

THE PERSUASIVE EFFECT OF METAPHOR IN ADVERTISING

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Introduction

Advertisement¹, as one of the most distinct facts of modern culture, today is treated as a certain form of rhetorics with the same aims as rhetorics itself: to influence one's mind, will, feelings and achieve the persuasive effects. Rhetorics is viewed as a kind of science analyzing the conditions and forms of effective communications, ways of persuasion, applied not only in rhetorical but also in all types of texts the authors of which aim at the effective or influential communication, which is closely connected with advertising (cf. Дюбья, 1986; Koženiauskienė, 2004).

Persuasion (Lat. *persuasio*) is the main target of rhetorics as the type of persuasive studies. Persuasion is also the target of every advertising message concerned. The following definition of persuasion has been given: "...it is a complex and interactive process where the addresser, guided by a certain system of verbal and non-verbal symbols, is trying to influence the opinion of an addressee" (O'Donnell, Kable, 1982). The professor Zimbardo Ph., at Stanford University, gives one more definition of persuasion: "...it is a systematic, deliberate attempt to affect one's mind, feelings, and actions with the help of certain arguments (Zimbardo, 2000). Finally, "persuasion is ideally perceived as a synthesis of intellectual, moral and emotional elements" (Koženiauskienė, 2005).

Metaphor was traditionally viewed as a figure of speech characteristic of language alone. Linguists had massively studied this persuasive rhetoric in its verbal manifestations. With the increasing interest of cognitive scientists in the subject, however, metaphor has been redefined as a cognitive system that structures our thoughts and behavior rather than merely a language phenomenon. A new view of metaphor that challenged the powerful traditional view in a coherent and systematic way was first developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who have put forward the well-known *conceptual metaphor theory* (CMT). To give some idea of what it would mean for a concept to be metaphorical we could use the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR as an illustration. This metaphor is reflected

in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions, such as:

He attacked every weak point in my argument.

His criticisms were right on target.

I've never won an argument with him.

You disagree? Okay, shoot!

This illustrates that human thought processes are largely metaphorical as there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system.

In the book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff G. and Johnson M. held that metaphor is persuasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action and the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980). Emphasizing our own ways of doing metaphors, we reject the ways practiced by other people as invalid. For this reason, metaphors are always charged with high pragmatic explosives; metaphors are 'loaded weapons' (Bolinger, 1996) in need of being secured. The primary function of metaphoric expressions is to represent our world through seeing and wording. Metaphors are ways of conceptualizing and understanding one's surroundings, as such, they *make up a mental model of our world*. In this way a *pragmatic² view* of metaphoring serves to point the way to a better understanding of our fellow humans. In particular, it tells us what things other groups in society, other classes, other nations attach weight to and prioritize in their interaction with themselves, with their environment and with the others (including us) (Mey, 2001).

This article aims at a deeper analysis of conceptual metaphor in various types of advertising media. To achieve the aim, the following *research objectives* have been set:

- to introduce conceptual metaphor and its persuasive effect in advertising;
- to review previous research into the role of metaphor in Lithuanian and English advertisements;
- to perform analysis of persuasive effect of conceptual metaphors in political advertising of English media.

¹ The term *advertisement* is derived from the French word *avertissement*, from stem of *avertir*, meaning "public notice".

² Pragmatics is concerned with the following main categories: reasons and intentions of the participants, strategies of the text, functions of elements, and ways of using them.

The analysis of conceptual metaphors, which is the *main research method* in revealing the effect of brainwashing³ processes on people's mind, has been performed not on periodicals only, but on the basis of Internet advertisements, i.e. political posters, as well.

Conceptual Metaphor and Persuasive Commercial Advertising

Conceptual metaphors and their pragmatic effect in advertising have been discussed by a number of foreign and Lithuanian authors.

Zhang X. and Gao X. (2009), dealing with the analysis of conceptual metaphor in Western commercial advertisements, mention two beer bottles snuggling up together, cars shown as one's lovers, and a piece of soap presented as a packet of cigarettes as a few vivid and innovative examples of conceptual metaphor applied in advertising. To attract viewers' attention, convey product information and promote their products, advertisers have increasingly used conceptual metaphor (Zhang, Gao, 2009). Indeed, conceptual metaphor plays an important role in advertising, as Kövecses Z. (2002) points out: "Part of the selling power of an advertisement depends on how well-chosen the conceptual metaphor is that the picture and/or the words used in the advertisement attempt to evoke in people. An appropriately selected metaphor may work wonders in promoting the sale of an item".

After review of previous research into the role of metaphor in Lithuanian and English advertisements, metaphor can be considered one of the most influential stylistic means expressed both in *verbal* and *pictorial* ways. Furthermore, there are metaphors working on several levels at the same time (*metaphorical blends*). All the cases will be analyzed further on.

A number of verbal metaphors have been presented by Knowles M. and Moon R. in their book "Introducing Metaphor". One of them is the conceptual metaphor MONEY IS A PRODUCT.

Money involves all of us: the earning of it, the spending of it, how to get more, insufficient funds, and so on. A strategy now used by banks is to see their customers as consumers buying actual merchandise. This occurs to the extent that it can be found in spoken situations as in face-to-face interaction with bank staff, as well as in the written mode. For example, compare the following. First, from the Lloyds/TSB

Platinum Account Pack, exemplifying the concept MONEY IS A PRODUCT:

Best rates of interest offered by Lloyds/TSB on this type of product

and second:

"We value our custom highly...we know that you have availed yourselves of a number of our products" (Personal conversation with Bank Manager, 2002).

What is interesting for the authors here is the fact that the product referred to in the first of these extracts concerns overdraft facilities, while the second is referring to a discussion about an application for a bank loan. In neither case is the text referring to something physical.

Another metaphorical expression in financial discourse is based on the concept of being *locked in*. This can concern a mortgage, as in this first example from some Building Society advertisement as in *No lock-in period*. Or in the BBC's reporting on the Bank of England's decision to cut interest rates:

These interest rates have been locked in (BBC Radio 4, PM at 5pm, February 6, 2003)

Another source exploited in money metaphor involves the concept of FIRE or HEAT. Heat, of course, signifies intensity. Kövecses Z. discusses the concepts of FIRE and HEAT and their association with emotions, such as ANGER and LOVE. In the financial world, decisions by governments and big business can create a situation that affects virtually everyone. Thus, from the same BBC current affairs programme cited above we have the following:

Do you think this could re-ignite the housing market? ... There's been a blaze there anyway.

So, the interviewee is being asked, "*will the cut in interest rates cause a situation which in turn will cause fire (re-ignition)?*" But we are told a little later in the interview that the situation of house prices has already caused fire (a blaze) (Knowles, Moon, 2005).

If the choice is temporary reduction in savings' rates versus a Japanese or a German-style meltdown, then a sacrifice on rates must be more palatable (Daily Mail, February 7, 2003)

As well as meltdown, Knowles M. and Moon R. point out the contrast between the concept of giving something up, that is the lowering of interest rates which adversely affects savers, and that of something appetizing (palatable) and therefore more acceptable, from the point of view of maintaining financial stability.

The ways of conveying pictorial (visual or non-verbal) metaphors are the same as those of verbal. The main difference, however, is their form of expression. The pictorial metaphor is especially

³ This aspect is analysed in more detail by Andrew Goatly in his "Washing the Brain – Metaphor and Hidden Ideology".

frequent as the view and colours are to attract the reader's attention more than the verbal text. The concentration of sense is what matters in advertising, thus, pictures implicate even more associations and meaning which could be hardly expressed in words (Chandler, 2007).

Forceville Ch. (2006) differentiates between several groups of visual metaphors based on M. Black's Correlation Theory and the definition of conceptual metaphor, which seems quite convincing (cf. it is the ascribing of the features of one subject on to another). They are such as follows:

1. Visual metaphor with one component
2. Visual metaphor with two components
3. Visual-pictorial metaphors (metaphorical blends)

As an example of *pictorial metaphors with one component* Juzelėnienė S. and Šarkauskienė S., the authors of "Visual Metaphors in Printed Advertisements", provide the advertisement of "Bata", where a dark woman is holding a pair of shoes of different colors.

The reader sees the product advertised, however, the features ascribed to the subject are absent. This is evident only from the environment the object is surrounded by. A dark woman is chosen not accidentally but to emphasize the social activities of the company. We can presume that face is a very important beauty element of a woman. The idea is also fulfilled by the hint to the earrings. The latter are represented by the shoes in the advertisement. Through this the metaphor SHOES ARE YOUR ACCESSORIES is expressed. Another possible interpretation of it can be: SHOES ARE YOUR EARS. The conclusion follows that "Bata" shoes represent the brand for safe, self-confident women. Possibly, with these shoes a woman is going to hear lots of compliments and attract one's attention (Juzelėnienė, Šarkauskienė, 2007).

The second case (pictorial metaphors with two components) is illustrated with a very specific example of the Land Rover Freelander ad, where the car advertised is compared to a dragon-fly.

The first and the second component parts are individual objects in terms of their visual comparison. The product advertised (the first subject) acquires the expressive, original expression as the features of the second subject let us look at an ordinary thing reality from a different perspective. The advertisement is based on the realization of the conceptual metaphor THE CAR IS A DRAGON FLY. We cannot underestimate the importance of the name of the car, which is Freelander. The word free implicates freedom and traveling; whereas a compound English word dragon-fly points to the dragon (a huge flying

mythical creature and the flight itself). The semantics of those two words connotes speed, freedom, and power.

Finally, *the third metaphor group (visual-pictorial metaphors)* is exemplified with quite an interesting advertisement of "IRIS", the seller of the bathroom equipment, with the circles on the white background of the poster, reminding human eyes.

If not for the text, questioning about the face of one's bathroom in a curved form reminding smile, it would be very complicated to tell what product is being advertised. The visual elements are not enough for the perception of contextual information. The circles on the white background of the poster remind the human eyes. The text in this ad obviously performs a double function: it is a visual component (implicates the smile) and helps to decode the conceptual metaphor "BELLAVISTA" EQUIPMENT IS THE FACE OF OUR ROOM. The face represents a human, so bathroom represents its host (Juzelėnienė, Šarkauskienė, 2007). The persuasion is effective indeed.

As an example of this type Knowles M. and Moon R. (2005) present the advertisement for washing machine detergent, which comes from the women's magazine Red and involves an element of personification as one of its selling strategies. The advertisement opens with a question under a picture of a washing machine with a large duvet spilling out of it:

What do you feed a machine with an appetite this big? Just pop a couple of Ariel Liquitabs in the drum. They tackle stains with so much energy they clean even the largest load. No wonder Indesit recommend them.

The machine is represented as having an appetite: it is personified (or 'animalified'!). So are the two tablets of detergent. The consumer has to put them in the washing machine but real work is done by Ariel Liquitabs: they can tackle, they have energy, they can clean. In other words, they are seen as having agency. The use of punning helps to highlight the personification of the detergent as a 'friend' who can take another load off your mind. The young, professional female reader does not have to do the washing herself as the onerous task is undertaken by her friends. The authors were unable to find any WASHING POWDER AS FRIENDS metaphors in similar male magazines, which made them conclude about presumable ideology (Knowles, Moon, 2005).

Research results

The types of conceptual metaphors in advertising presented above served as the basis for the analy-

sis of metaphors in political advertisements, where people are also being brain-washed into 'buying the product' by accurately chosen metaphors, both verbal and pictorial. The latter type of metaphors appears as the most predominant in the political field proving that the visual context is nevertheless important. The possibility of transferring the meaning is characteristic to verbal and visual expression of the ad as a whole. This idea is represented by an amusing editorial cartoon.



Picture 1. Editorial cartoon

(<http://www.intute.ac.uk/hottopics/2004/11/subliminal-messages-from-the-2004-american-presidential-election/>)

This seemingly simple illustration with a strange creature, shaped like the American continent, with the box of ballots in its hands and the thought bubble illustration of two words with similar sound combinations can stand for a complex subliminal message. The reader is being misled by the use of the consonant clusters in the questioning words *trick* or *treat*. The satirical words reinforce the effect of irony about the 2004 American presidential election, how Bush got his message more effectively than Kerry. The graphics itself in conveying the meaning of the advertisement (ELECTIONS CAN BE DECEITFUL) could not be underestimated.

One more undoubtedly interesting example of political advertisement is the one with an antiperspirant.



Picture 2. Antiperspirant poster

(<http://www.zazzle.com/political+posters?pg=2>)

Antiperspirants are well known to the addressee as one of the remedies that stop from sweating. The features of the popular product deodorant are ascribed to the American president Obama. The visual component in this ad is of paramount importance as it helps to decode the ironical message of the conceptual metaphor PRESIDENT IS THE PROBLEM that should be sealed out.

I also thought it useful to discuss the poster for the political campaign of the 2008, in which President Obama is portrayed as the knight on the steed – reminding more of an ass though – with the sword in his hands.



Picture 3. Knight poster

(<http://www.zazzle.com/political+posters?pg=2>)

This is an allusion to Don Quixote, a hero who carries his enthusiasm and self-deception to unintentional comic ends. Obama's campaign is also compared to a noble-minded, enthusiastic admirer of everything good and great with the possible comic ending. This is, of course, similar to the way in which conceptual metaphor maps meaning from one cognitive domain onto another, and especially interesting in this particular example is the way in which metaphor works on several levels at the same time. Verbal and visual components merge to make up the complex metaphor carrying the message of the poster OBAMA IS A NAIVE FIGHTER WITH THE WINDMILLS OF AMERICA.

Conclusions

Through the analysis of conceptual metaphors in advertising media, this article has arrived at the following conclusions:

- Metaphor is probably one of the most influential stylistic means used in advertising ('loaded weapons').
- Metaphor is by no means only the subject of linguistics but a way of thinking, reflecting the reality and one's way of perceiving things as well.

This provides a necessary bridge for pragmatics.

- As manifestations of conceptual metaphors, verbal and pictorial metaphors are used as means to attract and hold the audience's attention to the advertiser's informative intention.
- In addition to the findings of other authors, some research results have been made that accurately chosen metaphors appear as means to brainwash people 'into buying' not in commercial environment only, but in politics as well.

This article is only a primary glance at the role the conceptual metaphors play in persuading the people into buying things advertised. How conceptual metaphors work in other specific advertisements deserves an insightful study in much broader fields.

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Summary

The article analyzes metaphor as one of the most effective means of presenting advertisements, and reviews its place in linguistics by emphasizing the pragmatic function of this linguistic device. The article is based on the conceptual metaphor theory where metaphor is treated not only as a linguistic phenomenon, but also as a reflection of processes of thinking. Not only verbal, but also verbal-visual metaphors (metaphorical blends) are discussed. By the strength of influence on the addressee metaphors compare to “explosives”. Persuasive analysis of metaphors is carried out with reference to samples of periodical issues provided by foreign and Lithuanian authors as well as to political advertising on the internet.

Keywords: pragmatics, conceptual metaphor, metaphorical blends, advertising, persuasion.

PERSVAZINIS METAFOROS EFEKTAS REKLAMOJE

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama metafora kaip viena efektyviausių reklamos pateikimo priemonių; apžvelgiama jos vieta lingvistikoje, akcentuojant pragmatinę šios lingvistinės priemonės funkciją. Remiamasi konceptualiosios metaforos teorija, kur pastaroji traktuojama ne tik kaip kalbinis reiškiny, bet ir mąstymo procesų atspindys. Aptariamos ne tik žodinės, bet ir žodinės-vaizdinės metaforos (metaforinės samplaikos). Metaforos poveikio stiprumu adresatui prilyginamos „sprogstamiems užtaisams“. Persvazinė metaforų analizė atlikta remiantis užsienio lietuvių autorių pateiktais periodinių leidinių pavyzdžiais bei politine reklama internete.

Prasminiai žodžiai: pragmatika, konceptualioji metafora, metaforinės samplaikos, reklama, persvajija.

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