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# Signposting the inferencing route: a relevance theoretic analysis of intertextuality and metaphors in print advertisements

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This article reports an analysis of the manner in which copywriters use direct and indirect product claims to guide consumers' interpretations of metaphors in print advertisements. The analysis utilises a relevance theoretic framework, and the results are illustrated by means of a qualitative analysis of four case studies, taken from a larger sample of 120 print advertisements. The first stage of the analysis employs the concept 'intertextuality' to study the manner in which advertising texts construct the intertext as the source of a metaphor, with the advertised product as the target. In the second stage, a relevance theoretic framework is used to investigate the role that direct and indirect claims play in guiding consumers' interpretations of the product claims inherent in these metaphors. To achieve the latter aim, Simpson's (2001) 'reason' and 'tickle' constructs are used.

## Aanwysings langs die inferensieroete: 'n relevansie- teoretiese analise van intertekstualiteit en metafore in gedrukte advertensies

Die artikel doen verslag oor 'n ontleding van die wyse waarop kopieskrywers gebruik maak van direkte en indirekte produkaansprake om verbruikers se interpretasies van metafore in gedrukte advertensies te lei. Die analise maak gebruik van 'n relevansie teoretiese raamwerk, en die resultate word geïllustreer deur middel van 'n kwalitatiewe ontleding van vier gevallestudies, geneem uit 'n groter steekproef van 120 gedrukte advertensies. Die eerste fase van die analise maak gebruik van die begrip 'intertekstualiteit', ten einde 'n studie te maak van die wyse waarop die interteks opgestel geword as die bron van die metafoor, met die geadverteerde produk as die teiken. Tydens die tweede fase, word 'n relevansie teoretiese raamwerk gebruik om te ontleed watter rol direkte en indirekte aansprake speel in die begeleiding van verbruikers se interpretasies van sulke metafore. Om hierdie doel te bereik, word Simpson (2001) se 'rede' en 'prikkel' konstruksie gebruik.

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This project conducts a relevance theoretic (Wilson & Sperber 2004) analysis of what is undoubtedly one of the most influential aspects of mass media communication: advertising. It proceeds from the claim that one of the primary functions of advertising is to establish and reinforce positive associations with the advertised product, in order to gain an advantage over competitors. This claim, in conjunction with the observation that all advertisements attempt to achieve it through a combination of rational and emotive forms of appeal (Simpson 2001: 591) forms the point of departure for the current study.

To analyse the manner in which copywriters attempt to establish and reinforce positive associations, the researcher conducted a comprehensive investigation of intertextuality in 120 print advertisements from the following magazines: *Cosmopolitan*, *Fairlady*, *For Him Magazine (FHM)*, *Men's Health*, *Top Car*, *Ideas*, *Garden & Home*, *Afropolitan*, *Popular Mechanics* and *Indwe*. These were all South African editions printed exclusively in English between 2008 and 2010. The only exception was *Indwe*, in which all English advertisements are also printed in French. However, the present study is solely concerned with English texts. The results suggest that one of the most prevalent functions of intertextuality is to construct pictorial and/or lexical metaphors (51.7% of the total sample) (Conradie 2011: 95). This comes as no surprise, as metaphor is “a ubiquitous part of ordinary language [rather than] an ornamental aspect of speech” as was once believed (Tendahl & Gibbs 2008: 1823). In advertising research, both lexical and pictorial metaphors have received extensive attention from authors such as McQuarrie & Phillips (2005), Velasco-Sacristán & Fuentes-Olivera (2006), and Velasco-Sacristán (2010).

This study conducts a relevance theoretic analysis of the lexical and graphic features of an advertisement that signal the presence of a metaphor, as well as those which aim to guide readers' interpretations of the metaphor's relevance to the advertisement's overall commercial message. Subsequent sections will outline the tenets of Wilson & Sperber's (2004) relevance theory, as well as the difference between this framework's approach to metaphors and the conceptual metaphors analysed in cognitive linguistics. Thereafter, the article's approach to advertising as a commercial form of communication will be clarified.

## 1. Objectives

This study aims to investigate the lexical and graphic features that signal the relevance of a metaphor by means of intertextuality, and to analyse the role which direct and indirect product claims play in guiding consumers' search for the relevance of these metaphors to the advertised product. To achieve these goals, the article presents a case study of four print advertisements from the women's lifestyle magazine *Cosmopolitan*.

## 2. Relevance theory

Developed since 1986 (Wilson & Sperber 1986; 2004), relevance theory constitutes an attempt to elucidate the process whereby hearers/readers arrive at a communicator's intended meaning. It posits that all communication contains evidence, contained within the message itself as well as the communicative context in which it is conveyed, that allows addressees to accept one interpretation over others, by attributing to the communicator the intention of making it salient above alternatives (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 607-8; Sperber & Wilson 1995). Wilson & Sperber (2004: 608) posit that relevance does not form part of a broader communicative principle with other maxims, but can account satisfactorily for the inferencing process. This claim is founded on the notion that "the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition, which communicators may exploit" (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 609).

From this argument, an elementary example of inferencing routes in advertising would run as follows. Upon reading the headline *brand A... if you have taste, flaunt it*, addressees may attribute to the communicator the desire to convey information about brand A. They may infer the proposition that those who have good taste prefer brand A. It also follows that those who do not prefer brand A have poor taste. The first inference is an implicated premise (or conventional implicature), whereas the second is an implicated conclusion (or logical entailment) – see Melchenko (2003: 3). The addressee is able to make these inferences by processing both the stimulus and its context such as a billboard that signals its status as an advertisement. This signals the relevance of background knowledge about advertising, with the result that, although the information is implicated rather

than explicated, addressees seek a claim about brand A, because this concurs with their expectations for the genre. On this basis, the addressee has legitimate grounds on which to attribute to the communicator the intention to establish or reinforce the belief that brand A is an index of consumers' taste.

In addition, as outlined by the communicative principle of relevance, two variables determine a stimulus's priority in the processing queue (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 614). According to the first variable, relevance is enhanced when the stimulus promises to yield more positive cognitive effects than competing stimuli, whereas the second dictates that relevance decreases when processing it demands a disproportionate amount of cognitive energy. Thus, when stimuli effectively balance cognitive effort and effect, they acquire "optimal relevance" (Wilson & Sperber 2004: 614). However, the implication is not that adverts should require only a minimal amount of cognitive effort from readers, but that effort and effect must be balanced. A potent illustration is explored by Martínez (2005), who investigates English advertisements in the Spanish press. In this instance, the additional effort required to read a second language is balanced by the fact that the target audience consists of teenagers who view their higher proficiency in English as symbolic of in-group status. Thus, the implication for this analysis is that copywriters may confront audiences with an intertext that appears to have no logical connections with the advertised product. As a result, readers must access background knowledge about both the intertext and advertising, in order to recognise the intention to establish a connection between the intertext and the product. In the case studies analysed in this study, these connections are all metaphorical in nature, but this is not the only function that intertextuality can play (see Conradie 2011). Readers are, therefore, actively involved in the process of meaning construction which, in turn, supports the advertisement's efficiency by both enhancing recall and enjoyment and fostering a positive attitude towards the advertised brand (Jeong 2008: 69, Lim *et al* 2009: 1784).

### 3. Intertextuality

The current analysis concentrates on one of two distinct types of intertextuality, namely constitutive intertextuality (Fairclough 1992: 271), also referred to as latent (Lachmann 1990: 57) or generic intertextuality (Kuppens 2009: 115). It refers to surface elements in a text that signal reproductions of alternative texts, but which can be recognised as deliberately built into and combined with the current text to construct new meanings (Downing 2003: 70). To give the current text meaning, addressees must take cognisance of the functions these reproductions of alternative texts play (Van Niekerk 2008: 497; Kuppens 2009: 118). Recognising intertextuality is contingent on the addressees' background knowledge. Advertisers must, therefore, have reason to believe that their target audience has already encountered these texts previously and will be able to comprehend their contribution to the text under construction (Pantaleo 2006; Kenyon 2006; Kuppens 2009).

Latent/constitutive/generic intertextuality contrasts with manifest intertextuality (Fairclough 1992: 271), in which intertextuality is explicitly marked as such by quotation marks or citations (Momani *et al* 2010). To distinguish constitutive from manifest intertextuality, Fairclough (1992: 277) introduces the term "interdiscursivity". Unlike manifest intertextuality, it confronts readers with the task of identifying the alternative text and inferring its purpose within the text under construction. Readers are, therefore, required to access pre-existing schemata about both the intertext and the advertising genre in order to understand the former's function. However, following Downing (2003), Van Niekerk (2008) and Kuppens (2009), the term 'intertextuality' is used, in this instance, to include interdiscursivity. Intertextuality may represent one method with which advertisers attempt to load their products with associations which their competitors lack. Its utility for this purpose may lie in the way in which it incorporates features from an additional text(s) into the text under construction. Kuppens (2009: 128), for example, investigates a television advertisement which depicts a mother, wearing an orange jumpsuit, and daughter looking at each other through a glass partition in order to suggest that the latter is visiting the former in prison. When the camera zooms out, however, it reveals that the mother is in

the process of cleaning a shower. This is followed by a message about the efficiency of a new cleaning agent (see Conradie 2011).

To study intertextuality's role in advertising, reliable standards are needed to judge whether the advertising text under study contains sufficient traces of another text(s), to claim that the audience is encouraged to notice this intertext and consider its bearing on the advertisement's message. The standard employed by Van Niekerk (2008) demands clear evidence for the presence of a discourse structure that exists prior to the advertisement under study, and that functions to affect the audience's construction of meaning. This structure may be alluded to through the repetition of characteristic words or phrases, or by using images that invoke the intended intertext by virtue of an iconic or symbolic connection with it. However, advertisements that hinge on a pun, or the double meaning of a single word, are not viewed as intertextual unless that word is combined with other traces of an intertext. For example, a headline *Cooking appliances you can swear by* is only intertextual when combined with the image of Chef Gordon Ramsey and a line in the subtext reminding viewers of his cooking shows, during which his use of expletives is notorious.

#### 4. Metaphors and intertextuality: relevance theory and cognitive linguistics

The value of metaphors lies in the tension they create by confronting readers with the proposition that two seemingly incongruous domains are similar. In comparison with similes, the metaphor's propositional form exacerbates this tension by stating that domain X is domain Y, rather than X is like Y (Kaplan 2005: 170). As mentioned earlier, intertextuality is often used in print advertisements to signal the communicator's intention to construct a metaphor between the intertext and advertised product (Conradie 2011). To clarify this investigation's approach to metaphor and intertextuality, it is necessary to draw a distinction between the relevance theoretic account of metaphors subscribed to in this analysis, and the approach taken by cognitive linguists on the basis of Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory.

The most salient feature of cognitive linguistic research on metaphor is the notion that it is rooted, not in language, but in

“neural and bodily processes” (Tendahl & Gibbs 2008: 1824). The implication is that metaphor constitutes a fundamental aspect of human cognition, rather than a decorative feature of poetic language. Consequently, its analysis must proceed from the observation that metaphors pervade language, because people experience the world metaphorically. Language users employ it to explain abstract/elusive knowledge in more precise terms, because they tend to “think, feel, and act metaphorically” (Tendahl & Gibbs 2008: 1824). One significant impact of this departure point is that cognitive linguistics has a special interest in explicating metaphors with implicit rather than explicit source domains such as those which inform conventional expressions. These are often rooted in physical experiences such as “My marriage is *on the rocks*” (Tendahl & Gibbs 2008: 1835 – my emphasis, MC). Even the novel or “classic resemblance type metaphors such as ‘Man is wolf’” are studied as extensions of these conceptual metaphors.

Conversely, relevance theory’s emphasis is on resemblance metaphors rather than on the implicit source-target relationships that may underlie conventional expressions. Its focus is on the way resemblance metaphors optimise relevance. A metaphor may be embedded in a context that exploits the audience’s cognitive systems by rendering a range of strong and/or weak implicatures salient. Tendahl & Gibbs (2008: 1831-2), demonstrate this by means of the following dialogue:

Peter: ‘Can we trust John to do as we tell him and defend the interests of the Linguistics department in the University Council?’  
Mary: ‘John is a soldier!’.

In this instance, the first speaker’s pre-existing knowledge about the nature of a soldier may support the relevance of the following implicatures (Tendahl & Gibbs 2008: 1832):

- a. John is devoted to his duty.
- b. John willingly follows orders.
- c. John does not question authority.
- d. John identifies with the goals of his team.
- e. John is a patriot.
- f. John earns a soldier's pay.
- g. John is a member of the military.

The context created by Peter's question implies the optimal relevance of implicatures (a)-(d). Having accessed these strong implicatures, the inferencing process comes to a halt, so that implicatures (e)-(g) are not considered at all (Tendahl & Gibbs 2008: 1832).

## 5. Print advertising as subtle biasing effect

Crook (2004: 723) provides a relevance theoretic exposition of the pragmatic strategies of advertising and claims that copywriters aim to produce "only minute effects in their audience". Instead of outright persuasion that brand A is superior to brand B, advertisers simply aim to reinforce positive associations with the former, in order to increase its status over the latter. A crucial point is that they are willing to do this by increments over an extended period of time (see also Sutherland & Sylvester 2000; Baker 2001).

This distinction between outright persuasion and subtle biasing influence (Crook 2004: 732) echoes Kitis & Milapides' (1997: 560-1) distinction between conviction and seduction, although they refer specifically to editorials rather than advertisements. Both conviction and seduction are "subsumed [...] under the hyperprocess of persuasion" (Kitis & Milapides 1997: 560). However, the former relies on cogent argumentative steps, which appeal to rational cognition for acceptance. By contrast, the latter relies less on convincing evidence and leans toward emotive appeal. Its goal is to arrange an argument's content so that it manipulates perceptions of its source, rather than the validity of the argument itself. Based on the literature cited earlier, the current project proposes that advertisements rely on seduction rather than conviction. Marketers use seduction by aiming to reinforce favourable associations with the product/service/brand. It is also proposed that intertextuality, which will be defined



and discussed later, may play an important role in reinforcing such favourable associations.

A relevance theoretic description of this subtle biasing effect would consider the manner in which an advertisement provides a stimulus that makes certain assumptions more salient to the addressee and builds a connection between these assumptions and the advertised product. This article argues that one method of achieving this is to use an intertextual field, which is presented to the target market in conjunction with a product/service, in an effort to establish and/or strengthen specific associations. To do this, copywriters may structure an advertisement in a manner that highlights specific aspects of the intertext, which may be relevant to the product/service so as to enhance consumers' regard for it. For example, an advertising text may incorporate references to alternative media, such as a popular film. In this instance, the film represents the intertext. The manner in which it is referred to in the advertisement may be designed to activate specific aspects of readers' background knowledge about it. In addition, as readers know that adverts function to make positive statements about the advertised product, they have reason to believe that whatever assumptions are drawn from memory must be relevant to the product in this manner (Crook 2004: 723-5). For this reason, the first stage of the analysis focused on determining the methods with which copywriters attempted to render a specific intertext (and specific aspects of the intertext) salient, while the second stage concerned the manner in which its relevance to the product is signalled. In this sense, the successful use of an intertext refers to the degree to which it is able to fix positive associations with the advertised product/service.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. 'Reason' and 'tickle' product claims

The findings obtained from the larger dataset suggest that one way in which copywriters aim to guide readers' understanding of a metaphor's relevance to the product is to support it with a single or series of direct product claims (Conradie 2011). To elucidate this function,

1 At this point, it is important to remember that advertisements represent "but one element in the marketing mix and on its own, cannot achieve the final objective of the marketing campaign, the sale itself" (Skinner *et al* 2001: 56). The analysis is, therefore, positioned on the micro-level of an advertising campaign.

the current study employs Simpson's (2001) concepts 'reason' and 'tickle'. Simpson's (2001: 589) investigation centres on two features of advertising language, namely reason "those [features] which suggest a motive or reason for purchase" such as direct claims, and tickle "those [features] which appeal to humour, emotion and mood" such as intertextuality. This section will clarify how these constructs fit within relevance theory, before outlining their characteristics and bearing on the analysis.

The reason-tickle distinction is also referred to as hard sell vs soft sell (Kim 2007: 95; Atkin & Richardson 2005: 168). These concepts lie on opposite ends of a continuum. The position of an advertisement on this continuum is determined by the frankness of its sales agenda (Atkin & Richardson 2005: 168). In relevance theoretic terms, reason strategies offer ostensive stimuli that balance cognitive cost and effect by opening a relatively unambiguous inferencing route, whereas tickle strategies are more exacting in terms of the number of inferences required to obtain relevance (Simpson 2001: 593).

The basic characteristics of a reason strategy are "conspicuous product placement" and "a clear and unambiguous statement of the principle reason to buy the product" (Simpson 2001: 594). By contrast, tickle tactics employ a visually inconspicuous display of the product, as well as lexical units that do not contain clearly defined product claims. These aspects contribute to their most significant trait: a higher investment of cognitive effort in order to determine the relevance of these opaque statements to the advertised product (Simpson 2001: 601-2).

## 7. Sample and analytic procedures

For the purpose of this study, intertextual advertisements are defined as those that contain clear traces of pre-existing texts that have no axiomatic/unavoidable connections with the advertised product. Consequently, the nature of the intertext as well as its connection with the advertised product must be inferred by processing the evidence provided in the text. In each of the case studies presented below, the manifestation of the respective intertexts on the lexical and/or graphic levels is specified, with emphasis on the manner in which the presence of a metaphor is signalled. Subsequently, the manner in which

interpretations of the metaphor are guided to a specific commercial message will be explained by studying the combination of 'reason' vs 'tickle' product display and claims. To accommodate page restraints, the analysis will focus on four case studies, from the larger sample of 120 advertisements. The first three of these illustrate instances in which copywriters opted to provide guidance for the metaphor's relevance in the form of 'reason' claims. By contrast, the fourth instance requires readers to infer the metaphor's details without such support. The fact that all four have been published in *Cosmopolitan* between 2007 and 2010 is purely coincidental. Nevertheless, to achieve the article's research goals, reference to *Cosmopolitan's* ideology is necessary in one instance (see Conradie 2009).

Where the intertext is manifested in graphic elements of the advertisement, semiotic constructs are used to describe the reference. These include icons, indexicals and symbols. An icon is an image that physically resembles its counterpart in the real world, such as an engagement ring. Indexical signifiers bear a consequential association to the signified, such as smoke does to fire (Rayner *et al* 2004: 32). Finally, symbolic signifiers bear an arbitrary, yet socially accepted association to the signified, as the word 'rare' does to the image of a diamond (Rayner *et al* 2004: 31).

An alternative framework for analysing graphic elements in media discourse is Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal approach. Central to this framework is the notion that graphic elements contribute to the meaning of a text in a manner that is not subservient to, or dependant on the lexical aspects of that text. Although the approach adopted in the current study is in agreement with this position, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) framework has not been applied during the analysis. The focus of the present study is on the methodological combination of relevance theory, intertextuality and Simpson's (2001) 'reason' and 'tickle' constructs in an investigation of metaphors. A critical discussion of possible ways in which relevance theory may be combined with Kress & Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal framework may well constitute an article in its own right and, consequently, falls outside the scope of the present study. For example, an agenda for such a discussion includes addressing possible relationships between relevance theory's tenets and Kress's (2005) conceptualisation of gains and losses, especially

in view of Prior's (2005: 24-6) critique of Kress's (2005) semiotic history, as well as McDonagh *et al's* (2005) argument against the "binary opposition between words and images". For this reason, the semiotic constructs mentioned earlier are used to conduct a relevance theoretic investigation of the graphic aspects of the advertisements included in the sample.

One major limitation of the current study is the lack of informant-response data, without which any investigation of inferencing procedures in advertising can only be tentative. This limitation may be overcome by conducting focus group discussions in order to verify the validity of the inferencing routes proposed during the analyses below. The researcher has completed an analysis of three such discussions and, owing to page constraints, intends to pursue the publication of these findings in another article.

The advertisement in Figure 1 establishes intertextuality through both its graphic and lexical features. The intertextual domain is committed romantic relationships, in particular marriage. The following section will first discuss how intertextuality is established graphically, before turning to the lexical level.

The advertisement's most prominent graphic feature is an image of the mascara container and applicator, both of which are circled by two rings. The most visually appealing of these is adorned with a large diamond, rendering it reminiscent of an engagement ring (in traditional Western culture). The second feature appears to be a man's wedding ring. In semiotic terminology, the engagement ring constitutes an icon of marriage, as it resembles an object that is central to the ceremony. The two rings also bind the applicator to the mascara container in a manner that suggests the bond between husband and wife. In this capacity, the graphic unit signals the relevance of a metaphor. The advertisement provides no clues to suggest whether the applicator or the container represents the groom or bride. As the applicator is thinner and appears to recline on the upright container, some may suggest that the applicator is placed in a stereotypically feminine position. Although it is conceivable that some readers may come to this conclusion, based on pre-existing cultural views, the advertisement itself contains no further support for such deductions. In Simpson's (2001: 594) terms, this depiction constitutes one of

the central features of a 'reason' strategy, as the product is placed conspicuously in the middle of the page.

## 8. Results

This mascara vows to look pretty for 24 hours without a smudge or smear.

'Til warm water do us part.

Talk about a committed relationship. One stroke and these pretty lashes last through rain, sweat, humidity, tears. Yet the formula removes easily with warm water.

Ophthalmologist tested, too. By the power vested in new Lash Power™ Mascara Long-Wearing Formula, let the lovefest begin.

Clinique. Allergy Tested.  
100% Fragrance Free.

[clinique.co.za](http://clinique.co.za)



Available from the following Authorised Retailers:  
Edgars, Foschini, Stuttafords and Truworths.

Figure 1: Clinique

In the headline, the verb “vow” introduces the intertext and is supported by the reformulation of the ceremonial phrase *till death do us part*. Both references employ personification by projecting the ability to lay down marriage vows onto the product. In this manner, the copywriter aims to engage the audience in the inferencing process. First, readers must uncover the intertextual domain and, subsequently, its relation to the advertised product by deducing that loyalty is metaphorically projected onto the product. To do this, readers must access the necessary implicature. Although the exact cognitive route cannot be outlined without extensive informant-response data, it is clear that readers are required to convert the headline from its current form – “This mascara vows to look pretty for 24 hours without smudge or smear” – into something resembling the following: This mascara *is guaranteed* to make *you* look pretty for 24 hours without *smudging* or *smearing*. In this way, the headline begins to suggest the metaphor’s intended meaning, by specifying one manner in which loyalty may be projected onto the product, manifested in the claim that it will: “look pretty for 24 hours without smudge or smear”, while simultaneously being easy to remove: “Til warm water do us part”.

These references to marriage are further reinforced by the subtext, which contains two additional allusions in its description of the product: “Talk about a committed relationship” and “By the power vested in new Lash Power Mascara Long-Wearing Formula, let the lovefest begin”. The latter of these continues to use personification. However, in this instance, the product no longer personifies a groom or bride uttering marriage vows. Instead, it occupies the role of the authority conducting the ceremony. The reason for this sudden change in roles is uncertain, but it may indicate the product’s role in facilitating romantic relationships (“the lovefest”), by rendering its female consumer more attractive. If this is indeed the case, the advertisement’s message is clearly contingent on a gender stereotype about men’s obsession with women’s physical attractiveness. However, there is insufficient evidence in the text. Between “By the power vested in” and “let the lovefest begin”, the subtext employs ‘reason’ claims to further support readers’ interpretations of the metaphor. From the first two lines it is clear that, in the case of mascara, loyalty implies the ability to “last through rain, sweat, humidity [and] tears”, while remaining easy to remove - “Yet the formula removes easily with warm

water”. Thus, after projecting the loyalty of a good husband/wife onto the product through a ‘tickle’ strategy in the graphic unit and the headline, a ‘reason’ approach is utilised in the subtext to specify the relevance of this metaphor to the product. Consequently, this advertisement’s combination of ‘reason’ and ‘tickle’ strategies enables it to exploit intertextuality’s utility for involving readers in the process of meaning construction, while simultaneously avoiding potential confusion.

In summary, this advertisement employs intertextuality to create a platform on which specific attributes are metaphorically projected onto the product through a combination of lexical and graphic elements. The lexical features are particularly prominent. The headline begins to focus readers’ attention on a specific aspect of the intertextual field, while the subtext employs ‘reason’ claims to support the retrieval of a specific, rather than broad marketing message, which may be represented as follows: *this mascara is long-lasting yet easy to remove* as opposed to *this mascara is like a good husband*.

In Figure 2, the intertextual domain is long-term romantic relationships. It is manifested solely on the lexical level by means of a rhetorical question in the headline. The function of this question is to draw attention to a specific feature of the intertextual field, while the subtext constructs a metaphor.

On the basis of the headline, readers are encouraged to access schemata for long-term romantic relationships and to consider its advantages and disadvantages. In the former instance, readers can access a wide and unspecified range of assumptions. These, however, are irrelevant to the text under construction, as the headline centres attention on a single drawback. This is achieved by constructing the rhetorical question around the assumption that all long-term relationships have a propensity to become tedious. On the basis thus created, the text raises the inference that the product circumvents this problem in some way, allowing consumers to experience the excitement, but avoid the boredom associated with a long-term relationship.



**HONDA**  
The Power of Dreams

Looking for a long-term relationship that never gets boring?

With impressively low fuel consumption, and a higher level of performance and power, the Honda Jazz 1.5 VTEC is as reliable as it is ready for action. Stylish and conveniently compact on the outside, it's unbelievably luxurious and spacious on the inside. Excellent safety features, multi-award winning build quality and keen responsiveness complete this unrivalled package. The Jazz is also available in a 1.4 i-DSI model, with a smaller, more economical engine - but the same mighty value for money offering. Both models also come with a free 4 year / 60 000km service plan.

**Jazz**  
[www.honda.co.za](http://www.honda.co.za)

© 2002 Honda Motor Co., Ltd.

Figure 2: Honda

Thus, intertextuality's first function is to support retrieval of what is presumed to be a common conundrum in long-term romantic relationships. This dilemma is then metaphorically projected onto cars in the subtext. In this context, the words "long-term" and "boring"



must receive new interpretations. According to the subtext, the former refers specifically to the product's reliability, which implies the following features: "low fuel consumption", "conveniently compact", "[e]xcellent safety features" and "multi-award winning build quality". The ability to remain exciting is connected with the following features: "a higher level of performance and power", "[being] ready for action", "[being] unbelievably luxurious and spacious on the inside", as well as "keen responsiveness". In this manner, intertextuality creates a metaphor which allows the advertiser to boast the product's uniqueness. The metaphor's source is introduced in the headline, but the subtext plays the most prominent part in guiding interpretations of its meaning by means of unambiguous ('reason') claims. The graphic unit contains a conspicuous ('reason') depiction of the product, but plays no part in supporting the metaphor.

In Figure 3, the intertextual field is the practice of presenting engagement rings to one's intended during marriage proposals in Western culture. This field is situated on both the graphic and lexical levels. On the graphic level, the product's container and its position within the container are functional, whereas on the lexical level the words "Yes I do" confirm the intertext by echoing the desired response.

With regard to the construction of metaphor, readers are required to access schemata about marriage proposals before noticing that these must be altered in some way in order to maintain relevance with the product. However, the headline contains no evidence for the relevance of a metaphorical projection of attributes from the intertext (source) to the product (target). To uncover the metaphor, the subtext is essential: "you'll both receive the pleasure [...] Twenty minutes of vibrating bliss [...] All in all the best indecent proposal you're every likely to receive". Thus, based on the evidence in the subtext, readers have legitimate grounds for the inference that the excitement and pleasure of receiving a marriage proposal is projected onto the sexual gratification that will be derived from using the product. Against this backdrop, relevance suggests that the "Yes I do" in the headline be re-contextualised as an acceptance and expression of excitement about the mutual gratification that sexual partners will derive from the product.



Figure 3: Durex

In terms of Simpson's (2001) framework, the product occupies a 'reason' position, as was the case in both the Clinique and Honda advertisements. Furthermore, in a manner that is similar to the Clinique text, the graphic unit begins to suggest a metaphorical

relationship between the product and intertext, as the former occupies the position normally reserved for an engagement ring. More importantly – in a manner that echoes both the Clinique and Honda advertisements – the headline’s primary function is to fix the intertext, while the subtext employs clear (‘reason’) claims to confirm the metaphor that is first introduced by the graphic unit. In this manner, the subtext not only functions to confirm the metaphor, but also to explicate the claims proceeding from it.

The advertisement on the following page is printed on both sides of a single sheet, so that readers must turn the page in order to process the complete text. This allows the copywriter to construct a discrepancy between the intertexts on the first and second page.

The first page employs traffic violations as an intertext, whereas the second refers to men’s attempts to secure intimate social interactions – or *dates* in colloquial terms – with attractive women. The first intertextual field is established on the graphic level alone, while the second requires the aid of the lexical. Uncovering the discrepancy between the first and second field is central to the advertisement’s marketing message. With regard to the construction of metaphor, the discrepancy serves to project the pleasure of receiving romantic attention from men – as opposed to the discontent of being penalised for a traffic violation – onto the product, as discussed below.

To access the intended schemata from the first page, readers must retrieve background knowledge of law enforcement and traffic violations by processing the following evidence: the young woman is sitting in a stationary car; the man is dressed in a traffic officer’s uniform, and is holding out a piece of paper to her. As the reader cannot see what is written on the piece of paper, the previous two clues aid the implicated conclusion that it must be a penalty for a traffic violation. The second page allows the reader to observe the smile on the man’s face. However, without the aid of the name and cellphone number on the card, this would not have overthrown the conclusion drawn from the first page.



Figure 4a: Sprite



Figure 4b: Sprite

The fact that the second page overthrows the inferences drawn from the first supports the conclusion that the marketing message is encapsulated in the second. Recognising the true purpose of the

interaction encourages the reader to retrieve associations surrounding *dates*. Then, following the principle of relevance, readers have grounds for deducing that these arguably positive associations must be related to the product in some way. The only logical connection between the product and intertext is that the pleasure of receiving romantic attention is metaphorically projected onto the product. To clarify this issue, one may consider an alternative advertisement for the same product (not included in this sample). This advertisement depicts a young woman who appears to be stranded with a dysfunctional car along a deserted road. The second image depicts the situation from the other side and reveals four men attempting to repair the vehicle. The common denominator is the pleasure of receiving romantic attention from men. This, in turn, points to the suggestion that consumption of the product is somehow central to this result. At this point, the claim that the product contains no sugar becomes salient. As sugar is often associated with weight gain, the intertextual field may serve to suggest that consuming this sugar-free product circumvents this undesirable result and will consequently elicit more romantic attention from men. Readers may be able to make this inference by combining the assumptions drawn from the graphic unit with the headline “Life’s sweeter with zero sugar”, as well as the advertisement’s context, as explicated below.

As readers are more likely to process the graphic unit first, as a result of having processed the first page before turning to the second, the headline should be interpreted against the background of the discrepancy between the intertextual fields. In addition, as the context of the advertisement is a women’s lifestyle magazine that highlights the importance of female beauty (Conradie 2009: 77), it seems conceivable that the reader is placed in the woman’s position. “Life’s sweeter” may thus be related to the notion that women may expect men to attempt to secure romantic interactions with them. If the reader accepts this interpretation, “Life’s sweeter *with zero sugar*” (my emphasis, MC) may be interpreted as a claim that the product will not cause the consumer to gain weight. This, in turn, may establish coherence with the rest of the headline: “zero limits”. In this manner, the advertisement claims that life is sweeter because consumers may expect to enjoy Sprite Zero and still remain attractive enough to expect romantic suits from men. If accurate, this interpretation could also account for the fact that the



dots on the i's in the headline are shaped in the form of hearts – a symbol for affection in Western culture. However, in sharp contrast with the Clinique advertisement, this one does not support the above-mentioned process with 'reason' claims. As such, it runs the risk that readers, after enjoying the comical discrepancy between the first and second page, may simply page on without identifying the product, advertiser or commercial message.

In Simpson's (2001: 594) terminology, the product occupies an inconspicuous ('tickle') position, so that even readers who find the discrepancy humorous need not exert the cognitive effort required to identify it. The headline also assumes a 'tickle' strategy as it contains no clear selling proposition. More importantly, a 'reason' subtext that may have shed light on the advertisement's intended message has been omitted. In terms of the larger sample of 120 advertisements, this pattern was infrequently used, as 71.3% of these employed 'reason' claims in its subtexts, which served to clarify the advert's commercial message (Conradie 2011: 211).

The omission of a subtext with 'reason' claims, such as an exposition of the product's nutritional value, may count as evidence of the copywriter's assumption that the presence of a romantic male suitor, in the intertext, and the claim that life is more enjoyable without sugar, is sufficient evidence for the presence of a metaphor. Therefore, although the relationship between the product and intertext may appear vague, the text's 'reason-tickle' pattern indicates the communicator's confidence that the target audience possesses sufficient background knowledge about both the intertext and advertising to extract a meaningful claim, such as the following: *zero sugar results in more attention from men*. This, in turn, may explain why the copywriter opted for a 'tickle' placement of the product, despite the risks involved. Based on the assumption that physical attractiveness is of significant value to the magazine's core readership, the copywriter presumes that they will have sufficient motivation to discover a product that does not threaten their desired weight.

In summary, this advertisement depicts the product in a 'tickle' position, which runs the risk that readers will not expend the effort to notice it. In addition, it utilises a 'tickle' headline with a seemingly opaque statement. Nevertheless, the advertisement attempts to

address these risks by structuring its message around a metaphor that enhances its relevance. The copywriter assumes that the metaphor's source domain (the intertextual reference to romantic suits from men) is of such importance to the intended audience that they will be motivated to expend the additional cognitive effort required to infer the product claims inherent in the metaphor.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the fact that a subtext with 'reason' claims was deemed unnecessary suggests the copywriter's confidence that the target market possesses sufficient background knowledge to infer the intended marketing message.

## 9. Implications and recommendations for future research

In conclusion, this analysis focused on instances where intertextuality is specifically used to signal the presence of metaphors. The way in which such intertexts are combined with 'reason-tickle' patterns suggests the following: in some instances, copywriters assume that if readers have identified a particular intertext, the search for relevance will enable them to infer a relationship between intertext and product that casts the latter in a positive light without the aid of additional support in the form of subtexts with 'reason' claims. The advertisement for Sprite is a clear example, as the copywriter does not explicate how the product is related to romantic suits from men. As a result, the focus falls on the emotional appeal which the intended audience presumably associates with such attention, rather than the nutritional characteristics of sugar. In other instances, by sharp contrast, the copywriter provides a more detailed description of the metaphor's relevance to the product by adding 'reason' claims that signpost the inferencing route. Based on the notion that the maximisation of relevance is a pervasive feature of human cognition, it seems conceivable that the use of this strategy does not indicate copywriters' doubt about the ability of consumers to infer at least one plausible relationship.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the inclusion of these subtexts may

2 The fact that all the advertisements selected for case studies involve romantic/sexual relationships is coincidental and not representative of the larger sample.

3 That is, a relationship that is consistent with background knowledge about the goals of advertising.



result from the desire to highlight one particular message at the cost of others, as explained below.

The analyses suggest that 'reason' subtexts operate as safety mechanisms. They perform this function by signposting the inferencing route with a single or set of clear, unambiguous product claims. This pattern may result from copywriters' desire to support a specific rather than general message such as: *this mascara is long-lasting yet easy to remove* as opposed to *this mascara is like a good husband*. The objective is to leave readers with a detailed message such as the above-mentioned example for Clinique. That is, they believe that consumers will have a high regard for the advertised mascara not only because it is associated with marriage in a broad sense, but because a reading of the intertext allows consumers to extract clear and memorable advantages. In those instances where subtexts are omitted, less detailed messages are considered consistent with the advertiser's aim to establish or reinforce positive associations with the product. For this reason, the Sprite advertisement focuses its message on the pleasure of receiving attention from men, rather than scientific facts about the manner in which the product's lack of sugar supports weight loss. This result may point to the possibility that, in some instances, copywriters believe that consumers are more likely to respond positively to a message which places more emphasis on emotional appeal rather than on scientific details.<sup>4</sup>

Based on this hypothesis, one may expect explicit signposting to characterise advertisements that promote products for which readers are more likely to prefer a logical argument with detailed information, such as expensive/luxury items. To shed light on this, future studies may determine whether advertisements for such products are more likely to employ 'reason' claims, in comparison with less expensive products. In addition, future analyses may also investigate whether this 'reason-tickle' pattern is used in advertisements which employ intertextuality for other purposes than metaphor.

4 It is imperative to bear in mind that this analysis does not propose that an explicit list of product claims is somehow superior to an emotional appeal, or that the latter is necessarily indicative of some deceptive intent on the advertiser's part.

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