

# The Rhetorical Dimension of Printed Advertising: a Discourse-Analytical Approach

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**ABSTRACT:** The study of the rhetorical uses of language in advertising can be approached from different disciplines –discourse analysis, media studies, metaphor theory–. Although normally focusing on different aspects according to their objects of study, these fields share two basic assumptions: 1. the recognition that all advertising is clearly rhetorical; 2. the observation that metaphor is a frequent device in this genre (Williamson, 1978; Fiske, 1982; Vestergaard; Schroeder, 1985; Chandler, 1994; Forceville, 1996, 2006; Cook, 2001). Taking this into consideration, this paper attempts to provide a hierarchical top-down model of analysis as a means to examine the rhetorical dimension of printed commercial adverts. For this purpose, I adopt some theoretical and methodological analytical tools provided by discourse analysis and social semiotics, and incorporate elements from advertising studies and metaphor theory. Special attention is paid to studies on visual rhetoric and to representations of one specific trope, metaphor.

*Keywords:* rhetoric, advertising, discourse analysis, verbal and visual language, metaphor.

**RESUMEN:** La aproximación al estudio de los usos retóricos del lenguaje en publicidad puede hacerse desde diversas disciplinas (análisis del discurso, estudios de medios de comunicación, teoría de la metáfora). Si bien suelen centrar su interés en aspectos diferentes de acuerdo a sus objetos de estudio, estos campos comparten dos supuestos básicos: 1. el reconocimiento de que todo el discurso publicitario es claramente retórico; 2. la observación de la metáfora como un recurso frecuente en este género (Williamson, 1978; Fiske, 1982; Vestergaard; Schroeder, 1985; Chandler, 1994; Forceville, 1996, 2006; Cook, 2001). Teniendo esto en consideración, el objetivo de este artículo es proporcionar un modelo de análisis jerárquico y verticalista que permita examinar la dimensión retórica de anuncios comerciales impresos. Con este fin el estudio adopta algunas herramientas teóricas y metodológicas proporcionadas por el análisis del discurso y la semiótica social, e incorpora elementos de los estudios de publicidad y la teoría de la metáfora, prestando especial atención a los estudios de retórica visual y las representaciones de un tropo en particular, la metáfora.

*Palabras clave:* retórica, publicidad, análisis del discurso, lenguaje verbal y visual, metáfora.

## 1. Introduction

Rhetoric is persuasive discourse, all discourses are unavoidably rhetorical, and advertising is a highly rhetorical discourse in many specific ways. Taking this into account, the present study aims at providing a method to read and interpret the words and images of printed advertisements at the rhetorical dimension of discourse (in this occasion I restrict myself to this type of texts, excluding others such as TV commercials, since their analysis would bring in music and sound as well).

By considering discourse analysis as an essential preliminary to deal with this subject, I herein adopt a model developed by applied linguistics and discourse analysis, and combine it with social semiotics. I opt for this approach as it is multidisciplinary, not only because of the methodology it employs but also because of its objects of study, that is texts. These often belong to two or more media and consist of diverse genres expressed through different semiotic codes – commonly called multi-modality.

Nevertheless, detailed analyses of the rhetorical uses of the verbal and visual modes of advertising have not been carried out; therefore, I look at other fields which have dealt with the subject, mainly advertising theory and pictorial and multimodal approaches to metaphor.

The framework I present is thus oriented towards the construction of a model that is clearly integrative, since some of the problems encountered in one field of study can find an explanation in another related field. Ultimately, this model – which I use in a course I teach on English Advertising Studies – can also be useful to students and researchers in the fields of discourse analysis and metaphor studies.

## 2. The Rhetorical Dimension of Discourse

Because of its origins, discourse analysis is closely related to classical rhetoric, which was concerned with how to do things with words, to achieve effects, and communicate successfully with people in particular contexts (Cook, 1989). As observed by van Dijk (1988: 28):

[...] both classical and modern rhetoric deals with the persuasive dimension of language use and, more specifically, with the account of those properties of discourse that can make communication more persuasive. These rhetorical structures of discourse, featuring for instance the well-known figures of speech, are also based on grammatical structures but are not themselves linguistic or grammatical. Thus, an alliteration presupposes identity of initial phonemes or morphemes, parallelism requires identity of syntactic patters, and metaphor may involve partial meaning identity and referential identity of expressions. But the transformations involved, such as deletion, repetition, substitution, or permutation, are not as such grammatical. They do not express differences of meaning, nor do they always indicate differences in social context. Rather, the speaker uses them to enhance the organization, and hence the attention, and retrieval of textual information by the listener/reader.

Therefore, rhetoric deals with both context and formulation and can be understood in two senses: 1. in a broader sense, “it as a discipline that deals with all aspects of

persuasive speaking or writing”, thus becoming “nearly identical with at least a large part of discourse analysis”. 2. In a more restrictive sense, it constitutes “the rhetorical subcomponent of discourse analysis that explicates very specific, rhetorical structures only.” Like other discourse dimensions, rhetoric “also has a more empirical dimension, which studies the social psychological aspects of persuasion based on the use of specific rhetorical structures” (van Dijk, 1988: 28).

Since the aim of the present paper is the construction of a model to explore the rhetorical dimension of adverts, identify figurative devices in specific texts, and observe the role they play, the study must move from the broader to the more restricted sense of rhetoric. Together with this, we must take into consideration the ‘transformations’ mentioned by van Dijk (1988). These are the four basic modifying operations of classic rhetoric – *adiectio*, *detractio*, *transmutatio*, *inmutatio* –, which can be applied to the super-structural organisation of the whole discourse and to the lower dimensions, including utterances, singular words and visual elements.

In general terms, discourse analysis can be approached from two different directions (Cook, 1989: 82-83):

- 1) A bottom-up approach to language that divides communication into discrete levels, which can be dealt with separately. This type of text processing is *atomistic*, and focuses on form, rather than function. Language teaching for instance, has traditionally adopted this direction, being one of the reasons the fact that it has followed the historical development and procedures of linguistics.
- 2) A top-down approach, on the other hand, is *holistic* because it regards all levels of language as a whole, working together. This approach, which is frequently used in practices where text comprehension is a preliminary to achieve any discursive transfer operation (translation, for instance), is the direction we are going to adopt here.

Hence, although it is imperative the view of discourse as a whole, the application of an analysis of this kind to specific texts must account for the *communicative and socio-cultural context*; 2) the *textual analysis*, which goes from the macro-structural levels of discourse to the lowest levels. Within this frame, rhetoric can then be observed as another dimension of discourse, which interrelates with other levels – pragmatic, stylistic, syntactic, semantic, graphic (van Dijk, 1995).

### **3. The Communicative and Socio-Cultural Context**

In order to account for discourse, we need to look at the situation, the people involved, what they know and what they are doing (Cook, 1989). Hence, the communicative and socio-cultural context in the case of printed commercial advertising includes information about the medium, and publication details such as nationality, year, number and type of edition, advertising agency, and type of product, which can provide significant data for the analysis. Together with this, we have to understand the work of advertisers, considering that in media practices the process of text production goes from

the producer/s of a specific product to advertising agencies, who produce/create the advert, sometimes taking into consideration certain specific indications of their clients.

In “Text and Discourse, rhetoric, and stylistics”, Enkvist (1985) uses ‘rhetoric’ in its most classical sense of “*ars bene dicendi*, the art of attractive, and therefore effective, expression”, and his observations are most useful to understand the work of advertisers:

Because of their preoccupation with effectiveness, all rhetorics share an important trait. They are all teleological in approach. They advocate goal-directed strategies of communication and expression. Their basic statements are of the type

If you want to be effective in situation S, you will do wisely in using communicative strategies and linguistic expressions of types a, b and c. (Enkvist, 1985: 16)

Since the ultimate goal of all advertising is economic, the aim of advertisers is to sell more of the products they promote. For this purpose they construct texts which can persuade the readers to buy a specific product instead of another. Adverts do not have to include detailed information of all the qualities of a product; they normally select certain features for its promotion according to its characteristics. Moreover, their statements do not have to be necessarily true, only plausible, thus more than logical and complicated argumentations advertising uses psychological, social and aesthetic arguments accessible to the mass media (López Eire, 1998). Hence, to create their messages, which must be brief, attractive, new, and at the same time redundant, advertisers have at their disposal a series of rhetorical strategies – visual and verbal –. These are based on conventions and rules as a result of historical evolution, and many of them have become clichés.

#### 4. The Analysis of Multimodal Texts

By ‘textual analysis’ I mean the analysis of the level of discourse at which whole texts are considered as self-contained, coherent and cohesive entities. Thus, two basic concepts are: text ‘coherence’, i.e., the network of conceptual relations which underlie the surface text; and ‘cohesion’, i.e., the network of the surface relations which link visual and verbal units and expressions to other visual and verbal units and expressions. These concepts need to be observed in relation to the ‘macrostructure’, i.e., the compositional plan or underlying structure which accounts for the organization of the text, and which derives from the notions of ‘genre’. Thus organization within parts of the discourse means approaching the level of cohesion, as well as the combination of elements, and thus grammar (Cook, 1989). Together with this, the ‘topic’ summarizes conceptually the text and specifies its most important information.

The rules that construe the discourse in the macrostructure level however, vary depending on the type of discourse, and different discourses are distinguished by the way in which the topic, propositions and other information are linked together to form a unit. For instance, the textual structure and organisation in a news story takes the form of an inverted pyramid because the main information – the answers to the 5W – is provided right at the beginning of the text. On the contrary, a suspense thriller must present the

opposite structure. A printed advert also shows a specific structure and the constituent parts are organized and related to one another in order to form a meaningful whole; but in this type of discourse the information is not displayed in a linear way, but spatially within a compositional frame. Moreover, advertisements are *multimodal* texts that require an analysis of *visually* and *verbally* expressed meaning.

In general terms, advertising theorists have traditionally adopted a semiotic approach to the study of all sign systems of signification – oral and written language, images, gestures, musical sounds –, and the complex associations of all these. Within this domain the text or message is viewed as “an assemblage of signs constructed – and interpreted – with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication” (Chander, 1994). Hence, semioticians seek to analyse media texts as structured wholes being their main interest to study how meanings are made and to investigate latent, connotative meanings.

Nevertheless, there exist today significant variations in semiotic methodologies for analysing texts and social practices. In this respect, the work carried out by social semioticians and multimodal discourse analysts (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001) is most valuable to gain a better understanding of the images of adverts. Basically, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 20) have defined ‘modes’ as “semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action.” With respect to images, these researchers have provided a systematic and comprehensive account of the grammar of visual design, looking at its formal elements and structures: colour, perspective, framing and composition. As for the analogy between visual structures and verbal structures they make the following observation:

The meanings which can be realized in language and in visual communication overlap in part, that is some things can be expressed both visually and verbally; and in part they diverge – some things can be ‘said’ only visually, other only verbally. But even when something can be ‘said’ both visually and verbally the *way in which* it will be said is different. For instance, what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and semantic structures is, in visual communication, expressed through the choice between, for instance, different uses of colour, or different compositional structures (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 2).

## 5. Visual Rhetoric

As mentioned, this area of research has not undertaken detailed analysis of the rhetorical uses of images; therefore we have to look at other fields which have dealt with the subject, taking into consideration that this discourse tends to rely increasingly upon images (Cook, 2001). But whilst the study of verbal rhetorical figures in print advertisements – metaphor, metonymy, personification, hyperbole, paradox, etc. –, has been the object of many investigations, research on visual rhetoric is still quite an emergent field. In spite of this fact, the interest in visual rhetoric has increased considerably in the late times, and visual and multimodal metaphors are examined today in different areas: art history, cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology, advertising

theory, communication studies. In general, these approaches have theorised about its basis, much of this literature concerning itself with definitions and with specific studies on the role of metaphor in the arts and in the media.

What I mention next is a brief review of what I consider the most relevant investigations carried out within the 1) semiotic tradition of mass communication studies; 2) cognitive metaphor theory, which is currently the dominant paradigm in metaphor research.

### 5.1. Semiotic Approaches

Within the field of cultural and communication studies, the works produced by Fiske (1982), Fiske and Hartley (1978), and O'Sullivan *et al.* (1994) are most useful to first approach this subject. These authors present a general account of the three possible ways to 'describe aspects of semiosis', and provide several illustrative examples in different media:

The first approach, which the mentioned researchers adopt, is Barthes (1977) systematic model of two orders of signification to analyse the idea of meaning: 'denotation', which is the first order, and then 'connotation', 'myth' and 'symbol'. More specifically, connotation tends to work metaphorically, as observed in this example:

[...] in a photograph of a thatched cottage taken with warm lighting and soft focus, nostalgia is connoted. The lighting is a visual equivalent of the verbal metaphor 'looking through rosed-coloured spectacles,' and the soft focus is a metaphor of the soft heartness of the emotion. (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 93)

A second, alternative approach is Peircean semiotics and its distinction between 'icon', 'index', and 'symbol'. And a somehow different approach to describe aspects of semiosis is metaphor and metonymy, which this school derives from (though it is not quite the same as) Jakobson (1960), for whom these are the "two fundamental modes of communicating meaning."

Departing from a traditional verbal definition of 'metaphor', Fiske (in O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 93) defines this figure as "a word (signifier) which is applied to an object or action (signified) to which it is not literally or conventionally applicable." This scholar considers that metaphor is characteristic of advertising because in this discourse "meanings are created out of known cultural myths whose characteristics are then transposed on to the unknown product".

As for metonymy, "the signification depends upon the ability of a sign to act as a part which can signify a whole" (Fiske and Hartley, 1978: 48). Thus in photographic and filmic media many things are considered as functioning metonymically: film is basically considered a metonymic medium; the formal frame of any visual image is also metonymic since it suggests that what is being offered is a 'slice-of-life'; a close-up is metonymic because it involves a selection that can be expanded; or even the frozen moment that the picture is capturing is metonymic in the sense that we can infer the preceding events.

More specific books on the language of advertising have also observed, to a greater or lesser extent, that adverts can be metaphorical and metonymic in several ways, and that they are full of connotations and symbols, because to achieve their goals advertisers appeal to the possible associations, cultural, personal, of readers (Cook, 2001; Messaris, 1997; Vestergaard and Schroeder, 1985; Williamson, 1978).

As explored by Williamson (1978), visual metaphor can involve a function of ‘transference’, i.e., transferring certain qualities from one sign to another. Advertisers associate a product with a specific set of social values – in semiotic terms, creating distinct signifieds for it. One of the examples she provides is an advert for perfume, whose image presents the French actress Catherine Deneuve next to a bottle of perfume labelled Chanel No. 5. Two key signifiers are juxtaposed in this advertisement and the aim is for the viewer “to transfer the qualities signified by the actress to the perfume, thus substituting one signified for another, and creating a new metaphorical sign which offers us the meaning that *Chanel No. 5 is beauty and elegance*” (Williamson, 1978: 25 *apud* Chandler, 1994, chap 8).

Most relevant in this respect is Cook’s (2001) book on the discourse of advertising. Following a bottom-up model of discourse analysis, Cook’s analysis of adverts takes into account several dimensions of discourse (stylistic, rhetorical, grammatical, lexical, graphical), and emphasizes on the rhetorical level in several occasions. As for the interpretation of pictures, Cook extends the semiotic principles of ‘paradigm’ and ‘syntagm’ and observes that ads in general “foreground connotational, indeterminate and metaphorical meaning, thus effecting fusion between disparate spheres” (p. 217). Considering Lakoff and Johnson (1980) an alternative, the concrete figure of ‘metaphor’ is defined by this researcher following the traditional view based on Saussurean semiology, i.e., “one signifier refers to two signifieds by virtue of a shared component in the signifieds though not in the signifiers” (p. 67). Together with this, Cook considers the ‘intertextual meanings’ that derive from the intertextual voices of ads, which can be subdivided into two types:

Intra-generic intertextuality: containing the voice of another example of the same genre, as when an ad assumes knowledge of another ad.

Inter-generic intertextuality: containing the voice of a different genre, as when an ad evokes knowledge of a film or story. (Cook, 2001: 194)

## 5.2. The Cognitive Approach

Nonetheless, the most extensive work carried out in this area is found within metaphor studies, in spite of the fact that most of the work in metaphor research has so far tended to focus on *verbal* examples. More specifically, the study on the visual – or ‘pictorial’– representation of metaphor was started by Forceville (1996) with the publication of his *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising*. This book, which is hitherto his most sustained attempt at theorizing metaphor in advertising, has been widely cited and applied in advertising and media studies.

After the observation that cognitive metaphor theory is based on the proposition that metaphor derives from our bodily experience and is thus an essential part of everyday patterns of thinking (Lakoff; Johnson, 1999), this work set up a new field of research that has progressively broadened its scope by using insights from different fields: metaphor cognitive model theory, relevance theory, genre theory, visual design theory, perception psychology, and also semiotics.

Adopting the general view that “metaphors can assume non-verbal and multimodal appearances” (2006: 3), one of Forceville’s (2004-2007) main concerns is the classification of metaphorical representations as a method to understand their systematic nature and operating rules. Although not explicitly mentioned, this theory can also be considered as being founded on the classic rhetorical operations –suppression, addition, permutation –, since this scholar defines ‘metaphor’ in terms of “the replacement of an expected visual element by an unexpected one.” (But this does not cover all types: in pictorial simile, for instance, target and source are *juxtaposed*; nothing is “replaced”). In addition, Forceville analyses the features that can be matched depending on the context in which metaphor occurs, and interpretation is based “on the network of which target and source of a metaphor are part in terms of denotations – objective meanings, as found in a dictionary –; and connotations – personal or conventional overtones and emotions associated with the world –” (2004-7).

In his observations on ‘multimodal metaphors’, this scholar establishes first, the difference between ‘medium’ and ‘mode’, defining the first in terms of a more –or less institutionalised carrier of information, and the second in terms of a type of communication or signalling system. Hence, each medium “communicates via one or more signalling systems” (2006: 3). According to this conception, multimodal metaphors are those “whose target and source are each represented exclusively or predominantly in different modes” (p. 6).

Forceville’s model has been largely developed with respect to advertising pictorial representations and later expanded to other genres such as art painting, comic and film. Thus this line of investigation also includes the interpretation of other pictorial and multimodal representations of metaphor – written/spoken language, static/moving images, music, gesture, smell, touch.

Although this author expressed at a certain point serious doubts about a number of the claims made by social semioticians (Forceville, 1999), he has also recognised the possibility of establishing closer links with this field since in his own words: “Given its long disciplinary tradition, the robust insights of metaphor scholarship can in turn fruitfully feed into the budding field of multimodality in general” (p.13).

The convenience of combining insights drawn from multimodal discourse analysis with research carried out on cognitive metaphor theories when examining printed adverts is also the direction favoured in the present study, among other things because this integration can contribute to observe the presence of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) orientational, ontological, and structural metaphors not only in verbal language but also in images, and the combination of both.

In this same direction I agree with El Refaie (2003: 75) for whom visual metaphors “must be considered visual representations of metaphorical thoughts.” In her analysis of newspaper political cartoons, this researcher combines cognitive metaphor theories with



studies of visual ‘grammar’ (Kress; van Leeuwen, 1996: 80), and observes that “there seems to be a whole range of different forms through which metaphorical concepts can be expressed visually”. Hence, a metaphor can “emerge from the composition of several verbal and visual signs, which through their particular relation to one another, together produce a specific idea”.

## 6. Providing Answers: the 5W

In order to make a comprehensive method of analysis, the discourse-analytical approach suggested so far allows for the integration of research carried out in the above mentioned studies. At this point, the way to carry it on is by considering that all discourses proceed as through answering a series of questions. These questions were also established in classical rhetoric – *quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando* – after observing that the orator had to turn to a series of *loci* or common places, that is, to certain compartments in his memory which would enable him to find the right arguments and the selection of the topics of his discourse. Hence, the answers to these *what, who, where, when, why* and *how* are provided by the text and can be applied to all levels of discourse:

- To the communicative and socio-cultural context, as has been already observed: Where does the ad appear? Who is the sender of the text? What sort of person is he/she addressing? What type of discourse is this? What is the purpose of discourse? What role does the advertised product play in a specific culture?
- To the text, and more specifically to its rhetorical dimension. At this level some of the questions to be asked are: What is the relationship of picture and writing, and what does this tell us? What is the theme or topic of the ad? How can the action that is taking place be described and what is its significance? If there are people, who are they and what can we tell from age, ethnicity, gender, body language, class, relationships? What does the background tell us? What information is given of the product and where is it placed? How are the elements arranged? What kind of photographic shot is being used? What font is used, what size, where? What colour? What nets of connections can be established between the different elements? What signifiers allow for a rhetorical interpretation? What are their possible meanings and connotations? What associations can we make that link the narrative to a specific cultural myth or stereotype? Why does the intended audience respond to the ad as they do? What are the ideological, cultural and social implications of the rhetorical uses?

## 7. Further Suggestions

In keeping with what has been said already, let us make some further suggestions:

1. The possibility of reading an advert focusing on its rhetorical dimension can be done after the examination of context, genre, and then text structure and organisation.

Genre conventions can provide cues for interpretation, while the selection of possible meanings and connotations at the paradigmatic level will depend upon discourse coherence. Moreover, such an interpretation extends into symbols and myths – which in turn can be expressed metaphorically or metonymically.

2. Hence, it is necessary to observe how the different ‘units of meaning’ have been connected to each other by virtue of conceptual or meaning dependencies as perceived by language users. The analysis of how images and words supply meanings about a product, asks for an examination of how the different elements interrelate in the ad:

- Regarding images, the use of various devices to divide up the available space, the deployment of captions, shapes, size of objects, lightning, and the different codes of body language – gestures, clothes, dress, proxemics – are all examples of signifiers of immense significance which can construe a visual trope, and consequently allow for a rhetorical interpretation. For instance, the presence of the brand name typically placed on the down angle of the ad is significant since the information placed in the lower zones gives information value ‘real’ or ‘specific’. Or the straight lines and square forms of an advert for cars can produce an effect of contrast and amplification with the elongated shape of the product, which can be emphasized by the use of different sizes and colours. This kind of visual devices can be then interpreted as motivated signs which interact with the words and may also substitute words.
- Moreover, they must be combined with the meaning of the verbal devices of the written information, such as the presence of verbal and verbo-visual metaphors; the conventional use of the direct address ‘you’, and the imperative form of the verb to personalise the product and create conviction; the appearance of exclamation marks to connote admiration; or the use of superlatives and the definite article such as ‘the ultimate’ or ‘the newest’ to eliminate competition.
- Also, the many ways in which “advertising exploits the paralanguage of writing” (Cook, 2001: 84) have to be taken into account. Examples of this are: the use of capital letters to highlight an important feature; of handwritten style to signify an individual; and of different typographical style to present the brand name; for instance, a signature indicates authorship and it is a rhetorical convention which can be considered either as a metonymy – the product for the producer – or a personalisation – ads involve many voices, being the voice of the producer the most important one.

These are but a few examples of how visual and verbal devices allow for a rhetorical interpretation and provide the reader, in a persuasive way, with information and explicit details.

3. Besides, we can also consider the possibility that among the different rhetorical figures, most probably a visual/verbal/multimodal metaphor – here viewed as an operation of transfer of meaning – has been used to represent the topic. For instance, many adverts rely upon the mentioned image of a famous personality to transfer metaphorically his or her qualities to the product (Williamson, 1978), while others

substitute an object for the product. Overall, the visual interpretation can allow us to recognize, among the repertoire of characteristics commonly attached to a product, some of its possible features. To explain this second type of transference in more detail I will use an advert for shoes whose pictorial metaphor – SHOE IS TIE – was extensively analysed by Forceville (1996: 109-113). This specific advert presents the image of a shoe that has been depicted in a place where we would normally expect to find a tie; in rhetorical terms, the expected object has been *suppressed* and *substituted* by another, thus what we have here is a *permutation*. The shoe conventionally occupies a central position, following the portrait technique, and since advertisers always orient their readers towards a preferred reading, the image seems to be stating, using a direct form of address: “Look at *this* shoe. It is so ‘stylish’, ‘distinctive’, ‘elegant’, ‘light’, ‘smooth’, etc., that you could wear it in the place of your tie.” What has been construed is a most effective visual metaphor, SHOE IS TIE, which transfers synthetically several positive claims about the product; moreover, the visual transfer of features such as ‘soft’ and ‘light’ is synesthetic since they pertain to the sense of touch. Together with this, the idea of wearing a shoe in the place of a tie can also be seen as an exaggeration (hyperbole is another general characteristic of advertising). The advertiser has thus achieved his goal, for he wanted to create interest and to arouse the reader’s attention towards this shoe, which ‘can get really noticed’.

4. As illustrated with this example, the presence of various verbal and visual metaphors and tropes can provide different and complementary information. Such is the case of the meaning of vector. This concept applies to the different ways in which objects can be represented and related to each other (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996), and as well as other signifiers such as framing or lighting, they can be interpreted in terms of orientational metaphors (up/down, in/out, front/back, on/off, near/far, deep/shallow, central/peripheral). This kind of metaphors are primarily related to spatial orientations, and following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), they have given rise to schemas such as RATIONAL IS UP or GOOD IS UP, although we have to take into consideration that they are not universal, but largely determined by cultural factors. In advertising, the general assumption that “what is ‘higher’ is also considered to be ‘better’” (Cook, 2001: 84) is crucial. Moreover, this assumption leads to the observation that rhetorical and stylistic choices entail social and ideological implications. In this respect, Fiske has observed how the metaphor UP-DOWN (Lakoff; Johnson, 1980) is used:

[...] to make sense of a wide range of diverse social abstractions such as God, life, health, morals, social position, earnings, and artistic taste, and in linking them together it works ideologically. There is nothing natural that links high social position, high earnings, and high morals, but making sense of them through the same metaphor is one way in which the dominant values are spread throughout society. (Fiske, 1982: 94)

Since this is a rhetorical convention of the genre, advertisers have at their disposal various verbal and visual devices to represent the UP metaphor. The most clear example is the use of an ascendant oriented line to provide information which carries

- favourable connotations associated with a specific set of abstract values – lifestyle and social success. This is so because “most adverts take for granted that your relative position in the status hierarchy is determined by the number of prestige products which you possess” (Vestergaard and Schroeder, 1985: 65).
5. Finally, the intertextual level of discourse, i.e., the level of shared culture on which texts are viewed as bearing significant external relationships to other texts (by allusion or by virtue of genre membership, for example) can provide important cues for rhetorical interpretation. All texts are constituted by elements of other texts, contemporaneous or prior, and advertisers draw on their existence when making use of their reservoir of professional, cultural and personal experience to create their ads. This discursive dimension can be observed in words as well as in images, since as observed by Barthes (1977), “humanity is doomed to analogy”.
  6. Ultimately, although this study bases meaning interpretation on textual analysis, it must be taken into account that as readers we all bring to the text background knowledge (cultural and personal experiences, resemblances, remembrances, and emotional reactions) which we use in the interpretation of its meaning, through external references to wider belief systems.

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