



## UNPACKING MEANING-MAKING IN HYUNDAI'S 2016 SUPER BOWL AD: A MULTIMODAL TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

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APA Citation: Hanafi, I., Wardana, A., Sopian., Arum, R. K., & Artanti, M. A. (2026). Unpacking meaning-making in Hyundai's 2016 super bowl ad: A multimodal transitivity analysis. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 14(2), 757-772. <https://doi.org/10.25134/englishreview.v14i2.118>

Received: 07-04-2026

Accepted: 23-06-2026

Published: 08-07-2026

**Abstract:** This study addresses the following research questions: how are transitivity processes distributed across linguistic, visual, and auditory modes; how do transitivity frames construct meanings of power, control, and surveillance; and how do auditory elements interact with other modes to reinforce persuasive meaning in video commercials? Using a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis approach, the study integrates Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity system with Baldry and Thibault's macro-analytical framework. The Hyundai Super Bowl 2016 commercial was segmented into 67 frames, of which 20 were selected based on camera shifts, participant interaction, product visibility, and salient multimodal features. The findings show that material processes account for 50% of the clauses (9 out of 18), positioning the car as the central Actor, while relational processes construct positive attributes associated with the product. Visual strategies, such as low-angle shots and dynamic camera movement, reinforce meanings of power and control, while auditory elements, including wolf howls, tyre screeches, and alarm sounds, contribute to themes of surveillance and protection. Persuasive meaning emerges from the coordinated interaction of semiotic modes across transitivity frames. The study extends multimodal discourse analysis by incorporating auditory resources and offers pedagogical implications for teaching students to analyse how multiple semiotic modes jointly construct meaning in media texts.

**Keywords:** *transitivity frame; multimodal discourse analysis; Hyundai Super Bowl 2016 commercial; commercialising discourse.*

### INTRODUCTION

The commercial landscape has undergone a significant transformation from print-based formats to dynamic, multimodal, and interactive digital media (Sukmono et al., 2024). Contemporary commercials, particularly video commercials, as studied by Aleksić-Hajduković (2025) and Jia (2024), integrate linguistic, visual, and auditory elements to construct persuasive, emotionally engaging messages. Unlike traditional print commercials, modern commercialising relies on the interplay of images, sound, movement, and language to produce complex meaning-making processes (Groarke & Kišček, 2024; Stibbe, 2024).

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) studies communication that uses more than one mode or channel, such as language, images, and sound. It has become a key framework for understanding this complexity. Meaning in multimodal texts comes from the interaction among semiotic resources such as words, images, gestures, and sounds. In this way, commercialising works as both a commercial tool and a sociocultural practice (Rathee & Milfeld, 2023; Udris-Borodavko et al., 2023). It reflects and shapes values, identities, and ideologies (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Song & Perry, 2023).

This evolving complexity in audiovisual media brings new analytical challenges. Traditional linguistic approaches alone become insufficient as

commercials increasingly employ multiple modes such as gaze, gesture, camera movement, and sound (Zona & Felser, 2023). Thus, it is essential to adopt integrated frameworks that analyse how these semiotic resources interact dynamically within video commercials (Bateman & Tseng, 2023).

Previous studies have demonstrated that commercialising meaning emerges from the interaction of linguistic, visual, and contextual elements (Aleksić-Hajduković, 2025; Joy et al., 2024). Research in this area has shown how multimodal resources construct persuasion, emotional engagement, and brand identity.

However, despite the growing body of research on multimodal commercialising, existing studies tend to examine semiotic resources from specific analytical perspectives, often foregrounding visual or linguistic elements. As a result, the integrated analysis of linguistic, visual, and auditory modes within a unified framework, particularly across sequential structures in video commercials, remains relatively underdeveloped.

Within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language is viewed as a social semiotic system. Transitivity explains how actions, events, and states are represented in language. It does this by identifying processes (types of actions or states), participants (people or things involved), and circumstances (details like time or place) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Muhassin, 2023). The transitivity framework has been widely applied in discourse studies, particularly in the analysis of literary and written texts. For instance, Leng et al. (2023) employ Halliday's (2014) transitivity system to examine how experiential meaning is constructed through clause structures in a novel, revealing how linguistic choices represent characters, events, and thematic development. However, such applications remain largely confined to monomodal, linguistic data. The use of transitivity in multimodal contexts, particularly in audiovisual commercialising, remains limited, as existing studies rarely extend transitivity analysis beyond language to include visual and auditory resources.

Baldry and Thibault (2006) extend transitivity into multimodal contexts by introducing transitivity frames. These frames enable analysis of meaning across sequences of images in moving texts. While this approach is powerful for analysing visual and linguistic interaction, auditory elements have received less attention.

Sound plays a crucial role in multimodal communication, functioning as a semiotic

resource that contributes to meaning-making through its interaction with other modes. Within a social semiotic framework, sound is not merely an auxiliary element but an integral component that structures and shapes meaning (Yang et al., 2025). As van Leeuwen (2025) argues, sound operates through rhythm, voice quality, and pitch, which organise information, express emotion, and coordinate interaction across multimodal texts. This aligns with Chion's (1994) concept of *audio-vision*, which emphasises that sound actively shapes the interpretation of visual images. Beyond its structural role, sound also carries symbolic and cultural meanings; as noted by Korniietska (2025), it mediates emotion, memory, and identity in audiovisual texts. In commercialising, sound interacts with visual and linguistic elements to guide attention, reinforce narrative meaning, and evoke emotional responses. Despite its importance, sound remains underexplored in multimodal discourse analysis, which this study addresses by foregrounding auditory elements in commercialisation.

Intertextuality and humour also play key roles in commercialising. Intertextual references build familiarity and cultural resonance (El-Kanash & Al-Khatib, 2025; Normurodova, 2025; Wang, 2023). Humour, on the other hand, boosts audience engagement and recall (Howe et al., 2023). However, researchers often analyse these elements in isolation, rather than as part of a full multimodal system. This leaves questions about how they work with linguistic and visual resources.

Despite extensive research on multimodal discourse and transitivity, a key research gap concerns the systematic integration of auditory resources in multimodal transitivity frameworks for video commercials, as most existing studies prioritise linguistic and visual elements.

To address this, the current study systematically applies a multimodal transitivity approach to the Hyundai Super Bowl 2016 commercial, with specific attention to the integration of auditory resources.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How are transitivity processes (material, mental, relational, and verbal) distributed across linguistic, visual, and auditory modes? (2) How do transitivity frames construct meanings of power, control, and surveillance across sequences of shots? (3) How do auditory elements interact with visual and linguistic modes to reinforce persuasive meaning?

This study extends Baldry and Thibault's (2006) macro-analytical framework by systematically integrating auditory resources into multimodal transitivity analysis of a video commercial, with a focus on how intertextuality and humor interact as multimodal strategies.

Theoretically, this study extends multimodal discourse analysis by integrating auditory elements into transitivity frameworks. In practice, it offers a focused model for analysing audiovisual commercialisation. Pedagogically, it targets the development of critical multimodal literacy in English language teaching.

## METHODS

This paper adopts a macro-analytical method of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to investigate transitivity in the Hyundai Super Bowl 2016 commercial. This methodological approach enables the analysis of interactions among elements across modalities in the construction of meaning. Following Baldry and Thibault's (2006) framework, meaning making is delineated through examination of the connections between clusters, phases, and transitivity frames.

This study employs qualitative multimodal discourse analysis to investigate the interaction of linguistic, visual, and auditory resources in the construction of meaning within texts.

The analytical framework integrates Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with a macro-analytical approach. SFL conceptualises language as a social system and centres on the transitivity system outlined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), which classifies the representation of actions and experiences. Baldry and Thibault's (2006) model analyses larger multimodal units—clusters (linked sequences), phases (developmental stages), and transitivity frames (units reflecting meaning across modes)—thus

facilitating systematic analysis of their interrelationships in dynamic audiovisual texts.

The qualitative design incorporates multimodal data, including verbal, visual, and auditory elements, aligning with discourse-oriented content analysis (Rajendra, 2020).

The researchers selected the Hyundai Super Bowl 2016 commercial as the focal text for this study due to its prominent visibility and cultural relevance, rendering it a suitable case for examining the deployment of multimodal techniques to achieve wide audience appeal. The analysis centres on this commercialise as the principal document of the research.

VLC Media Player facilitated segmentation of the one-minute Hyundai Super Bowl 2016 commercial into 67 frames. From these, 20 frames were purposefully selected for detailed analysis, guided by explicit criteria aligned with the research objectives.

Frames were included if they met at least one of the following criteria: (1) Showed changes in camera angle or shot type, (2) Contained interaction between the father, the boy, and the girl, (3) Clearly displayed the Hyundai car, or (4) Included noticeable multimodal elements such as gesture, gaze or sound.

Frames were excluded if deemed repetitive, transitional, devoid of meaningful semiotic change, or if they did not contribute to transitivity or multimodal meaning-making.

Frame selection was conducted by one researcher (the first author). As only a single coder participated, inter-rater reliability was not assessed, which constitutes a limitation of the study. Nonetheless, consistency was maintained via clearly articulated criteria.

To ensure methodological transparency, the distribution of selected frames based on the inclusion criteria is presented below:

Table 1. *Distribution of selected frames based on inclusion criteria*

| Criterion                                          | Number of Frames | Frame Number(s)                               | Figure Reference(s) |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Camera/shot change                                 | 20               | 1; 2a–2h; 3a–3b; 4b–4d; 5; 8a–8b; 10a–10b; 13 | Figures 2–21        |
| Participant interaction                            | 12               | 2a–2f; 2g–2h; 4b–4d                           | Figures 3–10, 13–15 |
| Presence of Hyundai car                            | 7                | 1; 3a–3b; 5; 8a–8b; 10a–10b                   |                     |
| Salient multimodal elements (gesture, gaze, sound) | 20               | 1; 2a–2h; 3a–3b; 4b–4d; 5; 8a–8b; 10a–10b; 13 | Figures 2–21        |

This selection process ensured that the analysed frames were both representative and analytically relevant, while maintaining

consistency with the macro-analytical framework proposed by Baldry and Thibault (2006).

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analytically relevant, while maintaining consistency with the macro-analytical framework proposed by Baldry and Thibault (2006).

To clearly define the methodological approach, a transitivity frame boundary was established when one or more of the following occurred: (1) Shift in process type (e.g., from mental process “gaze” to material process “movement”). (2) Change in participant configuration (e.g., from father–boy interaction to father observing the couple). (3) Change in narrative function (e.g., interaction → surveillance → control). (4) Significant shift in visual construction (e.g., long shot → close-up; neutral angle → low angle)

In terms of verbal data, the dialogues were transcribed and analysed using the transitivity

system of M. A. K. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), including: Material processes (action), Mental processes (perception and cognition), Relational processes (attribution and identification), and Verbal processes (speech). Each clause was coded for the process type, participants (Actor, Sensor, Carrier, etc.), and circumstances. This linguistic coding forms the baseline for mapping multimodal realisations.

Building on this linguistic analysis, visual elements were systematically coded by mapping cinematic and interactional features onto transitivity process types, based on Baldry and Thibault (2006) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2021).

*Table 2. Visual coding framework*

| Process type                     | Visual Basis (What is Observed)                                                   | Analytical Rationale (Why It Is Classified This Way)                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mental process                   | Gaze directed at object/person; viewer-oriented gaze; facial focus                | Gaze represents perception, where a participant (Sensor) attends to a Phenomenon (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In this study, visual meaning is primarily constructed through perception and viewer alignment. |
| Material process                 | Movement of car or participants; camera tracking/following motion                 | Movement indicates action or event, corresponding to material processes (Actor → Goal). In this study, material processes are present but function as secondary to perceptual meaning.                           |
| Verbal process                   | Visible dialogue interaction; turn-taking; mouth movement; conversational framing | Speech interaction represents verbal processes (Sayer → Receiver). These are identified not only through language but through visual cues of communication.                                                      |
| Relational meaning (non-process) | Camera angle (low/high), framing, visual composition                              | These features construct symbolic meanings such as power, dominance, and control, but do not constitute full relational processes in the transitivity sense.                                                     |

Auditory elements were systematically incorporated into the transitivity framework as semiotic resources that reinforce and extend process meanings across multimodal sequences. Drawing on Michel Chion (1994), sound is analyzed through the concept of *audio-vision*, in which auditory elements provide “added value” by shaping the interpretation of visual images. In this study, auditory features such as wolf howls, tire screeches, alarm sounds, and narration are examined in relation to the visual and linguistic processes they accompany.

The analysis of auditory elements was conducted in three steps: first, identifying the occurrence of sound within specific frames;

second, determining the type of process (mental, material, or verbal) that the sound reinforces; and third, interpreting how the sound modifies or intensifies meaning within the transitivity frame. Through this procedure, auditory elements are not treated as separate components but as integral parts of multimodal meaning-making that interact with visual and linguistic resources to construct coherent, persuasive meanings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Each supporting feature of the commercial, such as the context of the broadcast, sound effects, dialogue, and intertextuality, is discussed initially,

and the analysis of the video frames is done using a macro-analytical approach.

### *The broadcast time*

This paper uses the 2016 Super Bowl commercial. The National Football League (NFL) championship commercial is among the largest in the US. It has a large following, which makes most large brands fight over commercializing spots. Due to the event's unprecedented popularity, commercializing during the broadcast is expensive. According to Foster (2023), commercialisers spent at least \$7 million on a 30-second commercial during Super Bowl 2016. With stakes this high, Hyundai made sure its one-minute commercial would have a great, memorable impact. The commercial relied heavily on humor to attract attention and enhance recall, a finding also supported by Howe et al. (2023) and Oba et al. (2025), who state that humor is a very effective method for engaging consumers. The fact that comedian Kevin Hart was featured as the main character also enhanced the commercial appeal. The image of a friendly, playful character that Hart used to appeal to his comedic audience helped the Hyundai brand seem familiar and approachable (Halder et al., 2024; Ono & Ono, 2024).

The commercial did not directly persuade the audience to purchase the product; instead, it entertained them and conveyed the car's value indirectly. In its brief time span, the commercial has managed to communicate how the vehicle fits into daily life and how it appeals to the audience emotionally through humor and the influence of celebrities.

### *Textual data*

This paper examines several verbal interactions in the commercial, including dialogues between the girl's father and the boy, between the boy and the girl, and a brief exclamation from the father. Each verbal utterance was carefully transcribed, using a standardized annotation format to ensure accuracy and consistency. The following passages are part of the conversation between the boy and the girl's father upon the boy's arrival at the girl's house.

Boy : O...h you look good.  
Girl : Thank you.  
Daddy : Hey ↑ , do the guy take my lil girl out huh?  
Boy : Yep.  
Daddy : Huh...  
Daddy : You know... why don't you go ahead

and take my new car  
Boy : Thanks ↑ pop.  
Daddy : Go ↑ babe.

The father's expletive then followed the boy's utterance to his girl

Boy : Favorite spot, favorite girl.  
Father : You should not be messing with me  
Boy : I will take you home  
Girl : Why?

A dialogue between the boy and the girl's father occurred as the boy handed him the car key.

Father : Back so soon?  
Boy: Here you go, sir.

A monologue of the father followed by his winning smile.

Father: Honey, what are you guys doing tonight?

The conversation in the commercial is brief, but it provides valuable insight into the makers' language choices. Informal or conversational expressions are used in most spoken lines, and it is a conscious effort to develop familiarity and relatability (Aliza et al. 2025; Davis & Brown, 2024). Through this informal language, the commercial conveys the idea that the characters are real people in real-life circumstances, and that viewers can relate to them. This approach aligns with the idea that colloquial language can reduce the psychological distance between a commercial and the audience (Moreno-Pinillos, 2025; Shevchyk, 2023). On the same note, Berger et al. (2023) opine that the use of words is important in fostering a sense of mutual understanding and a relationship with the audience.

The drawback of using informal language may be that it is perceived as disrespectful. Schwabe et al. (2025) agree that informal language in communication can signal a lack of respect or seriousness, especially in hierarchical settings. The boy holds the same status as the man's daughter, so he is expected to show the man respect. Instead, the boy responds to his father's question with the casual word 'yep,' suggesting disrespect. Additionally, his body language reinforces this rudeness toward the man. The section on transitivity will further discuss body language.

Using the filler 'huh' indicates hesitation. The father hesitates to trust that the boy would protect his daughter, or specifically, her virginity. The use

of 'huh' also shows the father is pausing to decide what to say next. Breaking a conversational maxim clearly signals that the boy is disrespectful. In this exchange, the man ignores the boy's thanks and abruptly changes the subject. According to Grice's Maxim (1975), a thank you should be acknowledged with a response such as 'you're welcome' or a similar phrase. Not responding breaks the maxim of cooperation. The absence of a polite response indicates a lack of cooperative conversation between the characters, pointing to social distance between them (Aslan, 2025). The man does not respond because he is angry at the boy's impolite behavior.

The shift from informal to formal occurs in the final text when the boy handed the man the key. When the boy refers to the man as pop " at the start of the ad, then it is the proper form of using sir to close the ad. It is the consequence of the boy's fear that he is going to be followed by the man all night. In the final part of the commercial, the man

decides to avoid the maxim by not responding to the boy's remark. The man did not even look at the boy as he gave him the key. The man shows no more respect for what the boy did to his daughter.

To summarize the commercial's narrative and its implications, the narrator makes the last statement in the ad and says, 'because a dad has to do what a dad has to do. This final statement has an unspoken meaning aimed mainly at fathers: having a Hyundai car is like a father taking care of his daughter and keeping her safe. The narrator's voice, therefore, supports the commercial's implicit persuasive tone and subtly links parental love to the product's trustworthiness.

#### *Transitivity analysis of the text*

All utterances are classified into Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity system. Details of them are shown in Table 1, and the frequency of the process types is shown in Table 2.

**Table 3. *Transitivity analysis of clauses***

| No  | Clause                                             | Process Type               | Process    | Participant(s)                                                | Circumstance (s) |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1.  | Oh! you look good                                  | Relational                 | look       | Carrier: you;<br>Attribute: good                              | —                |
| 2.  | Thank you.                                         | Verbal<br>(elliptical)     | thank      | Sayer: (I);<br>Receiver: you                                  | —                |
| 3.  | Hey, do the guy<br>take my lil girl out<br>huh?    | Material                   | take out   | Actor: the guy;<br>Goal: my lil girl                          | —                |
| 4.  | Yep                                                | —<br>(Minor clause)        | —          | —                                                             | —                |
| 5.  | Huh                                                | —<br>(Minor clause)        | —          | —                                                             | —                |
| 6a  | You know                                           | Mental                     | know       | Senser: you                                                   | —                |
| 6b  | why don't you go<br>ahead                          | Material                   | go         | Actor: you                                                    | Manner: ahead    |
| 6c  | and take my new<br>car                             | Material                   | take       | Actor: (you);<br>Goal: my new car                             | —                |
| 7.  | Thanks pop                                         | Verbal<br>(elliptical)     | thank      | Sayer: (I);<br>Receiver: pop                                  | —                |
| 8.  | Go, babe!                                          | Material                   | go         | Actor: (you)                                                  | —                |
| 9.  | Favorite spot,<br>favorite girl.                   | Relational<br>(elliptical) | (is)       | Carrier: (this);<br>Attribute: favorite<br>spot/favorite girl | —                |
| 10. | You should not be<br>messing with me               | Material                   | messing    | Actor: you; Goal: me                                          | —                |
| 11. | I will take you<br>home                            | Material                   | take       | Actor: I; Goal: you                                           | Place: home      |
| 12. | Why?                                               | —<br>(Minor clause)        | —          | —                                                             | —                |
| 13. | Back so soon?                                      | Relational<br>(elliptical) | (are) back | Carrier: (you)                                                | Time: soon       |
| 14. | Here you go, sir.                                  | Material                   | go         | Actor: you                                                    | Here             |
| 15. | Honey, what are<br>you guys doing<br>tonight?      | Material                   | doing      | Actor: you guys                                               | Time: tonight    |
| 16. | because a dad has to<br>do what a dad has to<br>do | Material                   | do         | Actor: a dad; Goal:<br>what a dad has to do                   | —                |

There are 18 utterances in total from the text section. 1 utterance divided into 3 phrases as they have different process types (6a, 6b, and 6c). The Final speech is the narrator's monologue (16).

Table 4. *Distribution of process types from the text section*

| Process Types | Frequencies |
|---------------|-------------|
| Material      | 9           |
| Mental        | 1           |
| Verbal        | 2           |
| Relational    | 3           |
| Existential   | —           |
| Behavioral    | —           |
| Minor clause  | 3           |
| Total         | 18          |

The material process is the most dominant type in the commercial, occurring nine times across the clauses (3, 6b, 6c, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16). These processes are realised through a limited set of verbs, such as *take out*, *go*, *take*, *mess*, *do*, and *do*. The dominance of material processes foregrounds the car as the central object of action, thereby emphasising its usability and appeal.

In Clause 3, the material process involves the actor, *the guy* and the goal, *my lil girl*. This construction implies the use of the car in social interaction, particularly in a dating context. This idea is further reinforced in Clauses 6b, 6c, 8, and 11, where the repeated use of *go* and *take*, often with an implicit actor *you*, positions the audience as active users of the car. The explicit mention of *my new car* in Clause 6c strengthens the focus on the commercialised product. Moreover, the process of *messing* in Clause 10 conveys a sense of challenge or resistance, suggesting that the car symbolises boldness and confidence.

Clause 14 ("*Here you go, sir*") is an idiom meaning "I give this to you." It symbolizes handing over the car or key, reinforcing the product's material value. Clauses 15 and 16 mark the commercial's message peak. Clause 15 presents a future activity ("*What are you guys doing tonight?*") and invites the audience to imagine using the car. Clause 16 ("*a dad has to do what a dad has to do*") builds a cultural expectation of responsibility. It links the father's role to providing a car, strengthening the persuasive appeal.

Relational processes occur three times (Clauses 1, 9, and 13) and assign positive attributes to the car. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain that these processes linguistically describe qualities or relationships, thereby characterizing and identifying entities. In Clause 1

("you look good"), the attribute 'good' suggests that the car enhances the user's image. In Clause 9 ("*favorite spot, favorite girl*"), an implicit relational structure (suggesting "this is my favorite spot/girl") conveys comfort and emotional satisfaction. Clause 13 ("Back so soon?") highlights the car's speed and efficiency by using 'soon.' Collectively, these constructions create a positive product image.

Verbal processes—words or phrases indicating speaking or communication—appear in Clauses 2 and 7, where they are elliptically realised as gratitude (*thank you* and *thanks pop*). Although these clauses do not directly promote the car, they add to the commercial's interpersonal meaning. Cornish (2023) notes that verbal processes can convey values in discourse; here, the expressions reflect politeness and cultural norms, especially in an American context.

The mental process—a verb expressing sensing, like thinking, knowing, or perceiving—appears only once in Clause 6a (*you know*), with *you* as the senser. According to Wilson & Lubis (2024), such processes, which involve cognitive activity, help commercial makers engage audiences cognitively. In this case, the clause fosters shared understanding. As a result, the audience feels mentally aligned with the speaker, thereby strengthening engagement.

Finally, there are three minor clauses (4, 5, and 12). Lacking a full clause structure, these examples do not contain a predicator (the main verb), subject (who or what performs the action), or mood element (which conveys speech function, such as statement or question) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), meaning they cannot be analyzed in terms of transitivity. Nevertheless, despite their structural incompleteness, such expressions can fulfill important interpersonal functions. They especially help maintain social interaction and foster rapport, aligning with the concept of phatic communication, in which language is used for social contact rather than exchanging information (Al-Awaid & Mohammed, 2024).

#### *Intertextuality*

Intertextuality is the manner in which various types of art and media rely on each other. According to Berger (2016), any text, whether consciously or unconsciously, borrows elements from earlier works. On the same note, Bakhtin (1981) notes that creators are bound to be affected by common cultural materials - plots, themes, visual effects, and language, which tend to

produce similar ideas in texts. This interconnection is possible since people are members of the same cultural traditions that define the production. This scene is very similar to one of the famous scenes from the movie *Bad Boys*. The Hyundai commercial, where the young man comes to pick up his girlfriend and is welcomed by her father. This scene is very similar to one of the famous scenes from the movie *Bad Boys 2*. This similarity is also intentional on the director's part to evoke memories of the movie in the audience and create an emotional and cultural connection between the film and the commercial. According to Normurodova (2025), commercialisers tend to use references and common social practices to increase audience engagement and recognition. Since *Bad Boys 2* was a huge box-office hit in the United States, the use of its visuals and tone helps the commercial create nostalgia and familiarity with the audience.

Meanwhile, the commercial implicitly redefines classic gender and family roles (Glint John & Bhuvaneswari, 2023). It reprises the protective father trope but reinvents it in a funny, modern setting. El-Kanash and Al-Khatib (2025) emphasize that intertextuality may be used subversively to break norms and authority. The Hyundai ad borrows from popular culture and updates the concept of fatherhood, suggesting that a responsible father today can show love and protection through modern technology, specifically a Hyundai car.



Figure 1. A scene from *Bad Boys 2* and a Hyundai car commercial

### *Sounds*

As a short video commercial, the Hyundai commercial has several modes of meaning that interact to convey its message. These modes include visual imagery, oral language, nonverbal sound effects, and other semiotic indicators. Sound is one of the elements that significantly impacts the interpretation of the commercial.

An interesting scene occurs when the father hands the car keys to the young man, accompanied by a wolf howl. In this context, the howl can be interpreted as symbolically representing the father's vigilance toward the young man. From a transitivity perspective, the howl reinforces a perceptual process in which the father (and, implicitly, the viewer) functions as the *Senser*, while the sound operates as the *Phenomenon*, directing attention and constructing a sense of surveillance. This aligns with the notion that experiential meaning is realised through transitivity structures that construe perception and interpretation of experience (Zulprianto & Fanany, 2023). The father's raised eyebrows and tight-lipped expression further support this reading, contributing to an impression of authority and control. In commercial discourse, such perceptual processes guide audience evaluation of characters and actions (Wilson & Lubis, 2024). The subsequent use of Hyundai's car-tracking feature extends this vigilance into a technological context, suggesting a modern form of parental protectiveness.

The screeching of tyres as the boy halts the car signifies speed and precision, suggesting power and reliability. From an SFG perspective, this scene realises a material process, with the car as the *Actor*, while the sound intensifies the action, consistent with commercialising discourse that foregrounds material processes (Wilson & Lubis, 2024). It also supports a perceptual process, positioning the viewer as the *Senser* and the car as the *Phenomenon*, thereby directing attention to performance and control. Thus, the auditory element contributes to experiential meaning through transitivity structures (Zulprianto & Fanany, 2023).

The third sound is the car alarm's loud chirp, which startles the boy when the father activates it. The alarm's distinctiveness suggests the car's efficiency and reliability, even in a noisy environment. From a transitivity perspective, this scene realises a material process, in which the car functions as the *Actor* performing a controlling action through the alarm system. The sound reinforces the car's operational capability,



highlighting its role in ensuring safety and control. This is consistent with findings that commercialise discourse foregrounds material processes to emphasize product functionality and effectiveness (Wilson & Lubis, 2024). In this sense, the auditory element contributes to experiential meaning by representing concrete action within the transitivity structure (Zulprianto & Fanany, 2023). The commercial concludes with the narrator's line, "A dad has got to do what a dad has got to do," reinforcing the idea that paternal care is realised through the car's safety and stability.

The next part of the paper is a macro-analytical discussion of the video frames, a consequence of a step-by-step analysis of the commercial using VLC media player.

### *Transitivity frames*

According to Baldry and Thibault (2006), transitivity frames examine the arrangement and order of two or three shots in the meaning-making process.

The luxury of the Hyundai car is highlighted in the first frame (see Figure 2). The use of a low-angle shot creates a feeling of admiration. Such a shot can evoke awe or excitement (Mascelli, 1998; Hoffmann et al., 2023). The boy's body language supports the idea that the car is eye-catching, as he walks with his eyes on the Hyundai. Another technique is the long shot, which captures a wide range of space and provides viewers with information about the location.

Transitivity frames, as described by Baldry and Thibault (2006), extend Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) concept into the visual domain. In the first frame, the boy acts as the Sayer while the car is the Phenomenon. His gaze signals a mental process of perception which is sensing, thinking and feeling about the presence of the car. In this frame, Ronquillo (2026) shows how mental processes reveal participants' internal experience.



Figure 2. Frame 1

The transition from a long shot to a point-of-view shot is observed between Frame 1 (Figure 2) and Frame 2 (Figures 3 and 4). The use of a point-of-view angle brings viewers closer to the event, creating the impression that they are positioned alongside the actor within the scene. This camera placement aligns the audience with the character's perspective, enhancing engagement. Both Frame 2a (Figure 3) and Frame 2b (Figure 4) can be analysed as representing verbal processes, as they depict interaction between participants through spoken dialogue. In this context, one participant functions as the Sayer and the other as the Receiver. The use of verbal processes contributes to the construction of interpersonal relationships between characters and helps establish social dynamics within the scene (Bangga, 2025).



Figure 3. Frame 2a



Figure 4. Frame 2b

In Frame 2a (Figure 3), the father greets the boy with a smile, signaling a friendly stance. In Frame 2b (Figure 4), the boy appears less respectful, as indicated by his casual posture and brief response, "yep." Both frames involve verbal processes, with dialogue between participants, and the father and boy alternating roles as Sayer and Receiver.



Figure 5. *Frame 2c*



Figure 6. *Frame 2d*

In Frame 2c (Figure 5), disappointment is conveyed through the shift from Frame 2a (Figure 3), while the filler “huh” emphasises the father’s hesitation.



Figure 7. *Frame 2e*



Figure 8. *Frame 2f*

In Frame 2e (Figure 7), the father allows his daughter to go out, marking a shift in his stance; further analysis is discussed in the textual section.

Frames 2g (Figure 9) and 2h (Figure 10) employ close-ups to highlight a change in the father’s expression, from a smile to a frown as the couple leaves. This shift can be interpreted as

signalling vigilance or concern, reinforced by the accompanying howling sound (see Sound section). These frames realise a mental process, with the father as the *Senser* and the couple as the *Phenomenon*, inviting viewers to align with his perspective (Wilson & Lubis, 2024).



Figure 9. *Frame 2g*



Figure 10. *Frame 2h*

In Frame 3 (Figures 11 and 12), the shift from a long shot to a close-up highlights the Hyundai car’s feature as the father activates the car finder. This sequence realises a mental process, with the father as the *Senser* and the car as the *Phenomenon*. The process of perception suggests the car’s advanced functionality, conveying a sense of security to the viewer. The emergence of the car finder technology evokes technological affordances for buyers that lead to surveillance, protection, and parental control (Pavlyuchenko & Dion, 2025).



Figure 11. *Frame 3a*



Figure 12. *Frame 3b*

Power and vulnerability are depicted across Frames 4b–4d (Figures 13–15) through shot angle and framing. In Frame 4c (Figure 14), a low-angle shot positions the father as dominant, while Frames 4b (Figure 13) and 4d (Figure 15) use high-angle shots to suggest the boy's powerlessness. In Frame 4d (Figure 15), the boy raises his hand as the father suppresses him.

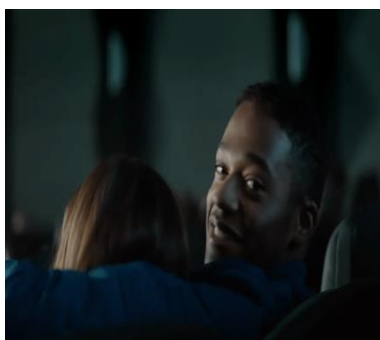


Figure 13. *Frame 4b*



Figure 14. *Frame 4c*

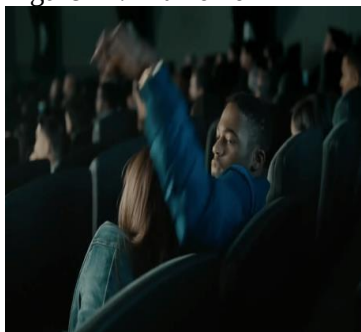


Figure 15. *Frame 4d*

Frames 4b–4d (Figures 13–15) also realise a mental process. In Frame 4b (Figure 13), the boy functions as the Sensor and the audience as the Phenomenon, aligning viewers with his gaze. In Frame 4c (Figure 14), the father becomes the Sensor, with the boy as the Phenomenon, shifting the perspective.

Frame 5 (Figure 16) employs a long shot to present a panoramic view, highlighting the Hyundai car as distinct within the scene. It is clear that the mental process is the one being used here. This process is important to shape how consumer perceive the luxury of Hyundai (Wilson and Lubis, 2024).



Figure 16. *Frame 5*

Frames 8a (Figure 17) and 8b (Figure 18) further develop the representation of the Hyundai car through camera movement, angle, and spatial composition. In Frame 8a (Figure 17), a low-angle shot positions the car as dominant and desirable (Mascelli, 1998). The car's movement introduces a material process, with the vehicle as the Actor, reinforcing its active role in the narrative. At the same time, both frames realise a mental process, inviting viewers to perceive and appreciate the car as the Phenomenon. A similar pattern is observed in Frames 8 and 10, serving the same representational purpose.



Figure 17. *Frame 8a*





Figure 18. *Frame 8b*

This representation is extended in Frame 8b (Figure 18), where a high angle long shot situates the car within a broader urban landscape. Unlike Frame 8a (Figure 17), which emphasises power, this frame highlights control and stability as the car moves smoothly through space. The transition between these frames forms a transitivity sequence, shifting the car's meaning from power to control and expanding its semiotic significance.

A similar pattern is observed in Frames 10a (Figure 19) and 10b (Figure 20). In Frame 10a (Figure 19), a high-angle long shot shows the car being followed by a helicopter, constructing a sense of surveillance and positioning the car as the Goal. In Frame 10b (Figure 20), the shift to a low-angle shot as the car stops re-establishes its dominance and control, completing the transitivity sequence.

The screeching of the tyres (see Sound section) reinforces this shift by adding an auditory layer of intensity and precision, supporting the material process of movement and control associated with the car. Across Frames 8–10 (Figures 17–20), meaning emerges through sequential interaction, with the car shifting between power, control, and resilience. This progression reflects Baldry and Thibault's (2006) concept of transitivity frames as meaning-making units that develop across shot sequences rather than through isolated images.

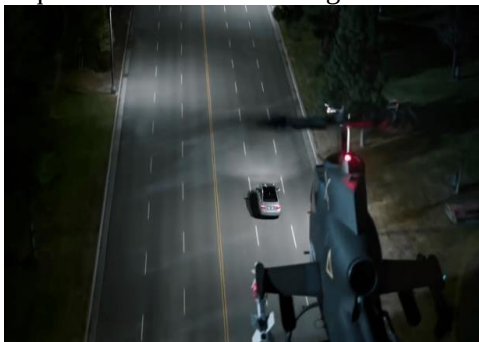


Figure 19. *Frame 10a*



Figure 20. *Frame 10b*

Frame 13 (Figure 21) serves as the closing transitivity frame, in which visual, linguistic, and interpersonal meanings converge. The use of a subjective camera angle positions the viewer directly within the scene, creating a sense of involvement and immediacy (Mascelli, 1998). The actor's direct gaze toward the camera establishes a simulated interpersonal relationship, inviting the audience to identify with the experience. From a transitivity perspective, this frame realises a mental process of perception, in which the father functions as the *Senser* and the audience becomes the *Phenomenon*. Through this gaze, the commercial shifts from internal narrative representation to direct audience engagement, encouraging viewers not only to observe but also to engage in cognitive evaluation of the product. In this sense, the mental process extends beyond perception to suggest consideration and potential desire, implying that what works effectively for the actor will also work for the audience.

This visual strategy is reinforced by the narration, "*Because a dad's gonna do what a dad's gonna do,*" which introduces a relational and ideological layer to the commercial. The clause constructs a cultural identity of fatherhood associated with protection and responsibility. When combined with the preceding visual sequences of surveillance and control, the car becomes symbolically linked to these values.

Therefore, this final frame does not merely conclude the narrative but transforms it into a persuasive statement. The integration of gaze, camera angle, and narration creates a multimodal alignment that positions the Hyundai car as an extension of paternal care and authority. In this way, the commercial achieves its persuasive goal by embedding the product within a culturally meaningful role.

Building on these findings, the results of this study are broadly consistent with previous research on transitivity and multimodal discourse in commercialising. For instance, Wilson and

Lubis (2024) demonstrate that material processes tend to dominate commercialising discourse by positioning the product as the central Actor associated with action and functionality, which aligns with the present finding that material processes account for the largest proportion of clauses. Similarly, Zulprianto and Fanany (2023) argue that experiential meaning is realised through transitivity structures involving processes, participants, and circumstances, supporting the present finding that meaning is constructed through the interaction of multimodal transitivity elements. However, in contrast to previous studies that primarily focus on linguistic data or isolate specific semiotic resources, the present study adopts a fully integrated multimodal approach, incorporating visual and auditory elements within a transitivity framework. This extends earlier multimodal studies such as Santikul (2024) and Huang (2024), which highlight the role of visual meaning in commercialising but give limited attention to sound as a semiotic resource. Therefore, this study makes a distinct contribution by demonstrating how auditory elements systematically function within transitivity frames to reinforce persuasive meaning in audiovisual commercials



Figure 21. *Frame 13*

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined how meaning is constructed in the Hyundai Super Bowl 2016 commercial through the interaction of linguistic, visual, and auditory modes using a multimodal transitivity framework. The findings show that material processes dominate the verbal component, positioning the car as the central Actor associated with action, usability, and control, while relational processes construct positive attributes linked to desirability and social value. Visual strategies, including camera angle, framing, and movement, further reinforce

meanings of power, control, and audience alignment across transitivity frames. Importantly, auditory elements such as wolf howls, tyre screeches, and alarm sounds function as integral semiotic resources that reinforce and extend transitivity meanings, contributing to themes of surveillance, performance, and protection. These results demonstrate that persuasive meaning in commercialising emerges not from isolated modes, but from the coordinated interaction of multimodal resources across sequential frames.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a single commercial, which limits the generalisability of the findings to broader commercialising contexts. Second, the selection of frames was conducted by a single researcher, which introduces a degree of subjectivity despite the use of systematic criteria. Third, the study does not incorporate audience reception data and therefore cannot account for how viewers may interpret or respond to the commercialise. Finally, the analysis does not employ quantitative reliability measures, which may affect the replicability of the findings.

Future research may address these limitations by analysing a larger corpus of commercials across different genres or cultural contexts, integrating audience reception studies, and combining qualitative multimodal analysis with quantitative approaches to enhance reliability. Further studies may also explore how multimodal transitivity frameworks can be applied in other media contexts, such as social media commercialising or digital storytelling.

## FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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