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**Posters of Oscar-winning Movies
as Visual Narratives: A Visual
Semiotic Study**

Lubna Sherif

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Abstract

Irrespective of their culture, people are storytellers who reflect on and shape their lives through narratives. Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017) agree that a narrative is a text which conveys a subject and a possible world to an addressee who can be a reader, a viewer, or a listener. They add that a narrative can take various forms: text, image, sound, or a combination of some or all of them. A movie poster is a possible narrative world because it tells the movie's story through an extensive use of visuals. As a narrative form, a movie poster shares some features of narratives such as characterization, setting, and plot. These elements can be linguistically realized via a plethora of linguistic tools as those recurrent in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual semiotics model. The present paper examines a few posters for Oscar-winning movies in order to expose the visual linguistic representation of the elements constituting a narrative.

Keywords: Narrative, Oscar Movie Poster, Visual Narrative, Visual Semiotics, and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)

1. Introduction

Narratives are a way of life since individuals are characterized by their ability to tell stories about themselves, other people, or the world. Narratives can take written, audible, visual, or audiovisual forms. In the present era, narratives have become more visual than written where images and colors are put together in a certain arrangement to create a narrative. Visual narratives can be interactive, dynamic, or static. An interactive visual narrative is that which involves the recipient as in video games; video games require the interaction of individuals with the game. The dynamic visual narrative can be seen in movies and television drama where images are moving. The last form is static where the image is still as in photos, paintings, and comic strips.

One form of static visual narratives which has not received much attention is movie posters. The significance of movie posters is being part of the marketing and advertising plan for movies. In the past, movie posters only focused on generating the audience's emotions. In this respect, Tan (1995) and Schwarz and Clore (1996) agree that the most important characteristic in a movie poster is to instill affective feelings in the viewers. They define affective feelings as those emotional reactions depicted in the movie transferred to the poster to impact the viewers so that they make the decision of watching the movie in the cinema.

In his survey of the history of movie posters, Smith (2018) identifies the main task of the poster: to sell the movie to the audience. Hence, the poster aims to generate the audience's interest in watching the movie. Smith (2018) reveals the main features of a successful selling movie poster. Firstly, it is expected to introduce

the movie's theme and genre to the viewers. Secondly, it should highlight the main characters of the movie. It is worth mentioning that in Smith's (2018) pursuit to trace the history of creating movie posters, it has been revealed that, in the past, movie producers did not add the movie stars to the poster for fear that they might ask for more money. However, the changes occurring to the advertising industry resulted in portraying the protagonists on the poster since the viewers became more interested in seeing their favorite stars on it. It is, thus, important nowadays to examine the interrelationship between the design of movie posters and visual narratives.

1.1. Elements of Narratives

Narratology is a broad term, which encompasses theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, and events that tell a story. Narratologists have for long shown interest in understanding what makes a narrative, and how it differs from a story. The works of Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017) focused on providing a definition for a narrative, identifying its elements, and highlighting the differences between it and a story. This part reviews their work on narratives with a specific focus on the elements of a visual narrative.

The work of Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017) provides a similar interpretation of the concept of "narrative". Fludernik (2009) explains it as

a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions (action and plot structure). (p. 6)

Fludernik's (2009) definition states that the medium of a narrative

can be written or visual. The elements of this narrative are having one or more protagonist(s), time, space, and events. Similarly, Bal (2017) defines a “narrative text” as a “text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee (‘tells’ the reader, viewer, or listener) a story in a medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof” (p. 5). The narrative text is responsible for narrating a set of chronological and logical events to a recipient. The recipient and the medium of expression determine each other. For instance, a viewer would need a visual and imagery medium, and an imagery medium targets the viewer. The narrative text, thus, tells a story even though the text and the story might not be identical.

Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017) agree on the fact that a written or a visual narrative entails a story that represents the content. Fludernik (2009) remarks that the recipients of narratives can construct a story which is defined as a sequence of events which has a beginning, middle, and an end. The elements of this story -as clarified by Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017)- are categorized as follows: characters who include the protagonist(s), setting, narrator, plot, and events. Bal (2017) elaborates on the aspects which enable the story to create the desired effect. The first aspect is that the events of the story should be arranged in a sequence which should not necessarily be chronological. Bal (2017) adds that events are sometimes linked to each other by cause-and-effect relations.

The second aspect of the story is the actors who are the characters participating in the story. Bal (2017) clarifies that not all the characters are the same because each has his/her own distinctive features. Space is another aspect of a story which is the location where the action takes place. The most important element in the story is the narrator. Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017) stress that the narrator has a voice which can be the first-person if one is narrating

his/her story or the third-person when a person is narrating the story of someone else. The narrator entails a focalizer that arises from the relationship between what is being perceived and who perceives it. Bal (2017) mentions that the focalizer is responsible for presenting the events from a certain viewpoint. The recipients of the story are, thus, allowed to interpret and see the story from the focalizer's perspective alone.

1.2. Research Questions

The study focuses on the analysis of the posters of Oscar-winning movies to expose how the poster as visual communication can represent a movie's story. The analysis attempts to decode the sign system of visual images to highlight the elements of the story and their visual representation. It attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

1. In which ways are the elements of the narrative represented in the posters of Oscar-winning movies?
2. What kind of relation between the represented participant and the interactive participant is revealed by the visual analysis of posters?
3. To what extent do the visual elements represent the story of the movie?

The study, thus, attempts to expose the role of Oscar-winning movie posters in constituting a narrative.

2. Visual Social Semiotics

Visual social semiotics emerged in the early 1990s. It was developed by the Australian design scholars Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen as an analytical theory which assumes that all modes of communication are socially and culturally constructed. The work

of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) on the grammar of visual design rests on the notion that images, like texts, communicate messages to their viewers. The context of their work rests on the Hallidayan theory on the social functions of language. Halliday (1978) identifies three metafunctions of language: Ideational which constructs the world, interpersonal which draws the relationship between people, and textual which creates the structure of the text.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) correlate with Halliday's (1978) metafunctions with visual semiotic dimensions as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

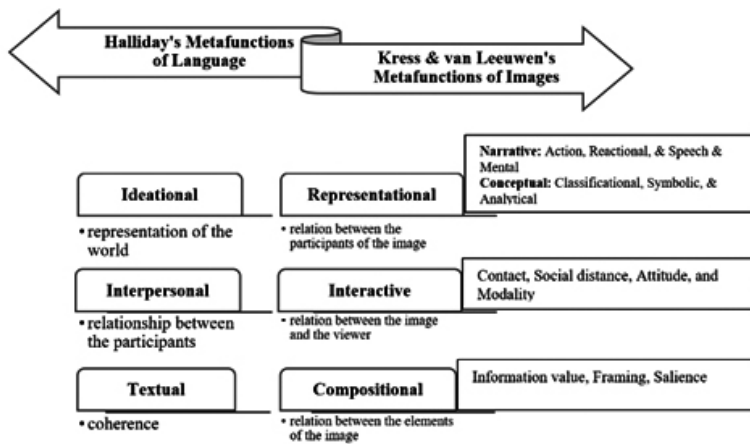


Figure 1: *The Metafunctions of Language and Images. Adapted from Halliday (1978), and Kress & van Leeuwen (2006)*

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) link the Ideational metafunction with the semiotic function of the Representational metafunction which constructs the representation of the world. The Interpersonal metafunction becomes the Interactive in the semiotic model to constitute communicative interactions between people; that is to say, social relations. Finally, the Textual metafunction is correlated

with the semiotic function of the Compositional dimension to create internal and external complex signs to link the design to the environment it exists in. The visual semiotic model, thus, offers a framework to analyze visual designs and make connections between elements of the visual design and the real world.

2.1. Representational Metafunction

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model tackles visual structures as linguistic structures. The Representational metafunction -as illustrated in Figure 1- is reflected in two structures: Narrative and Conceptual. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) differentiate between the previous two structures: The Narrative pattern is dynamic because it introduces actions and events to show processes of change and transitory spatial arrangements whereas the Conceptual is static because it introduces concepts and ideas. Each of these structures is based on processes which are the events taking place. Processes depict participants who are connected by a vector. A vector is a line formed by the elements in the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006); it is a line of force pointing to a certain direction in the form of eyelines or gestures. The vectors can be formed by bodies, limbs, or tools when the participants are doing something to or for each other.

The Narrative structure is concerned with the actions, reactions, thoughts, and speech of the participants; it has three types of processes: Action, Reactional, and Speech and Mental. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the vector in the Action process connects two participants: the Actor and the Goal. The Actor is the person or object doing the action whereas the Goal is the acted-upon. The Action process can take various forms depending on the number of participants. If the two participants (Actor and Goal) are present in the image, then it is a transactional Action process. In case

the Action process does not have a Goal, then it is non-transactional.

The second process type in the Narrative structure is the Reactional process which is created by the eyeline of the participants. The person who is doing the act of looking is the Reacter, and the Phenomenon is what he/she is looking at. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) remark that it has two types, transactional and non-transactional, depending on the number of participants. A non-transactional Reactional process exists when there is one participant, and a transactional Reactional process occurs when both participants are present. Finally, the speech and mental processes represent the thoughts and speeches of the participants (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006); the vector emerges in the form of speech and thought bubbles to connect the participant to the thought or the speech. Speech and Mental processes are transactional as they connect a living being with attendant speech or thoughts.

All the previous processes have secondary participants which are called Circumstances. They are related to the main participants without any vectors. They are categorized by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) into Circumstances of Setting, Circumstances of Means, and Circumstances of Accompaniment. Circumstances of Setting refer to the setting of the process which can be seen in the contrast between the foreground and the background, color saturation, lighting focus, angle shot, and camera's focal point. The Circumstances of Means highlight the tools used in the Action process through which the action is made. Lastly, the Circumstances of Accompaniment refer to a participant that has no vector to link it to another participant.

The Conceptual structure is characterized by having no vectors as it stresses the class, structure, or meaning of the participants. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) divide the Conceptual structure into:

Classificational, Analytical, and Symbolic processes. The participants in the Classificational process are related to each other via a taxonomy which has superordinates and subordinates. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) distinguish two kinds of Classificational processes. The first is the covert taxonomy in which the subordinates are symmetrically organized, and the superordinate is visually inferred. The overt taxonomy, on the other hand, is either single- or multi-leveled. The single-leveled overt taxonomy has a tree structure with two or more subordinates with only two levels whereas the multi-levelled taxonomy entails more than two levels connecting the superordinates to the subordinates, occurring at either the top or bottom of the tree structure.

The second type identified by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is the Analytical process. It represents the visual elements in a part-whole structure where the two components are Possessive Attributes (the parts) and Carrier (the whole). The last process is the Symbolic which defines the meaning or identity of the represented participant. It has two categories: symbolic attributive or symbolic suggestive. The image in the Symbolic attributive process includes two participants: the Carrier whose meaning is clarified by the symbolic attribute which carries the meaning or the identity itself. In addition, the Symbolic suggestive occurs when there is one participant only, usually the Carrier.

2.2. Interactive Metafunction

The second semiotic metafunction is the Interactive which highlights the relationship between the producer and the viewer of the image. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that it is realized via these tools: Contact, Social Distance, Attitude (perspective), and Modality. The Contact stresses the emerging eye contact between

the represented participants: producer and viewer of image. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that when the represented participants look at the viewer, vectors connect the participants and the viewers on an imaginary level called the "Gaze". The Gaze creates two types of images: "demand" and "offer". The Gaze of participants in "demands" requests something from the viewer; this can be reflected in the facial expressions and gestures of the participant. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) add that those images where represented participants do not look directly at the viewer are "offer" images; they offer the represented participants items of information or objects of contemplation to the viewer.

Another element in the Interactive dimension is the Social Distance which relates the represented participant to the viewer. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) elaborate that images are constructed in a manner which can make the viewer feel far away from or close to the represented participants. Social distance is determined by the distance between the represented participants. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) identify five forms of shots which reflect the social distance: close personal (close shot), far personal (medium-close shot), medium-long shot, long shot, and public distances.

The third element under the Interactive dimension is the Attitude which is also known as Perspective. The Attitude/Perspective is regulated by the relationship between the viewer and the represented participant as images can be subjective or objective to denote the degree of involvement/detachment of participants (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The angle reflects the degree of involvement/detachment. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) clarify that the horizontal angle reflects the relation between the frontal plane of the image-producer and that of the represented participants. A frontal angle demonstrates involvement whereas an oblique angle

indicates detachment. The vertical angle can be related to power. Involvement occurs when the represented participants are portrayed from a frontal point of view to link the viewer to the represented participants. When the represented participants are introduced from an oblique point of view to the viewer, detachment exists because it separates the viewer from the represented participant.

The last tool is modality which is the degree of normality of images. Modality judgements are “social, dependent on what is considered real (or true, or sacred) in the social group for which the representation is primarily intended” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 156). Modality is found in contextualization and colors. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) reveal that contextualization is a “scale running from absence of background to the most fully articulated and detailed background” (p. 165). They also focus on the scales of color in their analysis of modality. Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) highlight various semiotic aspects of color that can be summed as follows: value which pays attention to the greyscale, saturation which expresses the emotive temperatures, purity which contrasts pure colors (e.g. blue) with hybrid colors (cyan), and modulation which refers to a range of a fully modulated color (e.g. rich blue) to flat colors (generic colors). There is also differentiation which shows affordances through vividness and vibrance. Finally, hue is concerned with a scale ranging from blue to red.

2.3. Compositional Metafunction

As visual grammar emphasizes how visual elements construct meaning; it gives significance to the compositional dimension of the structure because it demonstrates the organization of the Representational and the Interactive meaning in the visual design. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that the Compositional dimension is analyzed in terms of Information Value, Saliency, and

Framing. Information Value relates the participants to each other and to the viewer as well. It is highly connected to Saliency because it depends on the interaction between the placement of elements and the size of images. Information Value pays attention to visual space; that is to say, the arrangement of the spatial organization: left/right, ideal/real, and center/margin (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In the left/right arrangement of information, the New information is usually placed on the right side whereas the Given information occurs on the left. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) note that the ideal/real organization places the information from the top to the bottom where the top is the Ideal, and the bottom is the specific presented as the Real. The last arrangement set by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is the center/margin structure which gives prominence to the central position whereas the margins introduce the subordinate elements in the composition.

Besides, Saliency exists when designers use the image's size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast, color contrast, foreground, and background to deliver a certain message (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The last element is Framing which demonstrates whether the images are placed together or not. This means that images can be either connected or disconnected. A disconnected image has elements with separate identities whereas connected images have elements represented as belonging to one another.

It is worth mentioning that each semiotic act relies on two participants: the Interactive participant who might be the designer and/or viewer of the visual structure, and the Represented participant that represents the subject matter or the theme. Movie posters involve the two types of participants outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Each poster is created by a designer to generate interest in the viewer to watch the movie, so the

Interactive participant exists before the release of the poster. The designer uses the Represented participant in the poster in order to deliver a certain message to the viewer. The interrelation between the Interactive participant and the Represented participant reveals itself in the Representational metafunction since it introduces the world view created by the designer to the viewer. The present study, chiefly, traces the Narrative structure because it underscores the connection between the participants and events. The analysis of the Narrative structure would integrate some tools from the Interactive and the Compositional semiotic metafunctions in order to fully realize the elements of the visual narrative.

3. Elements of Visual Narrative in Movie Posters

Visual narratives can take various forms, such as cinema, television, drama, advertisements, posters, and images. A widespread phenomenon, in the modern world, is marketing new movies through the visual medium of posters. The posters are designed in order to give the viewer an overview of the movie to help him/her make the decision to watch the movie. This section sheds light on the elements of narrative which exist in the movie posters under analysis.

3.1. Data

The current study is devoted to the analysis of a random selection of Oscar-winning posters collected from www.imdb.com. All the selected posters are for movies which won the Academy Award for Best Picture. According to imdb.com, this is the most prestigious award in the ceremony because it is awarded by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to the producers of the movie. The Best Picture is the final award of the night which allows every member of the Academy to submit a nomination and vote on the

final ballot. The selected posters belong to different ages to reveal the visual narrative pattern of the poster designers and highlight the story elements of the poster. It is important to note that a poster from each of the following decades, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, is analyzed. For each decade after the 1980s and up until 2019, two movie posters are analyzed since this period witnessed the prime of the movie poster industry as stated by Smith (2018). The analysis of the selected posters begins with a summary of the movie's plot. It is followed by the analysis of the Narrative structure of the Representational metafunction in addition to tools from the Interactive and Compositional metafunctions.

3.2 Analysis of Oscar-winning Movie Posters

The first poster under analysis is for *My fair lady* which won the Best Picture Award in 1965. The story is based on a play by George Bernard Shaw with the same name; the screenplay was written by Alan Jay Lerner, and it was directed by George Cukor. The leading roles are for Audrey Hepburn (Eliza Doolittle) who sells flowers in the streets and Rex Harrison (Professor Higgins). Professor Higgins is a snobbish phonetics professor who decides to make Eliza a representable figure in the upper-class society by teaching her the right accent.

The compositional structure of the movie poster has a black frame which puts all the elements inside together:



At the center of the frame lies a complex structure of processes. First of all, there is a transactional Reactional process in which Harrison (Professor Higgins) is the Reacter as he looks at Hepburn (Eliza), the Phenomenon. His gaze makes a demand because he wants her to learn from him how to speak like an aristocrat in order to assimilate herself with the upper-class. The look in his eyes and his smile reflect his confidence in succeeding in his mission as indicated by the aristocratic way she is dressed in. The fact that she is not looking at him foreshadows his failure in his mission. This is indicated by the Circumstances of Accompaniment which represent the secondary participants in the process: upper- and lower-class members of the society.

Besides, there is a transactional Action process where Eliza (Actor) carries an umbrella (Goal) which encompasses the design of the center of the Compositional structure. The Goal itself forms a Symbolic process where the umbrella is the Carrier of the Attribute

of protection. This umbrella encompasses the Reactional process and the Circumstances of Accompaniment which depict other minor characters in the story. The fact that the umbrella's rod is almost placed in the middle of Eliza's face symbolizes her fragmentation as she belongs to the lower-class; however, she is trying to change her style and attitude to join the upper-class.

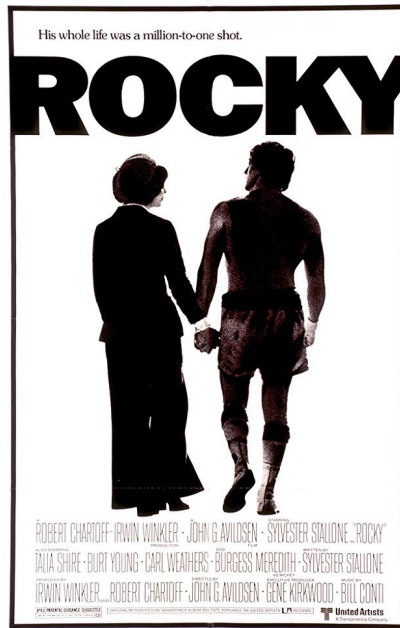
The modality of the colors used in the poster are illuminated though they are dark. The colors tend to be modulated in the middle as different shades of the red and off-white are used. At the edges of the poster, there is a frame of unsaturated black color to contain all the elements. Besides, the frame gives prominence to the focal point (represented by the Action and Reactional processes) to create some sort of intimacy between the participants and the viewer as indicated by using the close shot on Eliza and the medium shot for Higgins.

It is important to note that the items in this Compositional structure are arranged in the Ideal/Real organization. The Ideal, mainly, depicts the names of the leading actor and actress in the movie who are the protagonists of the story. The Real includes the production company, secondary roles, and the rest of the crew. They are written in red color on the unsaturated black in a manner which makes the bottom edge of the frame thicker than the rest of the edges. Within the Ideal, "Audrey Hepburn" is the Given information as she was a very famous actress at that time, and the New information is represented by the Real "My Fair Lady". This Real introduces her new role as an actress and the name of the movie which correlates with portraying her using the close shot.

The poster introduces the main characters in the movie: Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison. Since Audrey Hepburn is the focal point of the central composition, it is evident that she is the center of

narration in the whole story. The fact that there are many people with unclear features around her stresses her struggle between who she is and who she wants to be. The existence of flowers at the top right of the Compositional structure in off-white reveal one location of the of the story which is the street where Eliza sells flowers.

The second poster is for *Rocky* which was written and starred by Sylvester Stallone. It was directed by John G. Avildsen. It won the Best Picture award in 1977. It tells the story of the Italian-American Rocky Balboa who started his career as a famous boxer by being a club fighter. The poster of the movie includes important visual elements:



It has a frame which contains all the elements of the design. The colors used in the poster are unsaturated, especially, with the tonal contrast between the background and the foreground. The background is in unsaturated white color whereas the foreground

and the frame are in unsaturated black color. The background and foreground colors give more weight to the elements making the Representational metafunction. The Ideal of this Compositional structure has the following statement on the top left corner in a sepia modulation: "His whole life was a million-to-one-shot." It summarizes the theme of the movie. The name of the movie, Rocky, is written in thick unsaturated black color which acts as a banner, especially, that the frame merges with the name of the movie. In contrast, the Real informs the viewer about the cast; it starts with the actors and actresses on the first line, followed by the musician and the rest of the crew in a sepia shade of black.

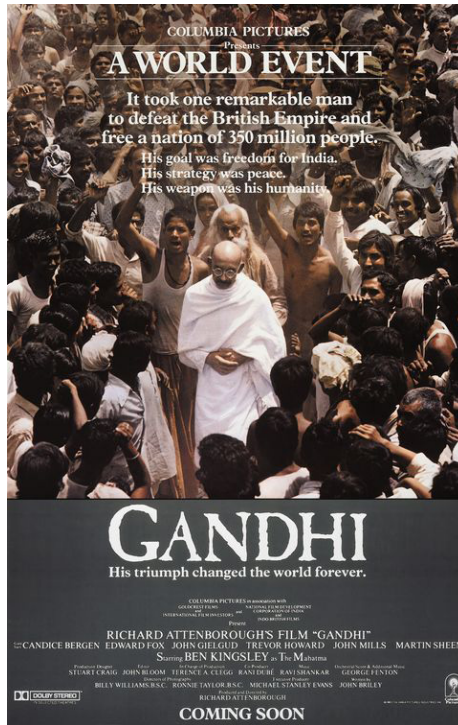
The center of the Compositional structure entails complex use of processes which involve two participants only: the woman on the left and Rocky on the right represented by Sylvester Stallone. The first process is a transactional Action process where the two Interactors are holding each other's hands. The second process involves them again in a transactional Reactional process in which the two of them are looking at each other. The long shot displayed by the Interactive dimension creates social distance between the viewer and the participants, especially, with the offer gaze where the participants are looking away from the viewer. This is further asserted by the modality of the background and foreground colors which contrast each other, except for the sepia color of Rocky who is the focal point of the design, participants, and movie.

The visual design of the poster reflects some elements of the story. First of all, the main protagonist in the story, Rocky, is the focal point of the design. Being dressed in the boxing outfit refers to his job in the movie as a boxer. The act of holding hands indicates to the love story emerging between Rocky and Adrianna (Talia Shire) on the left. The name of the protagonist and the theme of the story are written on the top of the poster. The poster, however, does not

refer to the setting at all.

The third movie recounts the story of the revered Indian lawyer, Mohandas Gandhi. It won the Best Picture Award in 1983. The screenplay was written by John Briley and directed by Richard Attenborough. The movie is based on a true story. It narrates the story of Gandhi who struggled hard all through his life to drive the British out of the subcontinent. Ben Kingsley acted the role of Gandhi.

The poster has a real design and tends to be informative. The background is a real photo for Gandhi and his followers which is indicated by the sepia colors. The foreground of the design includes information about Gandhi himself:



The Compositional structure of the poster has Ideal/Real

arrangement. The Ideal reveals facts about Gandhi and his achievements, and the Real includes information about the movie such as the name, cast, crew, and producer. The text written on the Ideal and the Real is in the unmodulated white color. White is used against the sepia background in the Ideal and the value of the color used in the Real is the greyscale which moves from a lighter to a darker shades of grey.

The focal point of the design is the sepia photo of Gandhi. Gandhi is the Actor of an Action process in which he is walking in the street (Goal). The secondary participants as indicated by his followers and supporters represent the Circumstances of Accompaniment. The followers are also participants in other processes. The followers behind Gandhi are the Actors in a transactional Action process in which they salute Gandhi (Goal). This is clarified by the Circumstances of Means where their hands are raised in the hailing and saluting mode. The followers in front of Gandhi represent the Reactor in a transactional Reactional process where Gandhi is the Phenomenon. These two processes result from the status he occupies due to his achievements -mentioned in the Ideal.

The focal point in the whole Compositional structure is Gandhi. The unsaturated white in the simple clothes he wears makes him stand out among his followers whose clothes' color has the emotive temperature of earth colors (brown and off-white). Gandhi's clothes' color connects him to what the viewers should know about him whether in the Ideal or the Real as indicated by the use of the white color for text. The medium shot used here creates an intimate social distance between the viewer and the participants in the poster despite the offer gaze of both Gandhi and his followers. The medium shot displays the love and respect people have for Gandhi. This creates some sort of affinity between the viewers and Gandhi, especially, when they read about what he did for people and his modest appearance.

The design of the poster reveals a few story elements. The setting can be assumed to be one of the third-world countries as indicated by the colors and appearance of the participants in the image. The time of the story would be expected to be the same time when Gandhi lived. It is obvious from the real photo of Gandhi and title of the movie that it recounts the story of Gandhi who is the main character as well.

In the 1990s, two posters will be analyzed as this decade witnessed changes in the advertising and marketing industry. The first poster is for Tom Hanks' *Forrest Gump*. The movie won the Best Picture Award in 1995. It is about Forrest Gump, a slow-witted and kind-hearted man who is in love with Jenny. After their separation for years, Jenny asks Gump to visit her. Gump sits on a wooden bench in the street after leaving the bus. The movie was based on a novel by Winston Groom. The screenplay was written by Eric Roth and directed by Robert Zemeckis.

The Compositional dimension of the poster has a generic color of the flat color; it is light grey as indicated below:



The background color directs the viewer's attention to the busy Mediator and Real. The Mediator itself presents another Ideal/Real organization using the following sentence: "Tom Hanks is Forrest Gump." This statement demarcates between the Given and the New information by using colors. The bright red color introduces the Given information "Tom Hanks is", and the bright blue color presents the New information "Forrest Gump" which is his new role.

The Real includes an Action process where Gump (the Actor) sits on a wooden bench, which is the main scene in the entire movie. The baggage in front of Gump presents the Circumstance of Means, which shows that Gump is travelling. The Real also includes a non-transactional Reactional process where Gump (the Reactor) is looking next to him. This process highlights a repetitive incident all through the movie where Gump narrates his past life and reflects on important political events to any stranger sitting next to him on the bench. Though the Gaze recurrent in the Reactional process looks impersonal, especially, that the whole body is portrayed by the long shot, it reflects intimacy as Gump tells his story to every passer-by.

The colors used are bright on top and grow dimmer on the bottom where the information on the cast and crew of the movie is presented. The color modality results in the shadow of the focal point in the Real. The shadow entails a Symbolic process where the Carrier of the Attribute of storytelling is the shadow. It reveals the fact that Gump's narration offers a new perspective to some historical and political events.

This main character, setting, and plot are introduced by the focal point and accompanying text. The poster informs the audience about the main character by stating that Tom Hanks acts the role of Forrest Gump. The the setting of the story is revealed by the street wooden bench, and the time is morning. There is a hint to the plot which tells the story of Gump.

The second poster from the 1990s is for *Titanic*. It was released in 1997, and it won the Best Picture Award in 1998. It is based on

the true story of the sinking ship of Titanic. The writer and director of the movie is James Cameron. The leading roles are for Leonardo Di Caprio (Jack) and Kate Winslet (Rose). The movie depicts a love story between a seventeen-year-old upper-class girl called Rose and a working-class boy called Jack. The love story begins while traveling on a ship called Titanic. As the ship sinks at the end of the movie, Jack sacrifices his life to save that of Rose.

The poster is arranged in the Ideal/Real composition. The Ideal depicts a transactional Action process where Jack (the Actor) hugs Rose (the Goal). The action of hugging creates a Symbolic process where the act of hugging is the Carrier of the Attribute of love which is the main theme of the movie. The text which reads “NOTHING ON EARTH COULD COME BETWEEN THEM” is written in capital letters to attract the audience to the theme of the movie. It also conveys an ironic effect as death will tear them apart:



The Gaze portrayed in the Ideal is an offer where none of the Interactors is looking at the viewers to create an impersonal atmosphere. Thus, the viewers would focus on their tragedy rather than the love story as the Ideal leads the viewer to the Mediator and the Ideal.

The high angle shot introduces the Titanic ship within the structure of the Mediator. The ship is the Circumstance of Means where the

Interactors are travelling. The Real presents the names of Di Caprio and Winslet, followed by the name of the movie "TITANIC" in off-white capital letters to reveal hope and love. It is written against the dark background where the unsaturated black color is used to denote death. It is important to note that each letter making "TITANIC" is framed with the pins used in manufacturing ships to give prominence to the ship.

This poster shows many elements of the story. The people involved in the processes are the protagonists of the story. The poster also introduces the setting; the spatial aspect of the setting is the ship (Titanic) where all the action takes place. The viewer can assume that the time of the story is the duration of the journey. It is evident that the plot tells the love story of Jack and Rose during their travel by Titanic.

Three posters are analyzed starting the year 2000 and up until 2019. The first movie is *A beautiful mind* which narrates the story of the Nobel Laureate in Economics, John Nash. The movie was directed by Ron Howard, and it won the Best Picture Award in 2002. The screenplay was written by Akiva Goldsman based on a book by Sylvia Nasar. The movie narrates the story of Nash, starred by Russell Crowe. Nash is a brilliant, asocial mathematician who accepts secret work in cryptography.

The Compositional structure of this poster is unique because it is, mainly, devoted to the focal point and foreground as shown below:



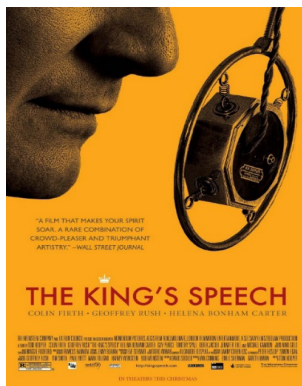
The background is blurred with an unsaturated black shadow of a person. The shadow is the Carrier of one of Nash's personality features; it is the Attribute of being anti-social which creates a Symbolic process. The foreground shows the image of Crowe who acts the role of Nash. There is a Symbolic process where Crowe/Nash is the Carrier of the Attribute of "A BEAUTIFUL MIND" which is written in capital, bold, unsaturated white color. Next to the focal point lies a text which reads "He saw the world in a way no one could have imagined" which mentions the main trait of Nash's personality. This focal point creates a non-transactional Reactional process where the Phenomenon (Nash) alone is depicted. The Reacter is understood to be the viewer as indicated by the offer Gaze where Nash is not looking at the viewers to reinforce the fact that he is asocial. The close-up makes Nash the center of attention, yet it creates an impersonal atmosphere as Nash does not look at the viewer.

Although the design of the poster does not include many visual elements, it displays many elements of the story. The poster focuses on the protagonist who has a beautiful mind. It is worth mentioning that there is no indication to the setting of the story, but the plot of the story is summed in the statement: "He saw the world in a way no one could have imagined."

The second poster is for the movie that won the Best Picture Award in 2011, *The king's speech*. This movie is based on a true story; it narrates a real-life incident for King George VI. He was going to deliver a speech following his accession to the throne of the British Empire in 1936. He stammers whenever he speaks which urges Elizabeth to hire a speech therapist to help him deliver the speech. Colin Firth performed the role of King George VI. The screenplay was written by David Seidler, and it was directed by Tom Hooper.

The focal point in the design of the poster is the Ideal and Mediator of the Compositional structure which present an Analytical process.

The possessive attributes of the process are the lips and microphone; the lips are for the body, and the microphone is for the radio. These possessive attributes are the Carrier in the Symbolic process where the lips stand for the King's stammer, and the microphone stands for the speech as indicated in the poster:



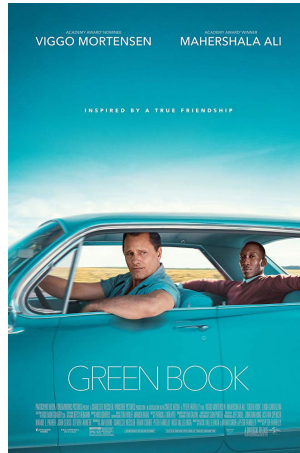
The aforementioned conceptual structure recurrent in the Analytical and the Symbolic processes compose a narrative scheme of a transactional Action process where the King (Actor) is giving a speech in the radio (Goal).

The Real in this composition is in the title of the movie, written in capital, red letters. The background is a plain, unmodulated orange color whereas the color of the foreground is of minimum scale (black and grey) on top. The dot on the letter "I" in the word "KING" is topped with a crown which creates a Symbolic process where the crown is the Carrier of the attribute of king. The focal point visually represents the movie title where Firth's lips stands for the "THE KING'S", and the microphone stands for the "SPEECH".

The elements of the story are reflected in the poster of the movie. First, it refers to the protagonist who is King George VI; the title uses the "THE KING" to represent him. The setting can be traced as well: The time is connected to the King's speech, and the place is the radio. Finally, the focal point alludes to the plot which is a king who is about to deliver a speech.

The last poster under analysis is *Green book*, which won the Best Picture Award in 2019. The screenplay was written by Nick Vallelonga and Brian Hayes Currie and directed by Peter Farrelly. The leading roles are for Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali. The movie narrates the story of a working-class Italian-American bouncer called Tony. Tony becomes the driver of an African-American pianist called Don. Tony drives Don on a tour across the Southern area of America in the 1960s. Don is disgusted by Tony's behaviors and asks him to behave better which causes disputes between them. However, they become good friends by the end of the movie.

As seen in the poster, the main color is saturated and modulated as the teal color has different shades: dark on the top and bottom of the poster and light in the center. The color of the poster is of maximal brightness:



The Ideal starts with the name of the leading actors, written in thin unmodulated white color. There is a reference to their achievement as actors written in a modulated shade of teal, which is a little dim because the background is dark.

The Mediator has the focal point which reveals an Action process of two Goals. The Actor is Tony who is driving the car (Goal 1) for Don (Goal 2). The Real presents the title of the movie, which is written in

white, thin, capital letters. As the *Green Book* is a guide for African American travelers to help them find establishment that would serve them, the placement of the title creates a Symbolic process. In this process, the white letters are the Carrier of the guiding attribute of the Green Book.

The use of the close shot presents the Contact which is established by the Gaze of the actors. The driver's Gaze is a demand as his look calls the viewers to sympathize with him. This connection is further supported by the facial expressions of the man sitting in the back seat whose seating indicates to his snobbish attitude. The close shot from a horizontal angle shows a spatial distance between the driver and the car owner which correlates with the tension in their relationship and the differences in their manners.

The visual analysis of the poster reveals a few pieces of information about the story. The complex use of processes represents the protagonists and plot in which Tony drives the car for Don. The color of the complexion of both characters point to their different races. The setting can also be deduced from the Compositional structure. The viewer can assume from the portrayed landscape that the movie does not occur in modern times, and that it occurs outdoors in a car.

4. Findings and Conclusion

The study investigated the visual elements of the story in selected Oscar-winning movie posters using the visual semiotic model of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The focus of the analysis was to identify how the elements of the story which Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017) identified are visually constructed. The study focused on the Representational metafunction because it represents the semiotic aspect of the world view. Some elements of the Interactive and Compositional metafunctions were also analyzed in order to

offer a comprehensive overview of the Representational dimension.

The analysis of the Representational meaning usually reveals the plot and protagonists. The participants in the analyzed processes present the protagonists of the movie's plot. The interrelation between the three metafunctions and the different visual elements highlights the basic plot of the story, which connects the participants to each other. The posters also help the viewer to estimate the time and place of the story even if it is not highly accurate.

Besides, the narrator is a significant element in the story which is not stressed in the poster design. Posters are made by designers who do not create the story and usually receive directions on the design from the director. Movies are written by screenplay writers and presented to the audience by the director. The director's vision entails the focalizer because it directs the audience's perspective of the story.

The interplay between the three metafunctions of the visual design underscores the relationship between the represented participants in the posters and the story, and the interactive participants. The represented participants trigger the interest of the interactive participants to watch the movie in the cinema or buy its DVD. The social relations established between these participants further reinforce the Representational meaning and create the intended effect on the viewers. The visual analysis is, therefore, capable of decoding the potential meaning of the movie recurrent in the story elements.

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