

# **Parsing strategies in film trailers**

**Catalina Iricinschi**  
Cornell University, Ithaca

**Donald Hu**  
Cornell University, Ithaca

**Abstract:** Film trailers have specific features defining a distinct visual media genre. Trailer structural features and viewers' parsing strategies were analyzed in 21 trailers – a set of comedy, drama, and action film per decade from 1940 - 2010.

Trailers' structural features show a shot duration pattern that replicates the gradual decrease in Hollywood film over the same period (Cutting et al., 2011; Salt, 1983). Trailers from 1960 to 2010 consistently decrease in shot duration. Dissolves and fades, also decreasing, mimic the Hollywood film evolution. The trailer parsers used an interface system eliciting an exposition-complication-resolution segmentation (Thompson & Bordwell, 1999).

The segmentation follows the 1/4 – 1/2 – 1/4 three-act pattern, with drama and action having roughly half of the total time as complication. The viewer agreement increases with trailer shot duration. Trailer structure mimics the Hollywood film evolution. Trailer viewers identify narrative content segments despite the trailer's scrambled nature.