

METAPHORS IN THE TEXT-WORLDS OF COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Within the framework of cognitive-discourse approach, the authors focus on the conceptual effects of metaphors used in commercial advertising for the sake of sales promotion. The article gives insights into the construction of pragmatically-orientated mental representations activated by metaphors as means of persuasion and entertaining the target audience. The authors chiefly draw on Text World Theory [1], [6], [7], [10], [11], [12] and Conceptual Blending Theory [5] because their heuristics can provide an adequate model of the text-driven discourse-level conceptual structures created in the minds of recipients. Text-worlds are viewed as mental representations ‘which enable us to conceptualize and understand every piece of language we encounter’ [6: 2].

Keywords: metaphor, megametaphor, text-world, blended text-world, commercial advertising

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an element of a broader **World Modelling Concept** – one of the contemporary theories of discourse representation initially based on **Text World Theory** developed by P. Werth, G. Gavins, E. Semino, L. Hidalgo Downing and then expanded upon contemporary theoretical approaches of Russian cognitive linguistics (E. Kubryakova, V. Demyankov, Y. Stepanov). The named theory is applied to advertising discourse to study its ‘power’ to influence the target audience by creating fictional worlds ‘inviting’ the addressee to buy the product.

Cook has observed that ‘the aim of the sender is to push the product, often via the worlds of fiction and fantasy, into the real world of the consumer’ [3]. We argue that commercial advertising presents functions such as informing, amusing, emotive and persuasive, where the latter is the most vital because it urges people to buy a product. As will be illustrated in the following discussion metaphors are regularly used to introduce desirable domains of experience and create the discourse-level conceptual effects. Our goal is to augment understanding of the role played by single metaphors and clusters of metaphors in the text-worlds as representational structures of advertising discourse.

METHODOLOGY

To embark on the analysis of the text-driven conceptual effects of metaphors in advertising discourse requires a cognitive theory of metaphor and one of discourse as

well. The model proposed in the article mainly builds on Text-World Theory (Werth, Semino, Browse), Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier, Turner), and brings elements of Gavins' approach (2007). These seem to be the most suitable methodological tools. We apply ideas from these approaches to advertising discourse to illustrate how the conceptual structures engendered by several metaphors interact with one another in the text-worlds of advertising and what pragmatic effects follow up. Under the conceptual framework presented in the paper the **key concepts** are defined as follows:

Discourse is a complex process of language communication unfolding over time (M. Matczak).

Advertising as a type of discourse focuses on distributing important information promptly to the public. Its aim is to increase the sales of goods or services of an organization. Advertisers seek to understand consumers' motives so they can effectively influence their buying decisions.

Text-world is a text-driven mental representation evoked in the minds of the recipients as they read or listen (E. Semino). Text-world presents a 'picture' of the world (state of affairs) which the recipient creates in his mind as a mental representation. According to Matczak (2013), this process unfolds gradually:

- 1) Each sentence of a text projects a certain element of mental representation;
- 2) The mental picture of the state of affairs is integrated by the recipient into the epistemic framework of a possible world;
- 3) Certain sentences of the text co-refer, they relate to the same state of affairs: each new sentence modifies the created mental representation;
- 4) All sentences of the text which refer to the same state of affairs create a complete mental representation of that state of affairs (the meaning of the text fragment);
- 5) The mental representation of all states of affairs described by the given text creates the mental representation of that text's world [8].

Text World theorists postulate four basic factors – **time, location, enactors** and **objects** [12], [6], [10] – that constitute *text-world building blocks* and mark a deictic space in which the action described unfolds. In contrast to them, *function advancing propositions* propel the communicative purpose of the discourse. It should be noted that most texts involve the creation of multiple worlds, and any change of time, location and modality indicates a world-switch and the creation of new text-worlds. It is stated that discourse participants can easily manage multiple text-worlds which are 'the product of text-driven world-switches' [1: 57].

The principle of **text-drivenness** is of crucial importance in Text World Theory. It actually means that it is the text that prompts the recipients to activate those areas of knowledge which are relevant to the state of affairs described in the discourse [6: 29]. It is for this reason we further develop the idea that the text is 'the control valve' that determines the instantiation of relevant text-worlds containing metaphorical structures in advertising discourse.

Metaphors are conceptual structures seen not only as linguistic devices, but as a powerful tool of structuring and understanding of the situation described (Lakoff, Johnson) which can be generated by participants of discourse as they interact.

In the context of this paper, metaphors are considered both cognitive and discourse phenomena, contributing to the general meaning of a text. Following Werth (1994), Gavins (2007), and Browse (2013) we distinguish between the notions of ‘micro-metaphor’ and ‘megametaphor’. As Browse admits, **micro-metaphors** are the individual ‘cross-domain mappings in the conceptual system’ that are prompted by the text [1: 62]. He underlines the principal difference between **conceptual metaphors** and **megametaphors**. While the former is a general cognitive phenomenon, the latter is a discourse phenomenon – a global conceptual structure stretching across the discourse, ‘created by the gradual accumulation and combination of micro-metaphors by the reader’ [1: 61–62]. A conceptual metaphor is static while a megametaphor is dynamic and defined as the text-driven discourse-level readerly phenomenon: in order to arrive at a megametaphor ‘readers will have had to construct it by integrating the micro-metaphors they encounter throughout the text into an overarching conceptual model’ [1: 61]. Built on this approach, it is stated that micro-metaphors are often integrated into discourse-level megametaphorical structures in commercial advertising promoting products. As will be shown below several micro-metaphors are often combined in the ad to create a megametaphor.

Conceptual Blending Theory (2002) and Gavins’ approach (2007) provide an account of the dynamic aspects of meaning construction and give insights into the ways separate source and target domains merge in a metaphorical mapping to form an emergent structure within a *blended text-world*. Conceptual integration theorists argue that *blending* is a general and basic cognitive operation, which is central to the way we think. The insight of Conceptual Blending Theory is that meaning construction involves integration of structure from across mental spaces, that gives rise to *emergent structure*. The structure in the blend is emergent because it is the result of adding together structures from inputs to produce a unique entity [4: 400–405].

The notion of a **blended text-world** is used in this paper to denote a complex mental representation that comes into being whenever several metaphors occur in the text. Individual micro-metaphors contribute to the complexity of separate text-worlds which feed into the blending process. A blended text-world develops from the use of a number of micro-metaphors drawn from one or several different domains. Blended text-worlds occur in discourse as ‘the result of the conceptual merger of two otherwise independent text-worlds’. Crucially, blended worlds exist at the same conceptual level as the text-worlds from which they originate: they are separate but concurrent mental representations [6: 149]. The recipients can easily manage numerous mental representations, ‘toggl[ing]’ between them. As will be illustrated, their paramount function in advertising discourse is to add the necessary details to the existing conceptualization with emphasis on the product.

RESULTS

The ads chosen for analysis in the paper promote foods. They are taken from the biggest retailing companies of Great Britain ('Tesco') and Russia ('Sed'moj kontinent', 'Diksi'). To analyze the discourse-level effects of metaphors in the text-worlds of commercial advertising we generally assume that advertisers try to understand consumers' drives and construct meanings of discourse accordingly.

A motive is the reason people behave in a given way. Consumers make buying decisions affected by needs and motives. Abraham Maslow who has introduced a good guide to consumer's behavior systematizes them. A well-known hierarchy is traditionally presented in the ascending order of importance: physiological (hunger, thirst), safety (security, protection), social (belonging, love), esteem (self-esteem, recognition, and status), self-actualization (self-development, realization) [9: 73]. This five-stage model of needs governs advertisers seeking to lure consumers to buy even the most insipid products or the products having very little qualitative difference.

Foods satisfy the basic need for physical survival. In the age of 'sophisticated customers' it wouldn't be efficient, though, to advertise foods applying solely to the most basic level of human needs. Thus, besides purely biological motives advertisers seek to appeal to friendship, intimacy, trust, acceptance, affection, and love. Language is an important source of evidence for what this process is like. On the textual level, it is realized due to a wide range of attention-grabbing techniques among which metaphor is one of the most common both in British and Russian advertising. Metaphor enables advertisers to communicate considerable amount of information within a relatively limited number of words. As was mentioned above each micro-metaphor generates some cognitive content presenting an additional layer in the conceptual structure of a blended text-world emerging in advertising discourse. Consider the example below:

*Milk chocolate with caramel centre. We think it's the dreamy drizzle of caramel that makes this treat so full of joy. Each **luscious curve** is **stirred** to just the right texture for a gooey delicious centre. And, **marrying** it with smooth dreamy Cadbury Dairy Milk means it's surely **a match made in heaven**.*

Sketching out the process that gives rise to the creation of a blended text-world we focus on the conceptual content which is the result of inferencing process extending far beyond information specified by the explicit forms contained within the text. The phrase 'Milk chocolate with caramel centre' introduces the basic text-world where the advertised product is the principal object. The world-switch (*we think*) establishes a distinct modal text-world where a concurrent blended world develops. It comes into being at the same conceptual level and provides details to the description of the product in the basic text-world. The processing of the information explicitly presented by several micro-metaphors together with the recipients' personal and cultural knowledge outside of the text thus form a rather complex conceptual structure.

The micro-metaphors *luscious curve*, *stirred*, *marrying*, *match made in heaven* are used to create a megametaphor (*courtship*). The concurrency of the blended world alongside the basic text-world allows the recipient to make conceptual use of both mental

representations. Employing a series of micro-metaphors from the conceptual domain *courtship* several perspectives of perception of the advertised product are constructed. Gavins (2007) calls it is the ‘multiple-vision’, or ‘double-vision’ effect of metaphors. The micro-metaphors used in the advertisement feed inferential information into the processing of the entire text. They share a broad semantic connection with reference to the period during which a couple develops a romantic relationship before getting married: a seductive curving contour (*luscious curve*), excitement (*stirred*), a ceremonial aspect of becoming husband and wife (*marrying*), and enjoying happiness together (*match made in heaven*). All these carry positive connotations and add to the accumulating sense of joy, bliss, and delight in the text promoting chocolate. The second input space that feeds into the blended world is *technological process*. In the resultant emergent structure ingredients (*caramel, Dairy Milk*) become lovers and their relations are crowned with marriage. A great amount of additional detail is supplied through the recipients’ *schemata* as they have substantial experience of what precedes marriage and is typically considered unforgettable and exciting pre-marriage cares.

Schemata are data structures, representing ‘stereotypical patterns’ which people retrieve from memory to understand discourse [2: 73]. In the above example, the text reinforces the recipients’ schema, and the world it projects is perceived as conventional, and familiar to the audience. Positive emotions generated in the concurrent blended world highlighting love, wooing, intimacy contribute to a more favorable representation of the promoted product. The pragmatic effect of the employed technique is to create associations necessary to transform an ordinary product into a tempting delicacy.

As Semino fairly puts it, metaphors vary in their potential for refreshing or reinforcing the existing beliefs and assumptions. This variability is captured in terms of a scale, from *schema reinforcement* at one end to *schema refreshment* at the other end [10: 197]. In the latter case, metaphors attribute new properties to the tenor domain, thus challenging the recipients’ knowledge. We claim that metaphors employed by British and Russian advertisers exploit conventionally accepted similarities between objects of reality rather than unconventional and novel, thus contributing to the creation of blended text-worlds recognized as familiar.

It is of course more accurate to say that some metaphors are conventional within one culture and might be less conventional or unconventional within another. Having examined the totality of 2000 British and Russian advertisements, we conclude that the use of micro-metaphors leading to the establishment of connection between the advertised product and love is on a regular basis in two discourses. The following examples give evidence: *We make our delicious Ski yogurts with a blend of creamy yogurt, juicy fruit and a **sprinkle of love*** (yogurt). *An **exotic marriage** of tomatoes, rice, sweetcorn and mild spices that’s delicious, filling and provides a source of fibre* (soup). ***Sun kissed** legendary rice, nothing else* (rice). Similarly, Russian advertisers tend to make use of metaphors pertaining to affection and love: *Лёгкость и нежность в цветах и деликатность во вкусе позволяют нашему миксу быть **любимцем** неженки*. The advertised product (lettuce) is described in terms of love (*beloved*). These metaphors are rather conventional in both cultures and they generally rely on associations accepted worldwide. It seems that

they project stereotyped views of reality in both discourses: consumers look for food that is not only delicious, healthy, but also lovely and exciting.

Though metaphors seem to be a universal resource of meaning construction in the blended text-worlds, micro-metaphors describing foods in terms of love and courtship are fewer in Russian advertising. Moreover, co-actualization of several micro-metaphors feeding into the blended text-world carries less potential in Russian advertising discourse as compared with the British, and mostly finds realization within marketing communication of a limited number of producers. Consider the following advertisement promoting salad mix:

*Салат «Аликанте». Входящий в состав этого микса салат фриссе обладает целебными свойствами и благотворно влияет на органы пищеварения и кровообращения. Настоящую **испанскую страсть** во вкусе микса «Аликанте» можно подчеркнуть, смешав оливковое масло с хересным укусом. Вы получите идеальную **испанскую заправку**. А завершить ужин в **испанском стиле** лучше всего горячим танцем **фламенко**, который оставит тонкое **испанское послевкусие** в Вашей душе.*

A complex mental representation arises in the interaction between the language of the text and the recipients' background knowledge. Trying to translate the features of a product into benefits that will make the customer want the product, Russian advertisers activate both physiological and social motives. In the basic text-world, the advertised mix is described as healthy (*обладает целебными свойствами*) and positively influencing digestion (*на органы пищеварения*) and blood circulation (*кровообращения*). The blended text-world develops from the use of a micro-metaphor 'Spanish passion in the taste of the mix' (*испанскую страсть во вкусе*), carrying positive connotations, and a number of schemes stored within a generic memory structure of an ordinary Russian. They are pre-existing stereotypical clusters of knowledge about the Spaniards activated by the text. More specifically, the Spanish are passionate people, flamenco is a style of Spanish music, played especially on the guitar and accompanied by singing and dancing. Thus, the recipients map knowledge about Spanish culture and people onto the advertised product, aspiring to finish the Spanish-style dinner (*ужин в испанском стиле*) with the slight Spanish aftertaste (*тонкое испанское послевкусие*) dancing 'hot' flamenco (*горячим танцем фламенко*). Advertisers appeal to the most common knowledge store associated with the Spanish and project a text-world in which the advertised product is attributed features positively assessed within the Russian culture. It is highly unlikely that the connections between the advertised product and purely emotional perception of the Spanish culture pre-exist in the recipients' background knowledge. In the context of the advertisement, however, they are used to advantage to trigger the establishment of not an entirely novel but a relatively new connection contributing to a more favorable presentation of the advertised product.

CONCLUSION

Metaphors in commercial advertising form one of the attention-grabbing techniques that makes advertisements stand out among multitudes of others promoting products of the same type. Metaphors set up vivid contexts aestheticizing consumption. It is possible because of the double-vision effect that metaphors produce in the text-worlds as representational structures of discourse. Employing metaphors British and Russian advertisers leave the area of factual information and enter the area of persuasion. The regular use of metaphorical structures running throughout the advertisements allows additional mental representations to be established in the minds of the recipients that distract their attention from the material use value of products and focus more on psychological and social use value of the advertised foods. The technique enables advertisers to not only communicate much information within a few lines of text but also amuse the customers and enhance their self-images. Appealing to the emotional sphere finds evidence in a number of separate micro-metaphors along with clusters of metaphors having a broad semantic connection to love and affection in the text-worlds of British and Russian commercial advertising. It proves to be a powerful force driving consumers' behavior and their loyalty in both cultures, which aims at evoking psychologically comfortable situations that the customers will identify with. The conceptual content generated in the text worlds mainly conforms to the recipients' existing knowledge. Any alteration of the existing knowledge structures should be very subtle to minimize processing efforts on the part of the target audience.

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