

# Exploring Persian Commercials Based on the Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar

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## Abstract

Advertisement has long been used as a tool for informing and attracting audiences in different ways. This study aims at investigating the linguistic tools of advertisement in Persian on the basis of Halliday's systemic-functional grammar theory. The data of this study were gathered from written and verbal commercial advertisements which were recorded and rewritten in order to investigate verbal groups in the sentences in terms of process and function types and subsequently compare the two bodies. The results showed that material and relational processes had highest frequency in Persian language in terms of ideational metafunction. From the interpersonal metafunction perspective, information function was frequent in most cases. Regarding these factors, there was no significant difference between verbal and written bodies.

**Keywords:** Systemic-Functional Grammar, Ideational Metafunction, Interpersonal Metafunction, Advertisement

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Received: February 2014; Accepted: March 2015

## **1. Introduction**

The ability to forge relationships with other scientific domains is one of the linguistics attractions. Sociolinguistics is one of these interdisciplinary sciences. The main subject matter of this field is studying both the effects of language on community and those of community on language. Advertising is a form of communication used to persuade the audience to purchase provided goods or services. Advertising does not always focus on material goods, but sometimes is used to convince the public to follow a particular opinion, belief or behavior.

Jacques Ellul, one of the most prominent western theorists in the field of communications and advertising, defines advertising as a set of methods used by an organized group (Homayun, 1995, p. 150). Faghihian (2010) studied various types of implicature in Persian commercials based on the Grice's theoretical framework from a pragmatic view. Analyzing the data, he concluded that the majority of advertisers use indirect clues in order to convey their message. Accordingly, they use conversational implicature resulted from flouting strategies more frequently compared to other types of implicature as understanding this type of implicature will engage the audience's minds more than other types of implicature do and can in turn exert an indirect mental effect on them. AzizAbadiFarahani (2007) investigated the interaction of persuasive function and other linguistic functions in television commercials. After investigation, this hypothesis was proved that direct use of persuasive function is very limited in commercials. Kordzafaranloo and Shahnavaaz (2004) studied the terminology used in the commercials in terms of linguistics. They found that minimal pairs, onomatopoeia; extensive, compound, derivative, novel, and loan words, abbreviations, acronyms, alternative phrases, existing non-common words, neologisms, symmetrical words and morphological deviation were used more frequently in advertising endeavors. Shafiee (2002)

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investigated deviation in advertisement and divided commercial into three major categories. In the first category, language plays a central role, while in the second category, the image has the mission of delivering the message. In the third category, language and image have the same role. Different classifications are appeared for advertisements in different sources reflecting the multidimensional nature of this concept. We can generally divide advertisements into the following categories:

- 1) Commercial advertisement
- 2) Political advertisement
- 3) Public advertisement
- 4) Instructional advertisement
- 5) Religious advertisement
- 6) Cultural advertisement

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The present study explores Persian commercials based on Halliday's systemic-functional grammar. Formalism and functionalism are two major schools of linguistic whose followers have different ideas about language and how to study it. Formalists are mainly concerned with language structure and emphasize on syntax, linguistic forms, and word and sentence formation patterns. . According to Crystal (1992, p. 142), formalisms is a method which analyzes linguistic forms regardless of their meaning. In contrast, functionalism views language as a communication tool (Aghagolzadeh, 2006, p. 75). This theory precedes language function over its form and believes that syntax derives from the communication function of language so that we must begin actual language studies by exploring its communication roles (Dabirmoghaddam, 2004, pp. 40-41).

Halliday was a functionalist who was active in London school. He used the concept of “function” beside “system” in order to account for the context of situation consistent with language system. He believed that description of roles and functions of language in every society equals describing the meanings that language in general and each language in particular could have (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, pp. 23-18). Halliday viewed grammar as a selection-based entity (Halliday, 2003, p. 180). He believed what emphasized in grammar is “system”. This concept is associated with a set of choices in which the first choice from the available options leads to limitation for subsequent selections. In this approach, every selection act as an environment for the subsequent selections and it continues until the intended meaning of the speaker is created (Mohajer & Nabavi, 1997, p. 16).

From Halliday point of view (2004), language is a system of meanings which forms the basis of interaction. Accordingly, He has suggested four major metafunctions including ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, textual metafunction, and logical metafunction. Each of these metafunctions is discussed in the following sections.

## **2.1. Ideational Metafunction**

Ideational function of language is a reflection of human perception and understanding form realities of his surrounding world. Language is a tool which incorporates all real or unreal, objective or subjective and tangible or abstract experiences without any limitation and makes them interpretable. It is impossible to use this tool without proper order, arrangement, and classifications. The human mind has the ability to organize concepts and facts (Heston, 1988, p. 25) through their classification into separate groups called schemata. During this classification process, all the concepts related to a

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particular category are placed in separate groups (Hunt, 1982: *ibid*). Halliday has developed his grammar based on meanings and segmentations in the human mind. The task of this system is interpreting the human experience as a set of manageable processes. These processes are presented in the form of clause. Clause refers to every part of language constructed around a verb group (Thompson, 2004, p. 16). In this system, each clause is composed of three components (Halliday, 2004):

- A) Process: the main and focal element in each clause is "process" which is developed with help of verb group.
- B) Participants in the process: participants are elements directly involved in the process. It means that they either perform the process or are influenced by the process results.
- C) Circumstantial elements of the process: they have no direct role in the process and are in fact marginal and optional.

Halliday has classified ideational metafunction into six categories depending the type of activities occurring in the process. These six processes are reflection of an event, action, state, emotion, expression, or existence; and include three processes as material, mental and relational processes. Halliday has introduced three other processes called behavioral, verbal and existential processes in the borderlines of the three main processes of his theory. The boundary between the material and mental processes is behavioral process which is an expression of mental activity and physiological states. The boundary between mental and relational processes is verbal process which suggests symbolic relationships formed in the human mind and manifested as words and speech. The Boundary between material and relational processes is filled by existential process which implies existence.

- Material clauses

The material clauses include “doing” and “happening”. They imply doing of an action or occurrence of a change or an event, in which someone or something does an action or makes a change and in turn may or may not affect another person or thing. Halliday (2004) has classified the material processes into four groups:

- A) Creative clauses: The actor or goal do not already exist in these types of clauses and are formed over time and advancement. The Verbs such as “build” and “create” can be seen as examples of this process.
- B) Transformative clauses: In this type of clauses, actor or goal are present from the beginning, but go through changes during the process. Turn off and “throw away” are two examples of the transformative clauses.
- C) Clauses contain concrete processes: the verbs in such clauses are manifestations of a concrete and tangible reality. In the case of “eat” or “hit”, we talk about visible facts.
- D) Clauses with abstract processes: the verbs in such clauses are manifestations of something abstract, such as “demit” and “resign”.

- Mental clauses

Mental processes are related to changes in the flow of events that occur in our inner world (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 197). Halliday (2004, pp. 200-210) has classified mental processes into four categories:

- A) Perceptive mental processes: such as seeing, hearing, smelling.
- B) Cognitive mental processes: such as thinking, understanding, discovering.
- C) Desiderative mental processes: such as wanting, seeking, craving
- D) Emotive mental processes: such as love, hating.

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#### - Relational clauses

Relational clauses contain processes which draw relationship between two concepts. Relational processes which often are associated with the verb “to be” either explain a possessive relationship among the concepts or attribute a character and quality to them or express the time and place. There are three types of relational processes which are known as intensive, possessive, and circumstantial processes. Each of these three processes can be stated in two modes of attributive and identifying. In the attributive process, a certain feature is attributed to someone or something, that is, “a” is a characteristic of “x”. While, the identifying process further introduces someone or something, that is, “a” is the identity of “x”.

#### - Behavioral clauses

Behavioral process consists of psychological and physiological behaviors. Behaviors like coughing, smiling and breathing which have characteristics of the material processes on one hand, and tend to have mental processes on the other hand, belong to behavioral processes group.

#### - Verbal clauses

Thompson (2004, p. 100) views the verbal process as a tool for conveying the message through language. This process manifests in verbs like “telling”. Verbs such as “talk”, “speak”, and “answer” belong to this category.

- Existential clauses

When we speak of the existence or non-existence of a phenomenon, we use the existential process. Existential processes are realized in form of verbs such as “being” and “existing”.

## **2.2. Interpersonal Metafunction**

How linguists view language as a tool for interaction and communicating with others is an aspect of language called interpersonal metafunction. From the Halliday's point of view (2004, p. 107), there are four basic communicative functions including: 1- information, 2- offer, 3- question, and 4- command.

These communicative functions can be accomplished in word-grammar layer of language through aspect structure of the clause so that information and question are accomplished through informative aspect consisting of two declarative and interrogative structures; and command is consistent with imperative structure. However, offer does not comply with any certain grammatical structures and is an exception (Mohajer & Nabavi, 1376, p. 50). This study explores the actions of information, question, and command which follow the general rules.

## **2.3. Textual Metafunction**

The textual metafunction is created through the formation of the text within the context of situation. Eggins (2004, p. 272) explained the textual metafunction's task as helping the clause to organize the elements create different meanings.



## **2.4. Logical Metafunction**

This metafunction is the logical component of grammar which investigates the similarities and differences between clauses (Abolhasani & Mirmalek Sani, 1999, p. 133). This means that all three ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions are concerned with meaning while the rational metafunction is concerned with relationships among messages.

## **3. Method**

The present study which is a descriptive-analytic one explores Persian advertisements based on Halliday's systemic-functional grammar. No other research has been done on Persian advertisements in this way.

Based on different linguistic criteria, different words can be classified into major classes of nouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions, and phrases (Golfam, 2010). In a sentence, the task of process representation is done by the verbal group. What can be seen in a number of Persian commercials is transforming verbs into noun clause (naming nouns). For example:

-“cutting call rates by 20% in Barkatpackage of Hamrah-e-Aval” instead of “Barkat package cuts Hamrah-e-Aval tariff by 20%” .

In the present study, such examples and verbal groups have been used for better clarification of the obtained results. Thus, available verbs could be considered as main statistical population.

The sources of the advertisements used in this research were those published through newspapers, magazines, urban billboards, internet, TV subtitles, and also commercials broadcasted from channel one to five (Tehran channel) of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting organization. These

advertisements have been differentiated and explored according to their verbal and textual characteristics.

The verbal data have been recorded and rewritten preserving their speech type characteristics. Out of 185 collected commercials from advertisements, 134 were written samples and 51 verbal samples making a total number of 500 sentences as 250 written sentences and 250 spoken sentences. Mismatch between the numbers of samples in these two bodies is due to their different nature.

Differentiating the commercials in both bodies, advertisements were classified based on the process type (material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential), and studied based on the frequencies, similarities, and differences. In order to summarize and analyze the data and compare the two bodies, SPSS statistical software was used. The z-test was used to determine the significance between these two bodies and reach the final conclusion.

#### 4. Results

Out of 134 written commercials making a total number of 250 sentences, material process has been used in 90 sentences to convey the meaning. For example:

- Plant a golden grain, reap the golden plain. We invite you to a golden plain by deposits in Saman saving plan of the Sepah bank.

**Table 1. *Frequency of the Material Process in the Written and Verbal Bodies***

	No. of commercials	No. of sentences	Frequency of material process application	Percent of material process application
Written body	134	250	90	36%
Verbal body	51	250	103	41.2%

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There were 103 cases of material process in the verbal body including 51 commercials and 250 sentences.

Roozaneh Cheese has a soft tissue and spread on-bread very well. It is produced from fresh cow milk and has very delicious taste. A healthy and pleasant breakfast for all family members with Roozaneh Cheese. And now low-fat Roozaneh Cheese with 50% less fat.

There were 54 cases of sentences in the written body that had used mental process. For example: Paksan **thinks about** your family health.

**Table 2. Frequency of Mental Process in the Written and Verbal Bodies**

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of mental process application	Percent of mental process application
Written body	134	250	54	21.6%
Verbal body	51	250	40	16%

This was the case in 40 cases in the verbal body:

It's a secret that only you **know** (Easy Life)

Only six cases of verbal processes had been used to convoy messages through the language:

**Say hi** to Sib, to a simple sense of joy, Shadly natural juices without sugar.

**Table 3. Frequency of Verbal Process in Written and Verbal Bodies**

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of verbal process application	Percent of verbal process application
Written body	134	250	6	2.4%
Verbal body	51	250	18	7.2%

This process was used a little more in the verbal body and appeared in 18 cases:

I'm calm now. It works with low pressure water as well. First, I called 51011 and told them that we have problem with water pressure. They introduced a suitable model to me. Butane the low pressure water heater and a safe choice.

Relational process has been used in 97 cases out of 250 cases to convey the meaning :

**Your skin is your most expensive clothes** (Golrang Body Shampoo)

**Table 4. *The Relational Process Frequency in Written and Verbal Bodies***

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of relational process application	Percent of relational process application
Written body	134	250	97	38.8%
Verbal body	51	250	83	33.2%

This was the case in 83 cases in the verbal body.

One unit of Patrice carpet is **not enough**.

Out of 134 written commercial, the behavioral process has been used only in one instance to convey the meaning:

Your bank **never sleeps** (Internet Banking of Eghtesad-e-Novin Bank)

**Table 5. *Frequency of Behavioral Process in Written And Verbal Bodies***

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of behavioral process application	Percent of behavioral process application
Written body	134	250	1	0.4%
Verbal body	51	250	0	0.0%

Out of 51 verbal commercial, making a total number of 250 sentences, behavioral process was not been used at all to convey the meaning.

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Like behavioral process, frequency of applying existential process was low compared to other processes.

Did you know that **there is** a charming slim person inside every fat person (By Line fitness hall)?

**Table 6. Frequency of Existential Process in Written and Verbal Bodies**

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of existential process application	Percent of existential process application
Written body	134	250	2	0.8%
Verbal body	51	250	6	2.4%

This process had a little application in the verbal body too:

You can **be** out on the street, anywhere in the city

You can **be** at home, any time of the day

You can **be** at your office or at work. You have complete facilities of a branch with Maskan telephone bank.

One of the important issues in the context of interpersonal metafunction was the aspect structure of the sentence. The application frequency of any action in present research data has been provided through examples of the application of information, command and question in the following sections:

Information: informative sentences are usually used to convey a kind of information.

We can have good and healthy hair, if we use a good herbal shampoo. Sehat Olive Shampoo contains natural olive oil for your hair softness and elegance.

**Table 7. Frequency of Information in Written and Verbal Bodies**

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of information function	Percent of information function
Written body	134	250	139	55.6%
Verbal body	51	250	197	78.8%

Information in the verbal body:

Many people like to serve Mihaan milk and cheese in their Eftar meal.

Mihaan milk and cheese are something different.

Command: imperative sentences are usually used to persuade the audience to do something (Golfam, 2010, p. 51). Choose the best for sure. (White Moor Appliance)

**Table 8. *Frequency of Command in Written and Verbal Bodies***

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of command function	Percent of command function
Written body	134	250	87	34.8%
Verbal body	51	250	28	11.2%

Do not think about your dreams any longer? (Aftab Water Park)

Question: interrogative sentences are often used to obtain information about a topic (ibid: 51):

Do you know that opaque and dark skin color and brown spots would show you older than you are? (Arden cream)

**Table 9. *Frequency of Question in Written and Verbal Bodies***

	No of commercials	No of sentences	Frequency of question function	Percent of question function
Written body	134	250	24	9.6%
Verbal body	51	250	25	10%

Do you want a PC or notebook? Do not know what to buy? Want a free consultation? Are you going to buy a computer in monthly installments? Is your system broken down? Do you need support? Whatever you want, just say what you want. It's up to you. So give us a call, visit... (Zero & One Computer Store in Karaj).

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Collecting and summarizing data, they were compared with each other in a one to one mode in every corresponding group in order to determine their significant level. Z-test was employed for this purpose.

**Table 10. Summary of Data form Ideational Metafunction Perspective**

Written commercial	Verbal commercial
Material Process: 90 (36 %)	Material Process: 103 (41.2 %)
- Creative: 3 (1.2 %)	- Creative: 3 (1.2 %)
- Transformative: 15 (6%)	- Transformative: 10 (4 %)
- Concrete: 44 (17.6 %)	- Concrete: 53 (21.2 %)
- Abstract: 28 (11.2 %)	- Abstract: 37 (14.8 %)
Mental Process: 54 (21.6 %)	Mental Process: 40 (16 %)
- Perceptive: 7 (2.8 %)	- Perceptive: 6 (2.4 %)
- Cognitive: 26 (10.4 %)	- Cognitive: 17 (6.8 %)
- Desiderative: 8 (3.2 %)	- Desiderative: 10 (4 %)
- Emotive: 13 (5.2 %)	- Emotive: 7 (2.8 %)
Verbal Process: 6 (2.4 %)	Verbal Process: 18 (7.2 %)
- Receiver: 1 (0.4 %)	- Receiver: 6 (2.4 %)
- Speech: 5 (2 %)	- Speech: 11 (4.4 %)
- Target: 0 (0.0 %)	- Target: 1 (0.4 %)
Relational Process: 97 (38.8 %)	Relational Process: 83 (33.2 %)
- Intensive-attributive: 51 (20.4 %)	- Intensive-attributive: 51 (20.4 %)
- Intensive-identifying: 18 (7.2 %)	- Intensive-identifying: 7 (2.8 %)
- Possessive-attributive: 11 (4.4%)	- Possessive-attributive: 10 (4%)
- Possessive-identifying: 3 (1.2 %)	- Possessive-identifying: 1 (0.4 %)
- Circumstantial-attributive: 12 (4.8 %)	- Circumstantial-attributive: 12 (4.8 %)
- Circumstantial-identifying: 2 (0.8 %)	- Circumstantial-identifying: 2 (0.8 %)
- Existential Process: 2 (0.8 %)	- Existential Process: 6 (2.4 %)
- Behavioral Process: 1 (0.4 %)	- Behavioral Process: 0 (0.0 %)

**Table 11. Summary of Data form Interpersonal Metafunction Perspective**

Written			Verbal		
Information	139	(55.6 %)	Information	197	(78.8 %)
Command	87	(34.8 %)	Command	28	(11.2 %)
Question	24	(9.6 %)	Question	25	(10.0 %)

In order to determine the significance level between pairs of data that belong to verbal and written bodies, data were computed using SPSS software and z-test. The results were as follows:

**Table 12. Level of Significance Between Written and Verbal Bodies in Terms of Ideational Metafunction**

	Written	Verbal	z-test	Sig.
Material process	90	103	1.19	p>0.05
Creative	3	3	0	p>0.05
Transformative	15	10	1.02	p>0.05
Concrete	44	53r	1.01	p>0.05
Abstract	28	37	1.19	p>0.05
Mental process	54	40	1.60	p>0.05
Perceptive	7	6	0.281	p>0.05
Cognitive	26	17	1.43	p>0.05
Desiderative	8	10	0.48	p>0.05
Emotive	13	7	1.36	p>0.05
Verbal	6	18	2.51	P<0.05
Receiver	1	6	1.90	p>0.05
Speech	5	11	1.52	p>0.05
Target	0	1	1	p>0.05
Relational	97	83	1.30	p>0.05
Intensive-attributive	51	51	0.00	p>0.05
Intensive-identifying	18	7	2.25	P<0.05
Possessive-attributive	11	10	0.22	p>0.05
Possessive-identifying	3	1	1.00	p>0.05
Circumstantial-attributive	11	10	0.22	p>0.05
Circumstantial-identifying	2	2	0.00	p>0.05
Existential Process	2	6	1.42	p>0.05
Behavioral process	1	0	1	p>0.05



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As it can be seen, these two bodies were significantly different only in terms of verbal processes. In the verbal body, verbal process was more employed in conveying meaning. There was no evident difference in the subsets as well. Only in subsets of relational process, it was concluded that intensive-identifying relational process was used more in the written body.

*Table 13. Level of Significance Between Written and Verbal Bodies Regarding the Interpersonal Metafunction*

	Written	Verbal	z-test	Sig.
Information	139	197	5.52	P<0.05
Command	87	28	6.26	P<0.05
Question	24	25	0.15	P>0.05

From the interpersonal metafunction perspective, there was a significant difference between two bodies in terms of informative and imperative functions. This difference reflects the greater use of information function in the verbal body and command function in the written one. Both bodies were in the same status regarding to level of applying question function application.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Since the theoretical framework set in this research has been Halliday's systemic functional grammar, an effort has been made to apply the previously mentioned "function" and "system" concepts in the conclusion of the present study. One question that may come to mind is how Halliday enters function into the syntax layer, and how this syntax can be generalized to different texts. The answer to this question lies in the nature of this grammar. Each of the six processes in ideational metafunction, which convey the meaning, reflects a reality of the outside world in some way. For example, if the frequency of material process is higher than other processes in a text, it will indicate this fact

that the text implies the happenings, actions and physical activity more than other aspects. As the relational and material processes had the highest frequency in the promotional texts, it can be concluded that Persian commercial text or advertisement relies on events and actions, and more talks about the quality of realities and objects, properties of goods, and attributing special qualities to them.

As there was no significant correlation between the results obtained regarding the process with the highest frequency in the written and verbal bodies, it cannot be concluded that more attention is given to actions and happenings in the written body and to description and attribution of characteristics in the verbal body. However, there was little difference between written and verbal bodies, that is, the relational process had more application in written body and the material process in the verbal one. There was no significant difference between the two bodies regarding the other processes. Only verbal process had been used in a significantly different manner in the written and verbal bodies. Due to higher application of this process in the verbal body of commercials, it can be concluded that quotations and word of mouth recommendations are more frequent in the verbal body.

It can also be concluded that significant difference between the two bodies in the relational subset of intensive-identifying process is due to the nature of written contexts. This process had more application in writing body. Thus, Introducing and identifying goods are more emphasized in the Persian written advertisement texts than in verbal advertisements.

Based on the findings, another result that was achieved was higher application of information function in the verbal body than in the written one and more usage of command function in the written body than in verbal one.

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An implication of this study was the difference in the number of sentences in written and verbal commercials. The number of sentences in the written commercials was less than those in the verbal commercials. In other words, textual advertisements were short and often in two or three sentences, while verbal advertisements were composed of more sentences, about six to seven. The difference in lexical density of these two types can be considered for the design and construction of commercials.

Another result was related to the use of pronouns. A significant proportion of pronouns in commercials addressing the audience were second person plural pronouns, and first person plural pronouns reflect the owner of goods. The use of the plural pronoun “you” to address the client is more frequent in cases where goods or services are more critical like an ad for the banks. The singular pronoun “you” used for consuming goods such as food. We can interpret the use of plural pronoun for expressing greater respect and use of singular pronoun for creating more intimacy. This result can be generalized to the first-person pronoun usage as well.

As it was mentioned each of the processes and their different metafunctions in Halliday’s systemic functional grammar convey meaning differently and reflect reality of the outside world in some different ways. By comparing written and verbal commercial advertisements in Persian language on the basis of the Halliday’s systemic functional grammar, it was distinguished which processes were used more in each text and what the main differences between written and verbal texts were. By considering the purpose of marketing, findings of studies like this can be used by advertisers and writers to choose the best processes and metafunctions in order to persuade the consumers to use or buy something.

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