

Humour and Metaphor in Advertising— Embarking on a Journey

Given the noticeable impact of humour and metaphor on contemporary ads, it comes as no surprise that both are frequently used in advertising discourse. However, it is still a relatively new concept to think of humorousness and metaphoricity as similar in terms of the cognitive experience provided; it turns out that both require a similar shift in cognition, for they “[...] involve a semantic contradiction [or] incompatibility that the recipient has to disambiguate, using his/her linguistic competence and encyclopaedic knowledge to find some analogy or other ‘common link’ to relate the involved planes of meaning” (Krikmann, 2009, pp. 14–15). The recipients are therefore made to look for additional implications and connotations, as well as to interpret, compare, and transfer meanings appurtenant to various domains, in the case of metaphors, and to different scenarios, in the case of humour. To my mind, combined in advertising, the two phenomena present a unique research challenge when it comes to understanding incongruities and the instances of conceptual blending.

To date, the subject of comparative studies on both figurativeness and humour in ads has received little attention, as the two were usually studied in isolation. In spite of extensive research on metaphorical language in advertising and on what may produce humour in ads (e.g., superiority humour, puns or irony), the issue of incongruity-resolution-based humour and metaphors in press advertising has received rather scant attention.

Hence, faced with such a gap, it seems useful to enquire into the joint operation of both the humorous and the metaphorical in contemporary advertising discourse, with special emphasis placed on their reception by the audience. This book is an attempt at joining three academic fields, namely, advertising discourse, metaphor, and humour research, with multimodality

as an overreaching thread. It will address questions related to cognition, communication, and humour, as instantiated in a selection of ads. The present volume is anchored in cognitive linguistics and communication studies, for one of its major objectives is to study the reflections of general conceptual mechanisms in language and the other to show how advertising messages communicate complex ideas of both metaphorical and humorous nature to the recipients. It should also be specified at this point that the book subscribes to the incongruity-resolution theory of humour which “defines humour as a cognitive-linguistic problem-solving task that elicits positive affect (Goel & Dolan, 2001; Raskin, 1985; Suls, 1972)” (Strick, Holland, Van Baaren, Van Knippenberg, & Dijksterhuis, 2013, pp. 7–8).

Research in cognitive linguistics has shown that there has been an increased interest in the role of metaphors and, in particular, of mental spaces and conceptual blending, in the production of humour (cf. Brône, Feyaerts, & Veale, 2015; Attardo, 2017). Citing Krikmann, “the theory of humour and the cognitivist theory of figurative speech have begun to notice and reach out towards each other” (Krikmann, 2009, p. 34), which, in turn, has led me to have a closer look at the synergistic application of metaphorical and humorous elements in both Polish and English multimodal press ads.

First of all, it should be clarified that multimodality relies on the simultaneous application of different modes of communication. It assumes “the interaction and combination of multiple modes within single artefacts” (Bateman, 2008, p. 1) or, in other words, it presumes the use of several distinct semiotic codes to convey a message, for instance, the textual and the visual mode in the case of press ads, with all the modes incorporated being treated as one meaningful entity (cf. Bateman, 2008). At the same time, multimodality assumes that each semiotic mode is responsible for the completion of specific tasks (Stöckl, 2015) (e.g., the anchoring function of the text (cf. Barthes, 1977) that helps the perceiver to avoid over- or misinterpretation).

Despite different functions they may perform, the modes involved create an inextricable network of interrelations that results in the creation of one semantic entity; this reciprocal contextualisation, as Maćkiewicz (2017) puts it, leads to the emergence of new meanings that were not contained in the aforementioned semiotic codes, which testifies to the synergistic communication effect of multimodality (Maćkiewicz, 2017, p. 40). Apart from the fact that such messages are simply more interesting due to the application of several modes that interact with each other, they are more

pleasurable to the eye than ads dominated by the textual mode alone, for example. What is more, multiple impressions generated by various forms create more chances to impress the perceiver and hence attract his attention.

The power of metaphors in advertising is of great importance as well because they are frequently more attractive and more cognitively engaging than any straightforward claims. Pérez-Sobrinó (2017) is of the opinion that, as a discourse genre, advertising is actually symbiotically tied to metaphor in that “metaphor suits the specificities of advertising because both consist in putting into correspondence two discrete domains: in the case of metaphor, the source and the target domain; in advertising, the product or service being advertised and the corresponding positive attributed values” (Pérez-Sobrinó, 2017, p. 50). Following this line of reasoning, it can be said that advertising as such constitutes fruitful a domain of study for metaphor scholars. Therefore, not only do metaphorical ads appeal to the audience thanks to their originality, that is, owing to a game of meanings played by the advertiser and the audience (cf. Bralczyk, 2000), but they also constitute a pool of novel figurative constructions to be studied. The usage of the figurative in advertising, in turn, aptly illustrates how the pre-existing knowledge structures in human minds in the form of cognitive schemas, frames, and scripts help people to identify relevant facts without the need “to sift through the blizzard of information” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 60) each and every time they want to communicate something or decode the message they receive.

When it comes to humour in advertising, it is employed to entertain the audience and, therefore, to dispose the prospects favourably towards the goods advertised. Thanks to the note of levity introduced, the message starts to stand out from the information clutter and creates a more relaxed cognitive environment for the perceiver, thus oftentimes conducing to increased liking for the ad, product or brand (Gulas & Weinberger, 2006). Apart from contributing to a pleasant cognitive environment, humour in advertising makes ads more appealing because, just like metaphors, humour usually provides the audience with involving content, that is, with a puzzle to solve. Nevertheless, resorting to humour is relatively risky a strategy in advertising, for whether a humorous ad succeeds or fails depends on many variables to be discussed in the ensuing chapters.

What follows from this short introduction is that both metaphoricality and humorousness are issues of significance when it comes to constructing memorable and influential ads, since they are said to facilitate ad appreciation and increase the prospects’ attention. Humorous metaphorical

ads may therefore pose a greater cognitive challenge to the audience, as they are characterised by considerable conceptual complexity resulting from the simultaneous application of the two phenomena. Based on the aforementioned contention that there are some marked similarities in perception of humour and metaphor, the following discussion will centre on the synergistic interaction of metaphorical and humorous elements in multimodal ads.

For this research, I first gathered two corpora that consisted of multimodal humorous metaphorical ads in English (100 press ads) and Polish (100 press ads); the selection for the two language corpora was made according to the following criteria: (i) the ads were multimodal in their nature, that is, they combined visual and verbal information alike; (ii) they contained a metaphor (verbal, visual or multimodal); and (iii) they made use of incongruity-resolution-based humour. The two language corpora were subsequently divided into several subgroups according to the “butt of the joke,” which made it possible to secure roughly equal representation of different humour targets identified in the selected ads in each language group studied (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed account of the methodology used). A proportional number of advertisements was then chosen from these sub-sets and, as a result, the final sample to be analysed and included in the questionnaires comprised 20 ads for each language group so as to prevent the task from becoming too tiring for research participants.

As stated above, the principal aim of the present research is to investigate the workings of conceptual integration and the incongruity-resolution mechanism on the basis of humorous metaphorical press ads in English and Polish. The specific objectives to attain are as follows:

1. To study the way in which metaphorical constructs may be used as vehicles for humorousness in advertising discourse. To achieve this goal, I will first provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks concerning the phenomenon of advertising and cognitive linguistics, as well as of the existing studies on metaphor in advertising. I will also explore topics connected to humour research in order to establish that there is some compatibility between the theory of conceptual integration and the incongruity-resolution model. Then, in the analytical chapter, I will perform a qualitative content analysis of selected English and Polish press advertisements (all the transcripts of the advertising material used can be found in Appendix 1);

2. To check ad liking (ad ratings) and affective attitudes (emotional responses) in an attempt to capture the emotional reactions of the informants to the ads sampled. This will be accomplished by having each research participant rate a set of humorous figurative ads. Ad ratings will be determined thanks to the use of a Likert-type scale, whereas emotional responses will be measured on the basis of visual self-reports that apply the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM) assessment technique (cf. Lang, 1980; Morris & Waive, 1993) (detailed information on research participants is included in Chapter 5, while the survey used to study ad ratings and emotional responses is available in Appendix 2);
3. To investigate the ways in which research participants understand and interpret the mechanisms inducing metaphor and humour in ads. To this end, I will use open-ended questionnaires and collect the informants' feedback on the ads they previously rated (see Appendix 3). The questionnaires filled in by the informants will provide post-exposure results and thus help to check whether research participants are actually aware of the mechanisms at work in the course of ad comprehension and appreciation.

Finally, more broadly, the present volume is also to advance current knowledge of effective pragmatics of humour in figurative advertising messages and to build the base for future research into advertising phenomena within linguistic frameworks. That is why this book aims to take a comparative approach and hence discuss the similarities and differences between the two corpora, one in English and the other in Polish. The analysis will show whether it is possible to identify any observable trends in the interplay between the concepts found in both metaphorical and humorous constructions in selected multimodal ads.

As far as the structure of this book is concerned, Chapter 1 deals with the phenomenon of advertising, that is, with its definition, purpose, and operation. It discusses print advertising and, therefore, centres on the verbal, visual, and multimodal facets of advertising with a view to presenting different modalities by means of which the advertising stimulus can be conveyed to the audience.

After this introductory chapter, it seems imperative to explain how the said audience manages to develop a decoded multimodal message into a relevant one. To this end, Chapter 2 touches upon the most important pragmatic theory pioneered by Sperber and Wilson (1995) known as

Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) with a view to demonstrating how the expanded version of RT proposed by Forceville (2020) can accommodate various dimensions of mass-communication.

Then, the following chapter delves into the theoretical foundations of research on metaphor. Chapter 3 refers to the theory of mental spaces (Fauconnier, 1994, 1997, 1998) and then adumbrates the theory of conceptual integration (conceptual blending theory) formulated by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002). The chapter explores the ways of identifying metaphors as such (cf. Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen, 2007), to which I refer in the subsequent operationalization of metaphor and cite existing research on the construction of verbal, visual, and multimodal metaphor in advertising.

Chapter 4 addresses the topic of humour and its numerous definitions. It cites relevant literature on the key theories of humour known as the incongruity-resolution, superiority, and relief theories (Hurley, Dennett, & Adams, 2017) and also stresses the role of the prototype theory (Rosch, 1973; Rosch & Mervis, 1975) in the shaping of humour and its strength. Following such researchers as Nerhardt (1976) and Giora (1991), I associate non-prototypicality with an increase in humour value. Furthermore, the chapter probes into the linguistic approach to humour, all forms of which are claimed to be descendants of the incongruity-resolution theory (Krikmann, 2006). The theories presented include the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin, 1985) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo & Raskin, 1991). Some polemic points concerning the SSTH and GTVH, raised in large part by Brône and Feyaerts (2003, 2004) and Brône, Feyaerts, and Veale (2006), are included. Emphasis is also placed on the Graded Salience Hypothesis outlined by Giora (2003) since it emerges as a pertinent area of research in the context of this volume. Relevance-theoretic treatments of humour are presented too so as to further the understanding of how different approaches may be combined to explain humorous discourse.

Given the multimodal standpoint adopted for this book, Chapter 4 stresses the role of both the visual and the multimodal in the production of humour. Discussion on previous research on humour in advertising ensues and, finally, similarities in the conceptual operations involved in the creation and understanding of both humour and metaphor are emphasised. The observation that such common features exist is made on the basis of the works by Attardo (1994, 2006, 2015), Brône and Feyaerts (2003), Dynel (2009), Kyratzis (2003), and Müller (2015), all of whom see the theory

of conceptual integration by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002) as a common denominator of metaphor and humour.

Chapter 5 clarifies the scope of the present study, shows the data collection procedure and research methodology, restates research objectives, and describes the group of research participants. Most importantly, it reports on the results of qualitative content analysis, which is supplemented with pertinent examples from the samples of humorous metaphorical ads in English and Polish. Furthermore, in line with the objectives of this research, a comparative study is conducted to present ad ratings and emotional responses for the ads from the English and Polish set. Last but not least, the chapter focuses on the reception and interpretation aspect, for it is also devoted to ad comprehension by research participants.

The final chapter presents conclusions on the workings of conceptual integration and of the incongruity-resolution mechanism, as instantiated in selected multimodal press ads in English and Polish. It is also devoted to the possible limitations of the study and to avenues for further research.