

BOOK REVIEW

Paula Pérez Sobrino, *Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in Advertising*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017. Pp. 232. ISBN 978-90-272-0986-3 (Hb), 978-90-272-64671-1 (E-book)

“A successful advertisement does not originate in magic, coincidence, or mystery. Rather, metaphor and metonymy are well-established conceptual routes with limited inferential potential that allow us to look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary.”

(Pérez Sobrino, 2017, p. 197)

Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in Advertising is an innovative contribution to the growing body of academic literature on figurative communication in advertising. Stemming from solid theoretical foundations rooted in the cognitive linguistic framework, this research monograph investigates how metaphor and metonymy interact within the multimodal genre of print advertising. The book combines quantitative and qualitative analyses and constitutes an essential read for both students and researchers interested in understanding how these figurative constructions work within this specific multimodal discourse. By doing so, this research monograph successfully bridges the large body of theoretical literature in cognitive linguistics with an innovative empirical investigation. The clear and informative set of results can inform not only academics, but also professionals outside academia on the processes involved in these creative images, and on how different linguistic and cultural communities approach them.

In cognitive linguistics, the study of figurative constructions within the visual mode of communication has received increasing attention and has affected the genre of advertising, above all. Two possible reasons can be set forth to explain this phenomenon. First, open source electronic repositories of advertisements can be easily found on the Web and browsed according to predetermined categories. Therefore, unlike other visual genres such as political cartoons, artistic paintings, digital illustrations, and photographs, it is relatively easy to explore and retrieve advertisements ‘in the wild’ and select those that respond to specific parameters, which are then used to identify specific figurative constructions. Second, the purpose of advertisements is to sell products or services. Therefore, metaphors and metonymies are constructed within these multimodal messages to predicate positive values of the advertised product or service, which typically constitutes the target domain of the metaphor/metonymy.

As Pérez Sobrino acknowledges at the beginning of the book, the study of metaphoric and metonymic constructions in language within the cognitive linguistic tradition precedes, by a couple of decades, the study of metaphoric and metonymic constructions in images. For this reason, the latter field of research is often influenced by methods and theories borrowed from the former field of research. This monograph also makes heavy use of theoretical models and analytical tools borrowed from the scientific literature on the conceptual interaction between metaphor and metonymy IN LANGUAGE. Such tools are adjusted and applied to the analysis of multimodal contexts, under the assumption that there are equivalent and comparable structures characterizing the way in which metaphor and metonymy work, interact, and are expressed in language and in images (the EQUIPOLLENCE HYPOTHESIS; Mairal & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2009, p. 154). This assumption, however, is not uncontroversial: empirical studies in cognitive and neuro-sciences report contrasting evidence on how humans process images and language. In particular, while some authors claim that pictorial and verbal information is processed in much the same way (e.g., Caramazza, 1996), others argue that the semantic information encoded in pictures and words is processed differently and along two functionally independent but still interconnected cognitive systems. This allows for the creation of multiple modality-specific semantic representations (e.g., Paivio, 1971, 2010; Glaser, 1992). This hypothesis is supported by empirical studies showing that, for example, phonological/orthographic information and lexical variables such as word frequency play little role in image processing (Taikh, Hargreaves, Yap, & Pexman, 2015). Moreover, pictures trigger faster and deeper emotional response compared to words (DeHouwer & Hermans, 1994; Hinojosa, Carretié, Valcárcel, Méndez-Bértolo, & Pozo, 2009). Given these results, we might also expect that metaphors and metonymies constructed within the pictorial vs. the linguistic mode work in different ways, and in particular they may exploit different aspects of the concepts involved as domains of the metaphor or a metonymy (Bolognesi, 2016, 2017; Bolognesi & Aina, 2018). Pérez Sobrino acknowledges the limitations of the equipollence hypothesis and argues that, while there are surely common aspects of metaphor and metonymy in verbal and non-verbal discourse, there are also modality-specific aspects that characterize verbal and non-verbal discourse, respectively. Nonetheless, the equipollence hypothesis is the driving methodological principle of this book.

Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in Advertising is organized into nine chapters. After an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) Pérez Sobrino delves into existing theoretical models that explore multimodal meaning construction in language and thought (Chapter 2). This review constitutes a valuable resource for research as well as for educational academic purposes. In a second

theoretical chapter, the author outlines and illustrates the complex ways in which metaphor and metonymy interact, to construct conceptual complexes (Chapter 3). Subsequently, a methodological chapter (Chapter 4) describes and evaluates strengths and weaknesses of the approaches used to explore figurative constructions in multimodal messages. The second part of the book reports a series of empirical studies: two chapters illustrate and exemplify, by means of qualitative analyses, the ways in which metonymy and metaphor work in isolation and interact in complex ways to construct figurative meaning in multimodal advertising (Chapters 5 & 6). Then, two chapters report quantitative analyses and show the proportions by which the different types of figurative constructions previously exemplified appear in real data (Chapter 7). Finally, another empirical study shows the ways in which different linguistic and cultural communities process and evaluate these multimodal messages (Chapter 8). The volume concludes with a chapter that summarizes the findings of the empirical studies and their implications for figurative thought and language research in multimodal discourse (Chapter 9).

I shall now illustrate the main points advanced by the author, in relation to the theory and methods, as well as to the discussion of the empirical findings.

From a theoretical perspective, Pérez Sobrino proposes an innovative theoretical model to address the inner complexities of multimodal metaphoric and metonymic constructions in the genre of multimodal advertising. This model follows a lucid, accurate, and clear analysis of four existing theoretical models to figurative meaning construction: the Visual Semiotic Model (evolved from Systemic Functional Grammar: Halliday, 1994); the Relevance Theoretic Model (evolved from pragmatic approaches to meaning construction, such as Relevance Theory: Sperber & Wilson, 1986); the Multiple Space Structuring Model (evolved from Conceptual Blending Theory: Coulson, 1996; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998), and the Conceptual Metaphor Model (evolved from Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Pérez Sobrino's model builds on Dirven's (2002) account of figurative continuum from metonymy to metaphor. The model establishes a cline of increasing conceptual complexity that ranges from metonymy to metaphor and encompasses various conceptual configurations. Such complexity is based on the potential of these figures to trigger inferences. The types of conceptual complexes identified and analysed by the author are: (multiple source)-in-target metonymy, metonymic chain, metaphonymy, metaphoric amalgam, and metaphoric chain.

The model proposed is first exemplified through qualitative analyses based on images extracted from a corpus of 210 advertisements, and then tested

through quantitative analyses, based on the same corpus.¹ Unfortunately, this resource is not publicly available. This is a well-known problem among scholars working with multimodal materials, and in particular with advertisements: these images are protected by copyright laws and cannot be reproduced online without written permission granted by the copyright holder. Such permission is quite difficult to obtain, because it is difficult to retrieve up-to-date contacts to get in touch with creative agencies and copyright holders. Moreover, advertisements typically display brand logos, and in some countries even the company holding the copyright of the displayed logo should be contacted before displaying online the advertisement in which their logo appears.

As Pérez Sobrino acknowledges in her book, the only electronic corpus of metaphorical images available today is VisMet 1.0² (implemented in 2013–2014 at the Metaphor Lab, VU University Amsterdam, by Bolognesi, Steen, van den Heerik and van den Berg, and described in greater detail in Bolognesi, Van den Heerik, & Van den Berg, in press), a small – but scalable – corpus of 350 images, all reprinted with permission. The images in VisMet 1.0 have been identified as metaphorical based on the VisMIP procedure (Šorm and Steen, in press), and analysed on the basis of a three-dimensional model of metaphor which can be applied to verbo-pictorial metaphors expressed in various genres (Steen, 2011).³ According to this model, meaning is constructed at three levels: Conceptualization, Expression, and Communication. Metaphor, a multidimensional phenomenon that affects thought, expression, and communication, can be analysed on these three dimensions. The advantage of using a multidimensional approach to metaphor is that of distinguishing different possible formulations evolved from the same image, expressed at different levels of abstraction.

The methodological steps taken to identify and analyze the multimodal metaphoric and metonymic constructions in the corpus described in this volume are based on an ad-hoc developed procedure, which is quite simple.

[1] The corpus is annotated on the basis of five categories: (1) product type (e.g. goods, services, NGO); (2) conceptual operation type (different metaphor and metonymy interaction patterns); (3) representation of the product vs. product hinted by the logo; (4) identification of the product as metaphorical target vs. different target; and (5) multimodal cues for domains, used to designate whether the metaphorical and metonymic domains are expressed by visual or verbal elements, or a combination of both. Category (2) has been annotated in a formal content analysis by three independent annotators, while the other categories, expressing simple metadata, have been annotated by Pérez Sobrino.

[2] <<http://www.vismet.org/VisMet/>>

[3] A detailed overview of the theoretical and methodological differences between the analytical tools used to compile and analyse verb–pictorial metaphors in these two corpora lies beyond the scope of this review. Among the main differences, it should be mentioned that VisMet 1.0 encompasses various genres (advertisements, political cartoons, illustrations, etc.), and as a consequence the VisMIP procedure used to identify metaphors in VisMet 1.0 does not revolve around the identification of the product to be sold, to pin down the target domain of the metaphor.

As a consequence, the procedure leaves much to the analyst's introspections, a peculiarity of the classic cognitive linguistic approach, as acknowledged by the author. Such procedure assumes that the product advertised in the image is also the target domain of the (potential) metaphor and advises the analyst to seek and construct possible source domains to which the product is compared. Once the domains are identified, the analyst should indicate whether the relation between them is metaphoric or metonymic (or a combination of both), and to spell out the specific patterns of interaction between the domains.

A fine-grained description of metaphor–metonymy combinations in advertising based on real data is reported by means of qualitative analyses. Ten metaphor–metonymy combinations (and their variants) are illustrated with authentic multimodal advertisements. The reader may find this chapter extremely helpful for grasping how the theoretical classifications between figurative constructions found in language can be appreciated also in images. Of course, the reader/viewer may also construct different or additional meanings within the same images, and in some cases this would lead them to the identification of different figurative complexes. For example, the image used to exemplify multimodal metonymy is a Duracell advertisement⁴ in which three audio appliances (walkie talkie, discman, and radio cassette) are graphically overlapped in such a way that they share the location of the battery compartment, in which the advertised batteries are represented. The slogan reads “Lasts for ages”. The author suggests that the three sound appliances metonymically stand for the three life stages (childhood, youth, parenthood), which are all accompanied by the same Duracell batteries. In this interpretation, the visual part of the advertisement does not contain any figurative meaning per se. However, the reader/viewer might argue that the three appliances are displayed in such a way that their shape resembles the face of a monkey, or even a skull. Based on this resemblance and on the slogan “Lasts for ages”, the viewer could elaborate an interpretation in which the battery life is hyperbolically compared to the length of human evolution (monkey to man), or human life (head to skull). If this visual resemblance is taken into account, then the visual part of this advertisement indeed displays some figurative meaning, and the classification of the advertisement may change. This example may warn the reader of the erroneous idea that the interpretation of these images, although complex, is eventually univocal. As Pérez Sobrino acknowledges and operationalizes in Chapter 8, these advertisements can indeed generate an array of different interpretations

[4] The advertisement can be viewed at the following url: <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/duracell_last_for_ages_3>.

which are motivated by several factors, including cultural and sub-cultural knowledge, genre-related knowledge, and personal preferences, all of which vary dramatically in relation to the viewer.

Regarding the distribution of figurative constructions in the corpus, the results show that, while metaphor can be reliably identified as such by independent analysts, for metonymy this is not the case. The reliable identification of metonymy therefore remains an unsolved issue. Moreover, while the results show that the identification of the TYPE of cognitive operation may be reliably achieved (for metaphor at least), the EXACT FORMULATION of the metaphor is far from being univocal and conclusive. Such formulation, in fact, requires a group of experts that need to discuss and eventually agree on how the metaphor shall be formulated, and this should reduce personal biases. For this reason, the author explains that a combination of classic introspection-based methods and data-driven methods constitutes the best approach to the analysis of these complex multimodal messages.

The main claims advanced by Pérez Sobrino, based on the results of the corpus-based analyses, can be summarized as follows:

1. Metaphonymy is the most frequent conceptual operation in advertising. This can be explained by the fact that, on the one hand, metonymy can usefully connect products with brands, and on the other hand, metaphor allows for the transfer of properties from a positively connoted domain to the advertised product.
2. Multimodality (i.e., the combination of linguistic and pictorial elements) occurs across, but also within, domains. In particular, source domains are more likely to be conveyed by visual (or verbo-pictorial) means, due to the higher evocative power of images, while target domains (typically the advertised product) are more likely to be conveyed in words or in a combination of words with images, as this is the safest (least ambiguous) way to indicate what the product is.
3. The type of product is likely to determine how the advertisement is to be structured, both in terms of figurative operations and mode of representation. For example, compared to advertisements for convenience goods, in NGO advertisements creative agents are more likely to use words to convey a figurative construction, because they promote and advertise abstract ideas and intangible products, which lack a physical referent to be graphically rendered within the image.
4. Figurative complexity does not predict the speed of comprehension, whereas it was initially hypothesized that processing times may increase together with the increasing figurative complexity, ranging from metonymy, through metonymic chains, metaphor, and metaphonymy, to metaphoric amalgams. This result, however, must be taken cautiously,

because the reaction times collected by the authors are extremely long (several seconds) and from a strictly psycholinguistic perspective it may be argued that in such long time frames the investigated variable (figurative complexity) may not be properly isolated. Moreover, the images have been classified in terms of figurative complexity but have not been controlled for other variables that might have affected the processing time, such as colorfulness, number of entities depicted in the image, number of words included in the message, etc.

5. Figurative complexity relates to the perceived effectiveness of the advert, and in particular to the self-declared likelihood to buy the advertised product. In the study hereby reported, metaphor, metonymic chains, and metaphonymy (intermediate degrees of complexity) scored higher on perceived effectiveness than more basic operations (metonymy) and also more complex ones (metaphoric complex). These findings suggest an Optimal Complexity hypothesis, advanced by the author, reminiscent of the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (Giora, Fein, Kronrod, Elnatan, Shuval, & Zur, 2004), according to which the sweet spot of creativeness lies between the too familiar and the too innovative poles.
6. Conceptual complexity does not relate to the amount of possible interpretations provided by viewers/consumers: there are no significant differences between the main figurative operations at work in each advertisement and the average number of interpretations provided.

Finally, the author investigates whether processing time, perceived appeal, and number of possible interpretations of these advertisements vary as a function of the linguistic and cultural background of the viewers. Although Spanish participants were found to be significantly faster than British and Chinese ones in processing the advertisements, no significant interactions were found between nationality, figurative complexity, the persuasive power of the advertisements, and the number of possible interpretations per advertisement.

To conclude, *Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in Advertising* is the first in-depth research monograph that illustrates the central role played by metaphor, metonymy, and their patterns of interaction in real multimodal advertisements. The book demonstrates that the complex patterns of interaction between metaphor and metonymy used in print advertisements can be systematically pinned down, and spells out the concrete implications that the usage of such figurative constructs have on viewer processing, consumer attitudes, and in general on human creative thinking.

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