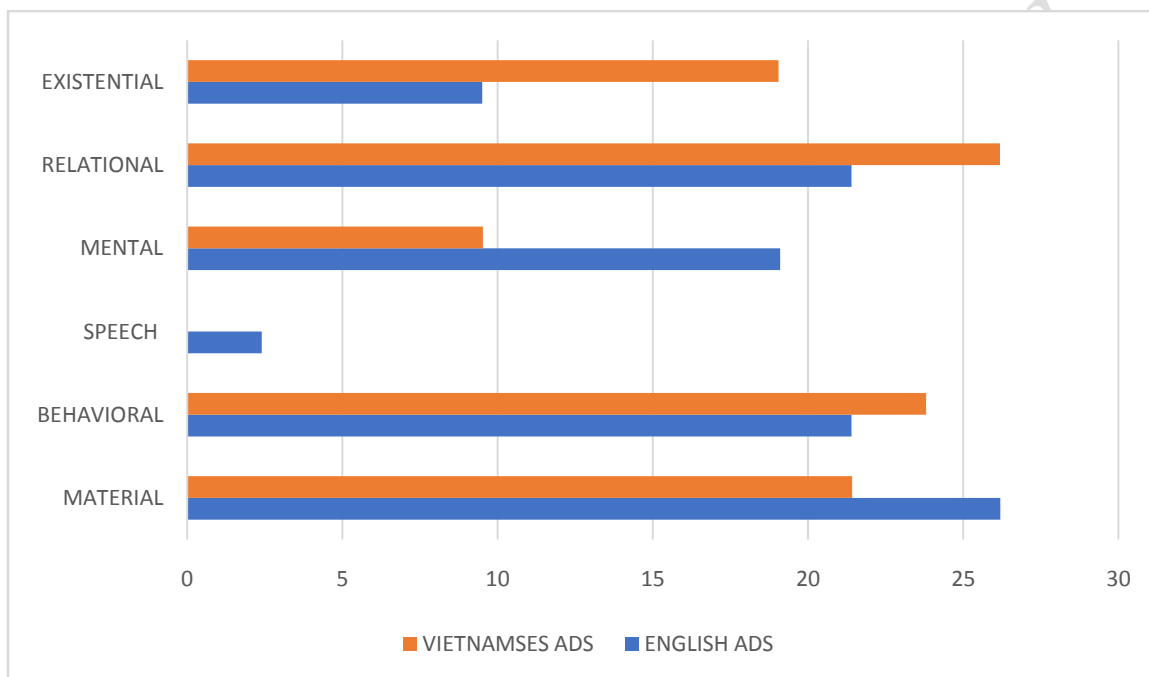
**Table 7: Experiential meaning of visuals**

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 colour 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.

### **3.3.2 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.



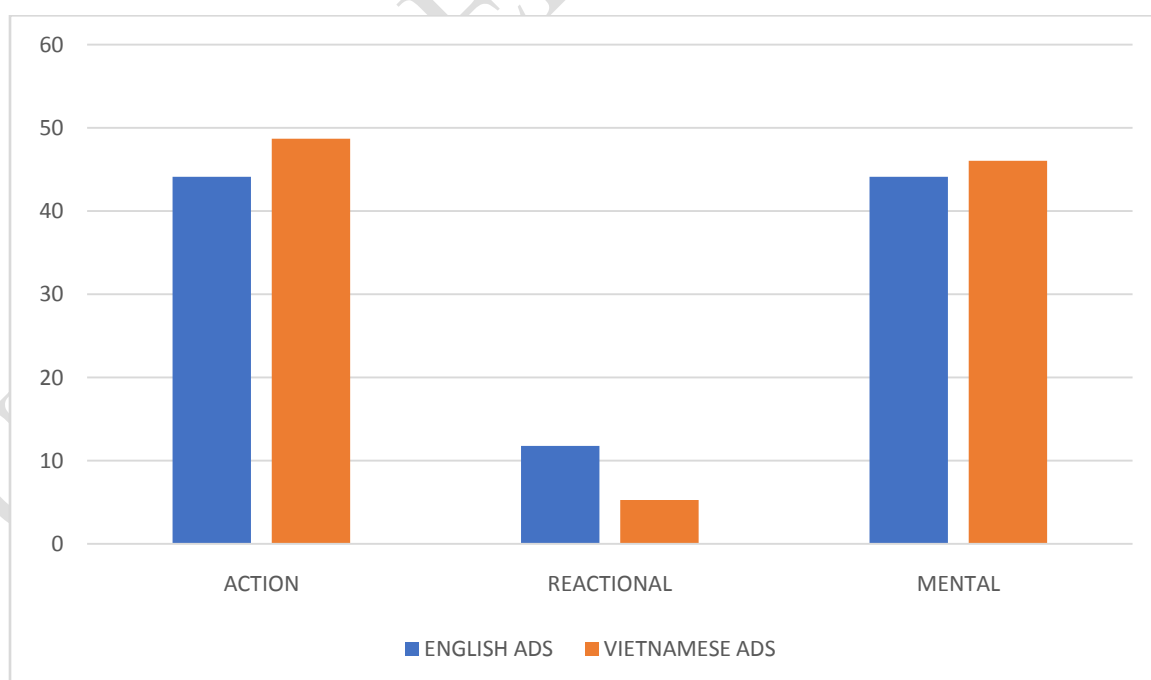
**Chart 1: Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse compared to English perfume advertising discourse**

In the material process type, English perfume advertising discourse accounts for a slightly higher percentage (26.2%) compared to Vietnamese (21.42%). English perfume advertising discourse uses more action-oriented verbs in advertisements than Vietnamese. In the behavioural process type, English perfume advertising discourse shows a significantly lower percentage (21.4%) compared to Vietnamese (23.8%). The expression of behaviour in language in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse appears more diverse, while 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 English (2.4%). This is because the form of speech does not align well with the written perfume advertising discourse. In the mental process, 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 their linguistic characteristics. The frequency of existential processes is not equivalent, with 19.05% in Vietnamese and 9.5% in 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 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 English and Vietnamese regarding experiential meaning, the data is presented in the chart below:



## **Chart 2: Advertising discourse in English and Vietnamese regarding experiential meaning**

Looking at 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 English fragrance advertising discourse have an equal ratio, while in Vietnamese, they are also nearly equivalent, differing by only about 5.26%.

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.

### **4. Discussions**

The goal of this study was to find out the similarities and differences of the experiential meaning in verbo-visual contexts of perfume advertising discourse in English and Vietnamese. There are five types of transitivity processes: material, mental, behavioural, relational, and existential which appear with different percentages in both English and Vietnamese. However, according to the statistics, the verbal process is only in perfume advertising discourse in English. Verbal processes are clauses of saying that functioned as sayers (Halliday, 2004: 252), so the absence of verbal processes in Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse, as opposed to their presence in English, within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) raises intriguing questions about linguistic and cultural distinctions. In English perfume advertisements, the verbal processes play a pivotal role in conveying actions and experiences associated with the fragrance. However, the absence of these processes in their Vietnamese counterparts might suggest a divergent communicative strategy. This linguistic variation could stem

from cultural disparities in the modes of expression and persuasive techniques employed in advertising between the two languages. It invites further exploration into how different linguistic features contribute to the overall effectiveness of perfume advertising in distinct cultural and linguistic contexts, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between language, culture, and marketing strategies.

In visuals, the comparison of the three processes—Actional, Reactional, and Mental—in the grammar of visual design between English and Vietnamese perfume advertising discourse reveals both similarities and noteworthy differences. The similarity suggests a shared emphasis on portraying dynamic and active elements within the visual design of perfume advertisements in both languages. English perfume advertisements exhibit a higher percentage of Reactional processes (11.76%) compared to their Vietnamese counterparts (5.26%). This distinction may reflect variations in cultural preferences or communication styles, where English advertisements place a greater emphasis on eliciting emotional responses from the audience. Both languages seem to allocate a significant portion of the visual design to depict the internal thoughts, feelings, or perceptions associated with the presented fragrances

These findings underscore the intricate relationship between language, culture, and visual communication in the realm of perfume advertising. While the Actional and Mental processes show a semblance of similarity, the marked difference in Reactional processes prompts further exploration into the cultural and linguistic nuances that influence the crafting of persuasive and evocative visual narratives in the advertising discourse of English and Vietnamese perfumes.

## **5. Conclusions**

After collecting and analyzing data from samples of fragrance advertisements in both 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, behavioural, 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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