

Intersemiotic Complementarity in Netflix Movie Posters: Analyzing Visual-Verbal Synergy for Dystopian Themes

Dr Lubna A. Sherif

Assistant Professor of Linguistics & Translation

Faculty of Language Studies

Arab Open University

lubna.adel@aou.edu.eg

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0059-1491>

Scopus ID: 58212321800

Abstract

The deterioration of fundamental human values associated with the beginning of the twentieth century led to the rise of dystopian narratives which depict futuristic, imaginary worlds shaped by totalitarianism, erosion of individualism, technological dominance, isolation, and manipulation of reality. Although dystopian narratives are extensively studied in literature and cinema, the multimodal strategies employed in their promotional movie posters remain underexplored. This study examines the interplay between verbal and visual semiotic modes in contemporary dystopian movie posters and its contribution to the construction of meaning. It analyzes four dystopian movie posters, streamed on Netflix between 2017 and 2020, using Royce's (2007) intersemiotic complementarity framework. The analysis reveals that the synergy between visual and verbal modes in these posters demonstrates the dystopian themes of helplessness and resilience in addition to the narrative elements of setting, protagonists, and theme.

Keywords: dystopian narrative, movie poster, Netflix, Intersemiotic Complementarity, Text-Image Relations.

1. Introduction

'Dystopia' refers to "a non-existent society located in time and space that the author intended a contemporary reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived." (Sargent, 1994, p. 9) Dystopian narratives often evoke the themes of "dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future" (Gordin, Tilley, & Prakash, 2010, p. 2), revealed through multimodal combination of text, images, and sound in movies. This combination can create static visual narratives, such as movie posters that represent an essential form in the marketing process of movies. Although posters' primary function is capturing audience interest by depicting the theme, genre, and main characters (Smith, 2018), they have not received much attention compared to other narrative forms.

Streaming services, such as Netflix, have also revolutionized audience engagement with movies as they facilitate access to a variety of content without commercials. Netflix promotes the visibility of a few movie genres, notably dystopian movies which tend to manipulate reality to urge humans to retain core moral values. Being central to promotional

campaigns and audience engagement with the cinema industry, Netflix movie posters pose a significant area of research. This study employs Royce's (2007) intersemiotic complementarity framework to investigate how verbal and visual elements correlate in Netflix dystopian movie posters to construct meaning and represent dystopian themes and narrative elements. It attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the dystopian themes manifested through image-text relations in Netflix movie posters?
2. How effective is Royce's (2007) intersemiotic complementarity framework in exposing image-text relations in Netflix posters?

It, therefore, drives attention to the significance of exploring multimodal strategies in dystopian posters, promoted by streaming platforms.

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Definition of a Narrative

A 'narrative' is a complex term to be defined. Chatman (1978) explains it in terms of its components: a story that involves the WHAT (actions, characters, and setting) and discourse that defines the HOW (the form). Fludernik (2009) asserts that narratives can be represented through "a linguistic and/or visual medium" (p. 9), 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" (Bal, 2017, p. 6). Fludernik (2009) and Bal (2017) concur that a written or a visual narrative mainly entails a story that represents the content. Fludernik (2009) observes that the recipients of narratives can construct a story, defined as a sequence of events with a beginning, middle, and end. The elements of this story are categorized as follows: characters (including the protagonist(s)), setting, narrator, plot, and events.

2.1.1 Dystopian Narratives

The term 'dystopia' dates to Ancient Greek, where "dys-" means "bad", "abnormal", and "diseased", and "-topos" means "place" (Gordin, Tilley, & Prakash, 2010, p. 1). While utopia explores idealized societies, dystopia focuses on hopelessness and isolation of individuals who live under oppressive, authoritarian regimes (Claeys, 2010). As Atasoy (2024, p. 15) argues, dystopian visions "thrive on the allure of scientific and technological progress and the oppressive control exerted by strict totalitarian regimes", where science and technology are instruments of oppression and destructive outcomes rather than progress.

Coinciding with the growing interest in science fiction and exploring unrealistic worlds, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed a surge in producing dystopian movies that manifest “oppressive or unfavorable settings and state organizations” (Klonowska, 2018, p. 18). There are quite a few central themes in dystopian narratives, for instance, the rule of supreme powers (human, natural, superhuman, or artificial), suppression of individual freedom, surveillance, and totalitarianism (Claeys, 2010). Klonowska (2018) underscores that dystopian movies are plot-driven nature, emphasizing action rather than exposition of the setting. Thus, the viewer can be disoriented for not being provided with any explanation of action and becomes in need of voice-over commentary, text written on screen, or expository titles to get information on previous events.

2.1.2 Visual Narratives (VN)

Although the notion of ‘visual narratives’ (VN) has received limited scholarly attention, there are a few attempts to define and categorize it. Pinenta and Poovaiah (2010) offer a more comprehensive definition in which VNs are visual constructions that explicitly tell a story. VNs reveal a series of events, characterized by causality, temporality, and sequence with the following key features: presence of a story, visual construction for communication, existence of participants within a visual universe, and expression across various mediums. Pinenta and Poovaiah (2010) categorize VNs into three types: Static Visual Narrative (SVN), Dynamic Visual Narrative (DVN), and Interactive Visual Narrative (IVN). SVNs are fixed, immobile visual forms like paintings and posters. DVNs, nonetheless, unfold through a sequence of moments the accompanying visuals and narratives as in comic strips whereas IVNs engage the viewer in the narrative’s progression as in digital stories.

A movie poster is, thus, an SVN example, functioning as a visual commercial tool that attracts the audience to watch the movie and increases its popularity. Posters integrate vibrant colours, pictures, and very limited texts (Aprilana, Wahyudin, & Kusuma, 2019) to convey essential information to the audience through linguistic and non-linguistic signs. Linguistic elements include the title, taglines, quotes, names of the stars, directors, and the production company whereas non-linguistic signs are colours and photos, which construct the poster’s aesthetics. The poster, therefore, acts as a condensed narrative via the interplay between these two modes of signs.

2.2 Multimodality

While language has been considered the building block of communication, the rise of social semiotics in the 1990s has reframed the meaning-making process to involve a blend of linguistic and extralinguistic resources. Social semiotics examines “the media of dissemination

and the modes of communication that people use and develop to represent their understanding of the world and to shape power relations with others.” (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009, p. 1) It revolves around the notion of ‘semiotic resources’, defined as “the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes together with the ways in which these resources can be organized.” (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 285) This view aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) perception of semiotic resources as means through which meaning is created by users.

‘Multimodality’ extends beyond social semiotics to highlight the interaction between multiple semiotic modes, where a mode is “a set of socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning.” (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009, p. 7) O’Halloran (2011) highlights that multimodality, as a set of resources and a medium of communication that create meaning through social and cultural resources, involves “images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music, and sound” (p. 120). Accelerated by the rise of digital technologies, multimodal research investigates how various modes generate a complete meaning and how power operates beyond language, such as Norris’ (2004) interactive multimodality theory, Forceville’s (2005) approach to multimodal metaphor, and Machin’s (2013) investigation of sound as a mode of communication.

Furthermore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) have been integrated within new technologies (social media and digital spaces) to create multimodal methodologies. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), rooted in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), examines how communication occurs through various modes, such as text, images, audio, video, and gestures in different forms of media: images, advertisements, websites, and educational material. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), as a sub-discipline of CDA, investigates the relationship between the communicative modes and the broader social and cultural contexts to identify the power dynamics and ideologies through the interrelatedness between text and audiovisual analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2023). Royce’s (2007) descriptive framework addresses the interrelatedness between verbal and visual elements in multimodal texts.

2.3 Previous Studies

Early work of Royce (1998) investigates the intersemiotic complementarity between visual and verbal modes in the WMI text, published by *The Economist* magazine in September 1995. In a similar vein, Royce (2007) applies his descriptive intersemiotic complementarity

framework to an extract from The Economist magazine, titled Mountains still to climb and published in March 1993. The intersemiotic analysis represents the synergy between visual and verbal modes and extends the application of metafunctions in Systemic Functional Linguistics to multimodality in texts. Royce (2015) also examines the intersemiotic complementarity in multimodal legal meaning-making in cartoons and concludes that written language and caricature modes represent the interaction between satire and critique, delivering the message through humor. Royce's work, therefore, presents an analytical framework that stresses the complexity of multimodal meaning.

Dewi and Khristianto (2022) employ Royce's framework to analyze the interpersonal meaning in movie posters from the official website of Marvel Studio. Their study finds that meaning is generated through the complementarity between visual and verbal elements that emphasizes the characters' emotions and fosters empathy between the viewers and the characters. The work of Haris, Febrianti, and Yannuar (2023) examine the contribution of visual and verbal modes to language learning in the comic book, *Little Dim Sum Warriors*, using Royce's (2007) framework. Their study concludes that repetition and collocation are prevalent verbal-visual relations, effective in learning language.

Multimodal approaches are increasingly employed to explore visual communication in movies and their posters. Atasoy (2024), for instance, adopts a multimodal semiotic approach to analyze the dystopian portrayal of eternal youth in the Netflix movie *Paradise*. The interplay of visual and auditory modes depicts eternal youth as a technological outcome and dystopia as a nightmare. Similarly, Navarro and Adriano (2024) examine the representation of women in 40 Filipino movie posters (2010-2023), available on Netflix. Adopting Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Visual Grammar, and Systemic Functional Linguistics, the analysis of representational meanings and processes highlights the stereotypical, subservient, and objectified portrayal of female characters.

The reviewed studies present valuable insights into image-text relations in multimodal texts. Royce's works (1998, 2007, 2015) showcase the construction of meaning on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual levels through the interplay between verbal and visual modes in magazines and cartoons. Subsequent researchers extended the application of the intersemiotic complementarity framework to other genres and text types: movie posters and educational comic books. Recent studies -Atasoy (2024) and Navarro and Adriano (2024)- emphasize the significance of multimodal analysis of movies and movie posters in revealing

dystopian ideological implications and gendered stereotypes.

The aforementioned studies, nevertheless, tend to overlook streaming platform marketing and poster design. Although Navarro and Adriano (2024) consider Netflix posters, the representation of Filipino women was their focal point rather than the genre conventions, and Atasoy (2024) focused solely on the Netflix movie. The current study, therefore, examines selected Netflix dystopian movie posters to explore the synergy between visual and verbal elements in pinpointing dystopian themes and narrative elements. Applying Royce's (2007) intersemiotic complementarity framework, the study elucidates text-image relations that ideationally construct meaning in dystopian Netflix narratives, thus offering insights on multimodal discourse analysis.

3 Theoretical Framework

The twenty-first century is often associated with a set of social and cultural facts which function in a system of differences, known as popular culture. The latter is manifested in various digital media forms such as movies and television shows. Netflix's production and distribution of various movie genres make it a rising form of popular culture. Movie posters, in this regard, raise audiences' interest in watching dystopian movies on Netflix and help them decide to watch the movie. Thus, this study explores the role of movie posters in revealing elements of dystopian narrative and image-text relations.

3.1 Analytical Model

Royce's (2007) descriptive framework of intersemiotic complementarity has its theoretical foundation in Halliday's account of the three language metafunctions: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational discusses the subject matter through the field of discourse; the interpersonal reveals the attitudes towards language through the tenor, and the textual addresses the organization and coherence of a text through the mode (Halliday, 2004). Any text entails the three metafunctions, involving the represented participants, the interactive participants, and the visual coherent elements. The animate or inanimate elements included in the visual that represent the situation are known as the represented participants.

The social relation between the viewer and the visual is represented by the participants interacting with each other in the act of interpreting the visual -the designer/drawer and the reader/viewer- which are called the interactive participants. In addition, the elements of a text

arranged in a coherent way constitute the compositional features. The latter links the interactive and represented participants to represent a certain ideology or world view (Royce, 2007).

Ideationally, the verbal and visual modes intersemiotically interact by identifying the represented participants, the activity, the circumstances, and the attributes (Royce, 2007). The visual features also include semantic properties that can be revealed via the analysis of text cohesion suggested by Halliday and Hasan (1985). In this respect, Royce (2007) utilizes several sense relations: Repetition (R), Synonymy (S), Antonymy (A), Hyponymy (H), Meronymy (M), and Collocation (C) (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Complementarity through Repetition (R) is established by the direct recurrence of experiential meaning across the visual and verbal modes. Synonymy (S) is revealed when the visual and verbal elements convey a similar or equivalent experiential meaning, whereas Antonymy (A) denotes the juxtaposition of opposite experiential meaning. While Hyponymy (H) classifies the interrelation between superordinate concepts and their subordinates on the verbal and visual planes, Meronymy (M) describes the part-whole relationships. Finally, Collocation (C), in the traditional sense, highlights words that tend to co-occur, yet for Royce (2007), they account for thematic associations between the verbal and visual modes. The study reveals the extent to which the verbal and visual modes establish these relations and the complementarity between them.

On the interpersonal level, intersemiotic complementarity investigates how the visual and verbal elements engage the viewer/reader and affect topic reception and interpretation (Royce, 2007), decoded by Mood and modality. The visual component includes Address (what the image conveys to the reader), Involvement and Power (the viewer's relation to the image), Social Distance (degree of involvement), and Modality Markers (truth value). The verbal component, nonetheless, is examined through Mood (speech function) and Modality (the features and attitude of clause). The intersemiotic relations linking the reader and the viewer are defined by (1) reinforcement of address (both modes creating an identical form of address), (2) attitudinal congruence (both modes expressing a similar attitude), and (3) attitudinal dissonance (both modes revealing opposite or ironic attitude) (Royce, 2007).

Finally, the compositional features of a multimodal text examine how the layout of the elements on the page creates a coherent, unified whole. The visual meaning involves the choice of Information Value (placement of elements), Salience (stand out elements), and Framing (connecting or separating elements). The verbal construction stresses the orthographic whole governed by the visual compositional choices. Mapping both modes reflect the intersemiotic

complementarity in a coherent layout governed by Information Valuation on the page, Saliency, Degree of framing of elements on the page, Inter-Visual synonym (synergy between visual elements), and Reading Path (Royce, 2007).

The twofold purpose of this study is to expose the multimodal strategies manifesting dystopian themes movie posters and evaluate the effectiveness of Royce's (2007) framework in decoding the correlation between visual and verbal elements. In alignment with Royce's (2007) framework goal, the current study is descriptive in nature to highlight the intersemiotic relationships utilized by Netflix dystopian movie posters to engage the audience. Adopting the intersemiotic complementarity framework (Royce, 2007), the study identifies the sense relations -Repetition, Synonymy, Antonymy, Hyponymy, Meronymy, and Collocation- on the verbal and visual modes which constitute complementarity on the ideational level. These sense relations are examined verbally and visually in isolation, then brought together via the intersemiotic complementarity analysis of the specific links between the two modes.

4 Data Collection and Procedures

4.1 Data Collection

The corpus size is limited to only four dystopian movie posters: *What Happened to Monday* (2017), *Bird Box* (2018), *I am Mother* (2019), and *The Midnight Sky* (2020) to allow an in-depth analysis of each poster. The posters are aligned with the study's thematic focus on dystopian, post-apocalyptic themes in which characters fight for their survival. They cover the period of 2017-2020 when Netflix promotes dystopian themes, following its expansion in 190 countries in 2016 (Au-Yong-Oliveira, Marinheiro, & Tavares, 2020), thus contributing to the visibility of the movies. All the posters were collected from the Netflix website in May 2025 to standardize the source of data and analyze the narrative elements within the Netflix context using Royce's (2007) descriptive intersemiotic complementarity framework.

4.2 Procedures

The analysis is conducted in three systematic phases applied to each poster, centering on the ideational metafunction. The first is contextualization which defines the 'field' of each poster. To overcome the lack of coherence characterizing dystopian plots, the researcher watched the movies to provide a synopsis of the plot. This is followed by a description of the poster leading to the analysis in which the verbal and visual meaning are decoded by answering the following questions:

- **Participants:** Who are the represented participants both visually and verbally?
- **Processes:** What actions, events, states, or types of behavior are represented?
- **Circumstances:** What is the location, accompaniment, or means accompanying the activity?
- **Attributes:** Which qualities are ascribed to the participants?
- **Intersemiotic Complementarity:** Which intersemiotic sense relations are employed to project the complementarity between the visual and verbal modes?

The previous elements in each movie poster are illustrated in a table, followed by an analytical commentary.

5 Analysis

This section is devoted to the analysis of four Netflix dystopian movie posters.

5.1 What Happened to Monday

What Happened to Monday (2017) is a science-fiction movie, directed by Tommy Wirkola, starring Noomi Rapace. Netflix distributed the movie in the United States, United Kingdom, and Latin America. Set in dystopian future, the European Federation's Child Allocation Bureau (CAB) enforces a strict one-child policy, leading a father to secretly raise his daughter's identical septuplet following her death in labor. Although he names them all "Karen Settman" before people, each sister is named after a day of the week and is allowed to go outside on the day corresponding to her weekday.

One day after work, Monday could not return home, and CAB agents detain the sisters one after the other. The movie ends by abolishing the one-child policy rule, and the sisters lead a normal life. Amidst a dark background, the central image in the poster is Noomi Rapace in seven different poses. The movie title is written in a large, white, bold font -with the tagline "SEVEN SISTERS. ONE IDENTITY." Netflix, the distributor, is written in large, bold, red font below the movie title with the release date.

The primary element in Figure 1 is the two dim, black ones on both sides of the poster:



Fig. 1. What Happened to Monday.

Seven shadowy female figures jump from the left building to the right, and a man with a pistol awaits them. The skyscrapers placed in the middle of the poster display seven variations of Noomi Rapace's (the leading role) face. Dim monochromatic colors (blue, gray, and black) dominate the poster except for the light background accompanying the women and the flashlights on the digital faces. The textual elements are vertically arranged: actors' names on top, followed by the tagline "SEVEN SISTERS. ONE IDENTITY", and the movie title "WHAT HAPPENED TO MONDAY". The phrase "ONE FAMILY ONE CHILD" is repeated seven times on the flashy skyscrapers.

The link between the verbal and visual elements of the poster are illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1: Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity in *What Happened to Monday*.

Visual	Complementarity	Verbal
<p>Identification: (1) Seven female shadows (2) One male shadow (3) Seven variations of Noomi Rapace</p> <p>Activity: Seven dim female figures jumping from the left building to the right one, and a man pointing a pistol at them.</p> <p>Circumstances: (1) Location: unknown place in the future (2) Accompaniment: Noomi's distinctions (3) Means: Pistol and skyscrapers</p> <p>Attributes: appearance vs. reality</p>	<p>Repetition: SEVEN SISTERS = Seven dim women figures</p> <p>Antonym: ONE ≠ Man with the pistol</p> <p>Meronym: (1) Noomi's face (2) MONDAY (3) ONE FAMILY (4) ONE CHILD</p>	<p>Identification: (1) NOOMI RAPACE (2) SEVEN SISTERS (3) MONDAY</p> <p>Activity: "HAPPENED"</p> <p>Attributes: "ONE IDENTITY"</p>

The seven female shadows are verbally labeled as “SEVEN SISTERS”, perceived as “ONE IDENTITY” referring to the sole visual participant, “Noomi Rapace”. These shadows are the Actors in an Action process of jumping between two skyscrapers, and the seven images of Rapace’s face on the skyscrapers highlight a different variation of the face, signifying that each sister possesses a different personality and identity. The multiple participants, thus, emphasize the theme of appearance versus reality: While the septulate shares the same identity, they represent distinct individuals. In addition, the entanglement between dark colors and futuristic setting (skyscrapers and digital screens) results in a mysterious ambiance, reinforced by the material process “happened” in which “Monday” is the Goal undergoing an unknown change of state. The interrogative “WHAT” evokes a mystery that the figures attempt to resolve. The dim figure of the man with the pistol suggests a resolution, thus depicting him as another Actor in an Action process.

Complementarity is evident in the repetition of the phrase “SEVEN SISTERS”, a lexical repetition for the seven dim figures and the digital images on the skyscrapers. The man’s figure is equated with “ONE” which contrasts “SEVEN”. This contrast creates dissonance through antonym and highlights the theme of appearance versus reality and resilience visually and verbally: There are multiple women who share a single identity, further stressed by being acted by one actress. The fragmentation of the seven faces on the skyscrapers indicates a visual meronym, for it reveals the whole of the seven figures. Verbally, “MONDAY” is a meronym for the whole week (seven days), i.e. the septulate, and “ONE CHILD” is another meronym for the “ONE FAMILY” that contains seven daughters.

5.2 Bird Box

Bird Box, streamed on Netflix in December 2018, is a post-apocalyptic horror movie - directed by Susanne Bier and starring Sandra Bullock. It recounts the aftermath of an epidemic that made anyone looking at a certain entity to act violently and kill his/herself. The only safe place is a school for the blind in the forest; thus, Malorie Hayes takes her two children on a boat and instructs them to remain blindfolded or else they will die. She also carries birds in a box to warn them of any entity attacking them. The movie ends with their success in reaching the community, and Malorie releases the birds. Set in an open area The accompanying poster depicts Malorie with her eyes covered while holding two children, blindfolded like her. The tagline “Never lose sight of survival” is placed above “Netflix” in large, bold, red font next to the release date.

The close-up in Figure 2 centers on a blindfolded woman and her two children:



Fig. 2. Bird Box.

None of the three characters maintain eye contact with the viewer, especially when the mother embraces her children in an act of protection. It appears from their looks and the dust covering their faces that they are in an unclear environment. Also, earth colors like brown dominate the poster, promoted by grey, blue, white, and black. There is not much text in the poster, mainly the star's name, "SANDRA BULLOCK", the movie title "BIRD BOX", and the phrase "NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF SURVIVAL".

Table 2 below highlights the complementarity between the verbal and visual elements:

Table 2: Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity in *Bird Box*.

Visual	Complementarity	Verbal
Identification: (1) Mother (2) Two children Activity: (1) Mother hugging her children (2) blindfolding Circumstances: (1) Location: open area (2) Means: cloth folding their eyes Attributes: vulnerability vs resilience	Synonym: "SANDRA BULLOCK" and the image of the mother Antonym: Being blindfolded ≠ "NEVER LOSE SIGHT"	Identification: (1) "SANDRA BULLOCK" Activity: "LOSE" Attribute: "SURVIVAL"

The visual focal point is Malorie Hayes and her children, involved in two concurrent Action processes. In the first, Hayes is the Actor who hugs her children to protect them from danger.

The second involves a non-transactional Action process of blindfolding which overlooks their identity for the sake of survival. The location is unspecified and unseen, reinforcing the apocalyptic setting; the means is the cloth used to cover their eyes, mandatory for their survival. This visual representation conveys the attributes of vulnerability and resilience. Where blindfolding denotes helplessness and lack of agency, hugging underscores Hayes' resilience to protect her children and determination to survive.

The primary participant is "SANDRA BULLOCK". The clause, "NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF SURVIVAL," is in the imperative mood, involving an implied Actor (you) in the material process (LOSE), where the Goal is "SIGHT." The attribute, the prepositional phrase "OF SURVIVAL," specifies the type of sight and suggests that the participants are occupied with winning any opportunity for survival. Furthermore, the intersemiotic complementarity in this poster is mainly established through the sense relation of synonyms. First, it equates "SANDRA BULLOCK" with the picture of the mother protecting her children from danger. Although "BIRD BOX" is visually absent, it is synonymous with "NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF SURVIVAL" and blindfolding to stress that the box is Hayes' guide in her journey. This complementarity amalgamates the theme of vulnerability and resilience: While the Circumstances of the visual representation denote loss of sight (vulnerability), the verbal element "BIRD BOX" signify that blindfolding is the only means of survival (resilience).

5.3 I Am Mother

I Am Mother (2019) is directed by Grant Sputore, starring Clara Rugaard, Luke Hawker, and Rose Byrne. The plot centers on post-apocalyptic Daughter, raised by a robot contributing to the repopulation of the Earth (Mother). Daughter develops affection towards a stranger, and Mother captures them while escaping. Daughter discovers that Mother is not a robot but AI controlling robots; thus, she assumes the responsibilities of Mother to recreate humanity. The central image in the poster partially depicts the faces of two women, placed at both sides of the poster. Since the movie is an original Netflix production, "A NETFLIX FILM" is placed between the faces in bold, white font, and "NETFLIX" is written in large, bold, red font under the red tagline "She'll keep you safe" next to the release date.

Mother and Daughter are depicted in Figure 3 through a medium-close shot:



Fig. 3. I Am Mother.

On the left side is Mother whereas Daughter is on the right, looking directly at the viewers. Only half of their illuminated faces is depicted against a black background. Centered between the human figures lies a black robot with an ionic frame. The movie title, “I AM MOTHER”, is written in white on the bottom of the robot, followed by the tagline “SHE’LL KEEP YOU SAFE” in red.

Table 3 illustrates the verbal and visual elements constituting the design of the poster along with their intersemiotic complementarity:

Table 3: Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity in *I Am Mother*.

Visual	Complementarity	Verbal
Identification: (1) Two female figures (2) Robot Activity: (1) Women and robot looking at the viewer Circumstances: (1) Location: unspecified Attributes: Resilience	Synonym: Woman on left, “I”, “MOTHER”, and “She” Antonym: Two women, “I” ≠ “you”	Identification: (1) “I” (2) “MOTHER” (3) “She” (4) “you” Activity: (1) “AM” (2) “will keep” Attributes: “safe”

The visual construction involves three participants (two female human figures and a non-human entity) in a non-transactional Action process. The latter establishes a direct gaze at the viewer, creating a visual challenge. The setting, though unspecified, denotes the future due to

the dark background, the robot's luminousness, and the ionic frames placed behind the robot; therefore, the attribute of resilience is reinforced by this futuristic design.

The clause, "I AM MOTHER", demonstrates a relational process: The copula refers to a state of being, in which "I" is the Identified and "MOTHER" is the Identifier. MOTHER's identity is reinforced through a shift in pronouns in the clause "She'll keep you safe": "She" is the Actor in the material process "keep", and the modal auxiliary "'ll" indicates future. The pronoun "you" is the Goal, and the complement "safe" describes the result of the material process. The referent of the second-person pronoun is unspecified; therefore, it could stand for "DAUGHTER" or the viewer.

The intersemiotic complementarity between the previous modes in the poster is clarified through the sense relations of synonym and antonym. Positioning the two women on both sides of the poster establishes a visual synonym through parallelism. Each is verbally represented by a pronoun: the first-person "I" and the third-person "She" for the woman on the left, and the second-person pronoun "you" for the one on the right. These pronouns also create an antonym relation in which "I" and "you" correspond to belonging to different age groups and roles. This contrast depicts a conventional mother-daughter relationship, representing the central theme of the movie, where MOTHER (I) is resilient in protecting DAUGHTER (you).

Moreover, the interrelation between these elements denotes isolation as they gaze directly at the viewer not at each other. The interaction between human and non-human participants evokes an ambiance of underlying danger that stresses that safety can only be achieved with the joint efforts of the two women, specially that DAUGHTER follows the steps of MOTHER. MOTHER, in this context, symbolizes protection not only to DAUGHTER but to the rest of the viewers through her resilience and determination, empowered by her maternal instinct and being an AI controlling robot.

5.4 The Midnight Sky

The Midnight Sky is a science-fiction movie for George Clooney, released by Netflix in 2020. Augustine Lofthouse (George Clooney), a scientist in the Arctic, attempts to find a habitat on another planet for humans. He starts a romantic relationship with Jean Sullivan; however, his preoccupation with his mission drives her to desert him. At the end of the movie, Lofthouse saves humanity that inhabits the new world, K-23, and dies at the station. The poster is vertically divided into two halves:



Fig. 4. The Midnight Sky.

The top part includes a spacecraft in faint color against a dark background with the following text in white “HOPE FINDS A WAY” and “THE MIDNIGHT SKY”. The bottom part, nonetheless, includes two human figures, an old man (Augustine) and a young girl looking to the front but not directly at the viewer. These parts juxtapose the cosmic, starry setting on top to the naturalistic, Arctic one in the bottom.

Table 4 demonstrates the verbal and visual design of the poster and the intersemiotic complementarity between them:

Table 4: Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity in *The Midnight Sky*.

Visual	Complementarity	Verbal
Identification: (1) An old man (2) a girl Activity: looking at something unknown Circumstances: (1) Location: Arctic (2) Accompaniment: Spacecraft Attributes: Resilience	Synonym: (1) “HOPE” (2) “THE MIDNIGHT SKY” (3) Action process (4) Spacecraft Antonym: (1) Top \neq bottom (2) Cosmic, dark background \neq “Hope” Meronym: The human participants and the space Collocation: (1) “FINDS A WAY” (2) gaze (3) Spacecraft	Identification: (1) “HOPE” (2) “A WAY” Activity: “FINDS” Circumstances: “THE MIDNIGHT SKY”

The focal point is the human figure (the old man and the girl). Positioning them in the middle amidst an Arctic background not only reveals the location but also highlights their isolation

from the action taking place behind them. They represent hope through a non-transactional Action process in which they react to something unknown, evident in their gaze and posture; this reflects their resilience and determination to defeat the unknown. Being a scientist, the man symbolizes the power of scientific thinking in saving humanity, represented by the girl; thus, they share the same vision and destiny: finding a place for people to inhabit.

The Actor in the material process is “HOPE”, and “A WAY” stands for the Goal. Despite referring to an abstract, “HOPE” dominates the course of action; thus, it is ascribed agency. “WAY” is not about finding a route since it refers to the expected salvation when humans find a place to live in. Besides, the Circumstances of Location, “THE MIDNIGHT SKY”, resonates the movie title and specifies where the hope is.

An array of sense relations realizes the intersemiotic complementarity of this poster. First, the tagline is linked to the visual composition of the Action process through relations of synonym and collocation. The phrase, “FINDS A WAY”, is a collocation that means ‘to discover how something is achieved’, thus referring to the means through which hope is achieved, further reinforced by the determined gaze and resilient posture of the human participants. The human figure, in this respect, personify the abstract noun “HOPE” and creates a synonym between the shared goal of the participants and the theme of the movie. The means through which they can reach “THE MIDNIGHT SKY” is the spacecraft that correlates with Augustine’s identity as a scientist.

The split in the visual design also creates a powerful antonym relation. The Arctic’s icy and lifeless nature stands for the Earth, whereas space is warm and lively to show that salvation is in the cosmos. Therefore, the movie’s theme is reflected in the vastness of space compared to the earth. The girl and the spacecraft behind him are not positioned on equal par with Augustine to underscore his isolation and solitude from humanity. Besides, the relation of meronym amalgamates his solitary state as the human participants, despite belonging to different ages and genders, are part of the universal cosmos, symbolized by the spacecraft and the “THE MIDNIGHT SKY”, which reemphasizes the theme of the movie.

6 Discussion

This descriptive study applied Royce’s (2007) framework to analyze the ideational intersemiotic complementarity in four Netflix dystopian movie posters: *What Happened to Monday*, *Bird Box*, *I Am Mother*, and *The Midnight Sky*. Though the number of visual and

verbal elements utilized in the posters are limited in number, they reveal the synergy between the two modes and core dystopian narrative features. In the four posters, action takes place in a bleak future in which humans encounter the eternal challenge of survival. The location in *Bird Box* and *The Midnight Sky* is naturalistic in which people do not feel safe, whereas *What Happened to Monday* and *I Am Mother* have a cosmic setting that reflects that humans are oppressed by another might power.

All the posters stress the theme of human resilience, without which the represented characters cannot confront the hardships they face and lead a decent life. However, they are not always ascribed agency as the main character in *I Am Mother* seems to be the woman on the left, but it is actually the non-human participant (the robot in the center) because AI is the driving force behind the course of events. Thus, resilience can be maintained within the post-apocalyptic context of the poster with and without the help of robots and AI.

Royce's (2007) intersemiotic complementarity framework reveals that the ideational meaning of the posters can be generated via the synergy between verbal and visual elements. Dystopian settings, as evident from the posters, are post-apocalyptic: They depict limited space and are dominated by blue, black, grey, and bleak earth colors to instill fear, depression, and alienation. Hope, however, is shown through the light employed in naturalistic or cosmic settings to suggest erosion of individuality for survival.

The titles of the movies and the taglines further elaborate on the visual composition of the poster. They highlight the conflict humans undergo between vulnerability and helplessness and their resilience to rescue themselves amidst chaos. Across the four posters, the verbal elements elaborate any disambiguation that might arise from the visual construction. In *What Happened to Monday*, the taglines explain the plot that revolves around identifying what occurred to Monday, one of seven sisters who live as one person before others.

Furthermore, the verbal elements in *Bird Box* show that blindfolding is a means of saving the lives of Hayes and her two children. The tagline of the third poster, *I Am Mother*, introduces "Mother" as an unconventional mother since her mission is to dominate robots to recreate the earth's population. The last poster's taglines clarify the problem-solution visual construction; humans can only survive if they replaced the bleak setting with "The Midnight Sky". Therefore, the verbal elements contribute as a commentary on the reality of individuals and their post-apocalyptic societies.

Therefore, the analysis demonstrates the effectiveness of Royce's (2007) framework in recognizing how verbal and visual modes interact, rather than analyzing them in isolation. Movie posters, in this respect, should not be regarded as a mere promotional text but a multimodal text conveying features of dystopian narrative. The analysis of the data studied reveals that Royce's (2007) framework communicates a complex narrative that encourages the viewers to watch the movie on a streaming network like Netflix. Intersemiotic complementarity -through synonym, antonym, meronym, hyponym, and collocation- establishes the main conflict in the movie, its theme, and setting through verbal-visual integration. The framework, thus, moves beyond a simple description of text and image to a deeper reflection on the cohesive meaning they create together.

7 Conclusion

In the contemporary digital age, movie posters are considered a promotional activity that engages viewers with the movie. The application of Royce's (2007) framework in this study is limited to the ideational intersemiotic complementarity to reveal how multimodal texts represent experience, necessitating the examination of the interpersonal and the compositional in future research. In addition, much attention should be paid to the analysis of Dynamic Visual Narrative (DVN) and Interactive Visual Narrative (IVN) (Pinenta & Poovaiah, 2010).

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