Tanulmány

Abuczki Ágnes

The Use of Metaphors in Advertising

A Case Study and Critical Discourse Analysis of Advertisements
in *Cosmopolitan*

Abstract

The aim of this study is to draw attention to the ways the media use and manipulate people's thinking by applying a specific type of figure speech, namely metaphor in advertisements. I try to investigate the relationship between individual psychology, metaphor and the media by means of a case study of the metaphors contained in two issues of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the original American issue and a Hungarian version. A model is proposed in my essay whereby people's thinking is structured by metaphor. Magazines such as the *Cosmopolitan* have the power to influence the way that people, and therefore, societies construct abstract domains such as interpersonal relationships, health, and beauty. In the first half of this paper, I will explain the relationship between consumerism and advertising; and I will also provide a definition of metaphors, describe their component parts, observe their role from a cognitive perspective, and provide a brief historical overview of the research of metaphors. In the second part of the paper, I will present my research of a collection of metaphors – categorized according to their source domains – found in the adverts of the magazine.

1 Advertising Industry and Consumerism

1.1 Introduction – Shaping Consumer Behaviour in Advertising

Advertising originally meant 'taking note' or 'considering', however, its meaning later changed to 'persuading'. The purpose of advertising is to build a favourable image if a product, a service, a particular brand that matches the profile or motive of the potential buying public. Regarding the history of the advertising industry, domestic consumption increased drastically in the 50s and 60s, which resulted in the production of a massive volume of advertisements. As for the adverts targeting female audience, besides focusing on the domestic role of women and domestic values, advertising gradually turned to clothes, make-up, and the teenage market as well. The combination of sound and vision in the early ads guaranteed greater effectiveness and success, it is hardly surprising, therefore, that the consumption of the promoted products increased massively. Moreover, advertising has recently persuaded and is still persuading people to buy specific consumer goods that they do not necessarily need. By now, advertising has become a competitive war against commercial rivals for a share of the market.

We can state that today we live in a society consumed by consumerism. Whether the advertisements are for a particular product or for a particular service, their ultimate goal is to promote product and persuade people to buy – to consume. This motive is often explicit in ad-

vertisements for specific products but it is sometimes concealed within the discourse itself. As Fairclough sums up its historical background, "consumerism is a property of modern capitalism which involves a shift in ideological focus from economic production to economic consumption, and an unprecedented level of impingement by the economy on people's lives" (Fairclough 1989: 199). Evidently, advertising shapes consumer values and choices in a powerful way. What is more, in my opinion, consumer mentality can be seen as the creation of advertising. Everyone should be aware of this fact since "we are all exposed to massive daily injections of advertising […]. It is on the basis of sheer quantity that advertising is able to achieve its most significant qualitative effects" (1989: 201). The reader may ask the question how the economy can impinge on people's lives so much. Fairclough provides us with a short answer to this question: advertising constructs consumption communities: "through ideology" (1989: 202). Later, he provides an explanation of his idea:

> Advertising has made many people into consumers, i.e. has brought about a change in the way people are, in the sense that it has provided the most coherent and persistent models for consumer needs, values, tastes and behaviour. It has done this by addressing people as if they were commonsensically already fully fledged consumers. The general point is that if people are obliged day-in day-out to occupy the subject position of consumer, there is a good chance that they will become consumers […].
>   Advertising can show people lifestyles (and patterns of spending) which they might not otherwise meet, but also invite them to 'join' (1989: 207).

In more general terms, advertisers aim to find the possible values, images, and versions of reality that probably appeals to the targeted audience. Therefore, advertising becomes the ideological apparatus for the reproduction of social identities and consumer habits and norms.

1.2 Women's magazines

Currently, women's magazines are one of the most popular and most frequently purchased press genres, so they play a significant role in influencing women. Therefore, they are constantly highlighted in cultural and sociological analyses. As Caldas-Coulthard rightly points it out:

> As mass culture texts they are pervasive in modern societies, and, as the studies prove, are a continuing presence in many women's lives. They have a highly important role in the maintenance of cultural values, since they construct an 'ideal' reader who is at the same time both produced and in a sense imprisoned by the text (1996: 250).

In my study, I have chosen a monthly women's magazine to analyse, *Cosmopolitan*, which is a liberal and open magazine. It usually reports individual experiences of women, by showing women with ideal careers, relationships, and most importantly, with ideal bodies. Caldas-Coulthard argues that "writers create, through first-person testimonies, a fictionalised world that helps to construct and maintain a contradictory ideology of femininity and sexuality" (1996: 250). Caldas-Coutlhard further unfolds the idea that female readers prefer the "emotive novelisation of events" to the more masculine factual and analytical form of reporting.

In my analysis, I mostly focus on the advertisements found in these magazines, as they also reflect social values worth analysing. Furthermore, from the point of view of marketing, women's magazines also serve commercial functions with these ads, besides their more obvious informing and entertaining purposes. Their advertising sections present the stereotypes of the 'ideal' women, reflected and embodied in the visual and textual aspects of the ads. Caldas-Coulthard comments on this consumerist function as well:

Entertainment is constructed by this media discourse as inextricably bound up with consumption. The different magazines situate readers according to different buying practices […]. Feminity and sexuality is defined through consumerism. Sex is one of the most attractive products to be sold […] the sexually attractive woman is the beautiful one who, to please men, is persuaded to buy the products being advertised in the magazine (1996: 254-255).

In my advertisement analyses I will touch upon the various techniques whereby this goal is achieved in the ads. Ad-writers apply both textual and non-textual methods, all kinds of visual and linguistic tricks in order to persuade their audience. An ideal ad must draw attention, arouse interest, stimulate desire, create conviction, and above all, get action. Eye-catching slogans, often with figures of speech, such as metaphors – which I will discuss in the next chapter in detail – seem to easily attract the attention of the readers.

2   Metaphor studies

2.1   *Overview of the study of metaphors*

Barcelona's definition of metaphors is a convenient starting point for the discussion of metaphors:

Metaphor is the cognitive mechanism whereby one experimental domain is partially ʻmapped', i.e. projected, onto a different experimental domain, so that the second domain is partially understood in terms of the first one. The domain that is mapped is called the *source* or *donor domain*, and the domain onto which the source is mapped is called the *target* or *recipient domain*. This is basically the cognitive concept of metaphor profounded by George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Mark Turner and by other cognitive linguists (1997: 3).

One of the most significant Hungarian researchers of metaphors, Kövecses proposes a similar definition:

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain […]. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions is to understand another conceptual domain is called *source domain*, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the *target domain* […]. Understanding one domain in terms of another involves a set of fixed *correspondences* (technically called *mappings)* between a source and a target domain (2002: 4, 12).

The target domains are usually fairly abstract, involving phenomena that are difficult to grasp such as love, emotions or life in general. The source domains help us to comprehend the target domain, therefore they are more concrete and physical. For example, a source domain for *life* can be a *journey*. As I have argued in my previous paper on Semantics, there are a large number of universal metaphors that arise out of typical and similar human physical experiences, such as movement (hence spatial metaphors), senses (such as the sensing of temperature, coldness and heat), or other body parts and functions. I will introduce and describe a few such metaphors later in my paper.
    Providing a historical overview of the study of metaphors, Cameron states:

The shift in metaphor studies back to a more overtly cognitive position, prompted by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) book *Metaphors We Live By,* arose from the perception of inadequacies of formal logic-based approaches, and the need to take account of new findings about the psychology of categorization, including prototype theory (1999: 9).

In describing metaphors, Niemeier observes:

> Lakoff and Johnson were the first to present a cognitive analysis of conceptual metaphors […] [they] claim that conceptual metaphors in all their complexity and systematicity […] influence not only our linguistic behaviour but also our thought processes and our system of values (1999: 196).

2.2   *Purpose of my research*

As a work method in my investigation, I have taken the cognitive approach to the study of metaphors.

> One of the major general cognitive abilities is imagination, or in more technical terms, the ability to project concepts into other concepts. And this is why such imaginative devices as metaphor and metonymy have become an object of prime interest for cognitive scientists (Barcelona 2003: 2).

In general, metaphors are important linguistic devices. They are a primary means of conceptualizing the world. Their power is derived from their ability to assimilate new experiences to familiar patterns of perception. However, metaphors are often used unquestionably as common sense expressions with which one has grown up. One tends to forget that they are partial conceptualizations of reality, because, as Goatly has pointed out, highlighting and suppression of experience necessarily involves "ignoring of differences and highlighting of selected similarities" (Goatly 1997). Therefore, it is necessary to critically analyse metaphors in order to unmask what they hide and to discover the interests that are at stake in the use of particular metaphors. Therefore, the ultimate purpose is to investigate how metaphors have construed and communicated consumerism and social (female and male) roles.

2.3   *Realizations of metaphors in advertisements*

This section is mainly concerned with the role of the media in influencing how people mentally structure their conceptualizations of abstract, complex domains such as human relations, age, etc. According to recent theories, metaphor plays a significant role in cognitive processing, influencing our thinking, reasoning and actions. As Lakoff and Johnson originally put it, "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (1). Lakoff and Johnson were perhaps the first to recognize the importance of metaphor in everyday life and everyday communication.

When Kövecses discusses the non-linguistic realizations of conceptual metaphors, he lists *advertisements* among the first ones:

> A major manifestation of conceptual metaphors is advertisements. Part of the selling power of an advertisement depends on how well-chosen the conceptual metaphor is that the picture and/or the words used in the advertisement attempt to evoke in people. An appropriately selected metaphor may work wonders in promoting the sale of an item (2002: 59).

Each person is surrounded by a great variety of metaphors: in newspapers, in conversation, in books and in movies. If theorists such as Kövecses, Lakoff and Johnson are right, these metaphors are used to make sense of and structure abstract domains and phenomena such as love, time and beauty. The media can play a powerful role in this process by presenting readers or viewers with alternative metaphorical constructions of such domains.

3   Case study of advertisements in *Cosmopolitan*

3.1   Categories of metaphors depending on the source domain

The advertisements I analysed manipulate metaphors and can be divided into seven groups depending on their *source domain*. The first group uses spatial metaphors whose source domain is *physical closeness and physical touch*. The second group represents the product to be sold as the *friend* of the shopping audience. The third group applies *journey* as the source domain of the metaphor. The fourth group is based on the universal body and *sensomotoric experiences* of human beings. The fifth group's source domain is *heat*, with *passion and attractiveness* as the target domains. In the sixth group, *sexual desire* as the target domain is identified with *hunger* as its source domain. Therefore, women are seen and represented as tempting and attractive food for men. The seventh group is built on a typical metaphorical correspondence which identifies *good* and *happy* with *up* and *upward movement*.

3.2   Analysis of metaphors in Cosmopolitan adverts

The first category of metaphors identifies emotional intimacy with physical closeness. Emotional distance can be presented as physical distance, or emotional effect as a manner of contact, or emotional effect as a matter of contact such as touching. This is often expressed with the help of spatial metaphors. You can observe the same phenomena in the Hungarian advertisements of *Pannon* and *Tide*. The slogan of *Pannon* (a telecommunication company) is "közel hozzád" ('close to you'), thus this ad is also based on the idea of spatial relations. *Tide* (name of a detergent) advertises itself with the lines: "a szuperanyukák gyengéd érintése" ("soft touch of super Moms"), therefore, this ad also identifies intimacy and love with closeness, to be precise, with touch. These types of correspondences also seem universal if we compare the spatial metaphors of different cultures.

The second group of metaphors personifies the product to be sold and gives it human features. These ads misrepresent the product as the friend of the shopping audience. For example, *Sopiane* (a cigarette brand) claims that it is "társ a mindennapokban" ("your everyday companion"), or Cosmopolitan advertises itself as "a legjobb útitárs a nyárra" ("the best friend to travel with in the summer"). These slogans create misconceptions in the human mind. Even the images in the ads express the false ideas that the product is one's best and most trustworthy friend.

The third category of advertisements applies the metaphor of journey. The source domain of *journey* is used to capture the target domains of both *love* and *life* as they both also have ups and downs, etc. I have found a perfume called *'Journey of Love'*. Besides, the Hungarian slogan of *Nissan* is 'válts új utakra' ("change to new ways"). This line suggests that if you choose to drive a Nissan car, your whole life will change for the better and you will take the good direction. This can also cause misconceptions in the mind and can delude naive people.

The fourth group of advertisements is based on universal metaphors deriving from the same physical-bodily experiences and sensations of the human kind. For instance, the English ad version of *Nissan Shift* contains the slogan "the way you move". This metaphor is based on the fact that all humans share the same sensomotoric movements, so, everyone can make sense of this phrase. Most universal, cross-culturally shared metaphors are based on the universal body experiences of people. A further universally shared feature of humans is thirst. This is applied in the ad of *Juicy Organics,* which "quenches your skin's thirst". This metaphor is obviously comprehensible across all cultures.

The fifth group is also based on a source of body sensation, namely, heat. Across cultures, heat is associated with passion, while cold and coldness with rigidity and emotional distance. In the advertisements I have found, the target domain of passion is captured through the source domain of heat. The correspondence between the two seems to be universal as heat is a basic human experience. For example, the slogan of *Lancome*'s lip gloss is "color fever gloss", which identifies fever and heat with being sexy and attractive. *Escada* also applies these senses in the ad: "sunset heat". The following two ads apply the figure of speech of oxymoron as well besides the metaphor of heat. *Pantene*'s slogan is: "hot as ice", while *Abreva*'s slogan is: "Nobody looks hot in a cold sore".

In the sixth group of ads the target domain of sexual desire is captured with the help of the source domain of a physical feeling, namely, hunger. In other words, sexual desire is identified with hunger. In the ads of perfumes, women are often represented as tempting, attractive food for men. For example, consider the slogans of *Macy's* perfumes: "feast your senses", "make them [men] melt", "ripe [the woman herself] for romance", "spice things up", or "fénylő csokoládék" ("shining chocolate") in a Hungarian hair color advertisement. All these ads present food, therefore, cosmetics – such as perfume – as weapons – if we talk about sexual desire in terms of hunting or warfare – in the hands of women in order to attract men. In other perfume ads, perfumes have features, attributes, and characteristics that people would like to have for themselves – for example sweetness, being easy-going, friendly, successful, etc. These ads create the false belief in people that if they wear these perfumes they are going to possess these features with the help of the perfume. This is also a form of delusion of lay people by the media.

As both Lakoff and Kövecses claim another universal metaphor is that *good* is associated with *up* or *upward movement*. This appears in ads as well, just think of a previously mentioned slogan: "spice things up", or "up for it" by *Rimmel*.

4   Conclusion

This discussion briefly sketched the theoretical issues of metaphor studies, and provided a few case studies of the advertisements of a popular women's fashion magazine. Nowadays, when we are all exposed to heavy masses of adverts, we must always bear in mind that advertising has several tools and tricks to influence us. Therefore, we have to filter the information presented in ads, and be careful to accept portrayals of people and the world found in adverts, as they often tend to employ stereotypes. Hopefully, my paper has managed to call attention to the importance of further research into the relationship between metaphors and the media, more specifically, to the usefulness of performing Critical Discourse Analysis of the metaphors that are presented in the media.

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