

The Use of Covert Communication, Irony and Puns in Print and Online English Advertising: A Relevance-theoretic Account¹

Eisa S. Alrasheedi

University of Newcastle
School of English Literature
Language and Linguistics
Percy Building NE3 7RU
United Kingdom

Abstract

The use of covert communication in general and irony and puns in particular in advertising is counted a common technique many prudent advertisers make use of when shaping the general lines and framework of their advertisements. Additionally, irony and puns are highly deemed as useful tools in assisting the advertisers to attract audience's attention and consequently re-modify their personal attitude towards the products or services in question. In connection to this, this research aims at providing a relevance-theoretic account to a number of print and online English advertisements so as to pinpoint how these advertisements are better off in case of covert communication, irony, and pun. In addition, it indicates how the effort-effect trade-off plays a vital part in guiding the people (audience) towards understanding the advertisements fully and truthfully. This guidance is conducted via a unified fashion rendering who reads the advertisement at issue to yield the utmost message the advertisement is designed to serve and deliver.

Keywords: Relevance Theory, covert communication, irony, pun, advertising

1. Introduction

Covert communication, irony, and puns are highly analyzed under the framework of the Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986 ; Blakemore, 1992; Tanaka, 1999). This huge bulk of work and investigation, couching within the RT, is in the main motivated by the assumption that the Relevance Theory is arguably the most appropriate framework to decipher the underlying language and mechanism of advertising (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Crook, 2004). On reasoning these lines, this research attempts to validate this well-argued assumption, working out two over-arching methods of covert communication exhibited in advertisement: irony and pun.

The discussion is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces a theoretical background and underpinnings adopted in this research paper. It defines covert communication, irony, and pun, introducing a succinct overview for each. Section 3 elaborates the Relevance Theory as a theoretical means to delineate the use of irony and pun as covert communication in advertisements. It specifies and works out how the Relevance Theory is robustly related to understanding the potential use and theoretical manifestations of covert communication, irony, and pun. Section 4 examines a set of advertisements where irony and pun are exploited. It explicates how the effort-effect trade-off uncovers the actual benefits gained on the part of the addressees when irony and pun are intently deployed. Section 5, in turn, concludes the paper.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Covert Communication: An Overview

In every advertisement, revealing the real advertisers' intention, buying the product, is not likely explicitly said (Xinren, 1998; Piller, 2003). Advertisers use various techniques in order to conceal such intentions smartly. Advertisers use covert communication as an effective way to persuade the audience to buy their products.

¹This paper is mainly derived from my MA thesis, written under the supervision of Prof Bob Borsley. It was submitted to the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex in September 2011.

Roughly speaking, the advertising language is deployed in a specific and thorough way to drawing the requisite attention to the message (connotation) the advertiser intends to convey (Crook, 2004). Thus, communication takes place, it seems, mainly between the advertiser and the audience using a context where a high degree of cooperation and trust between the former and the latter are not always guaranteed or even required. In other words, the lack of trust and/or social cooperation is not seen as fundamental for communication to exist but does not necessarily hinder the ostensive communication to occur, bearing in mind that the audience are automatically aware of advertisements' aim, the persuasion of the audience to buy a product. Therefore, the cognitive communication is what really matters, and once the cognitive cooperation is successfully achieved, the communication takes place (Martínez, 2005).

Advertisers seek out for the persuasion of the audience by targeting the addressee's cognitive environment, which is according to Pérez (2000) is "the cognitive environment of a person that refers to that person's assumption about the world. It comprises a potentially huge amount of information to be perceived in the physical environment, information that can be retrieved from memory, and any inferences yielded from these two sources." (2000: 38). As a result, advertisements are set forward using persuasive devices which do not require a high level of social cooperation or even conveying explicit messages. Furthermore, in advertising the lack of trust and social cooperation is usually resolved by specific order procedures: increasing the cooperation on the cognitive level, leading the addressee can recover and accessing the intended message that is not clearly manifested.

Admittedly, it appears that there is a poor cooperation on the social level and the lack of trust between the advertiser and the audience in terms of the social bonds and intention. Advertisers hardly reveal their intention of persuading consumers to buy their products and then gain profit as revealing this fact can have a bad effect on customers and may result in refraining them from the purchasing process at the end. According to Tanaka (1999), there are several advantages for advertisers of using covert communication in their adverts. One advantage of engaging in covert communication is that advertisers can overcome the above obstacle and conceal the explicit intention of buying, profit or any form of exploitation that might come across to the audience's mind. In this regard, Williamson (1981) states that in social situations where trust and co-operation between interlocutors are limited or risky, the hearer becomes ostensibly more involved in the process of communication (1981: 167).

2.2. Irony: Definition, uses, and Implications

Irony is defined as a type of communication process where a situation (or a statement) is presented in stark contradiction with the appearance and presentation of an idea at issue (Stern, 1990; Burgers *et al.*, 2012). Blakemore (1992) comments that irony is best analyzed in terms of meaning: the opposite of what the sentence uttered literally means (1992:164). Put it mildly, ironic statements may subsume other meaning-related components such as sarcasm where the literal meaning of a statement is oftentimes depicted as the sheer opposite of the implied meaning (implicature) (Creusere, 1999). This disparity in depiction results in that the implicature and the surface meaning (e.g. explicature) are quite different.

Moreover, different forms of irony are in use. For instance, irony can be perceived as verbal, situational, comic, dramatic, tragic, historical, etc. (Wilson, 2006). Consequently, irony has regarded as a meta-linguistically technique benefited in various knowledge branches. It is not unusual to tell that irony was used along the ages from the rhetoric of Socrates to the modern movies, books, songs and advertisements (Tanaka, 1999). It was employed to break any monotony occurring in a situation or a dialogue (Haverkate, 1990). Due to its salient effect in attracting people, irony has been subsequently used very effectively in advertisements in order to highlight, say, the product characteristics, traits, and so on. This highlight is meant to pinpoint competition in poor light, to increase awareness-related issues of a product, and, finally, to get the audience's attention and simulate them to buy the product (Benwell, 2013; Guang-xiang, 2013).

In relation to this, Lagerwerf (2007) states that the effect of advertisements when irony (and sarcasm) are used leads to positive reactions and sometimes to negative reactions and repercussions from the side of addressees. An example is an advertisement for guns that says "guns don't kill people but people do". The irony here is envisaged in the notion that a gun is typically known as an instrument of death. By stating that guns do not kill people, but people do, the advertiser attempts to deliver that guns by themselves are mere objects with useful uses. It is only when people take up the guns, the guns do kill. Apparently, it is observed that this advertisement is an attempt to mix innocence with culpability in a fashion generating irony in the Ad.

Thus, we are in position to assert that irony is used in advertisements to put forth a tacit message, triggering the reader to re-calculate any pre-judgment on the part of readers. Readers of advertisements may pause to read, assimilate, interpret and then take an action. This use renders irony useful in shaping the main function of media in general and advertisement in particular. Thus, irony is best categorized as a persuasive strategy (Gibbs and Izett, 2005).

Smith (2005) maintains that consumers are strategically targeted by using irony in advertisements. Targeting is done by using demographics, gender, and age groups activities, among other things. For instance, an advertisement for a beauty cream for teens to remove acne and pimples would use clear complexioned and beautiful girls along with ironical statements. An example of an ironical statement is "what would she look like unless she used this cream every night". In print advertisements, the use of visuals and images is interspaced with printed words and both use irony to push the product message in the advertisement (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). Furthermore, the use of irony depends on the demographic group targeted by the advertisement. Accordingly, a motorcycle ad will probably use young and adventurous men shown riding the bike in extreme settings. The irony used here is to bring forth the contrast between the drab existence of the reader with the allure and adventure of the countryside to the city 'slicker'.

Kotler (2006) sums up the use of irony in advertisements, mentioning that irony is used to drive any gullible person fall a prey to the sales tactic. An ad for a funeral service that claims to offer low cost services shows a pile of ashes in order to sustain the ironic impression on the hearer's side. In detail, in one ad, the pile of ashes has the sentence "That is what is left after an 8000 USD cremation". In the second following ad, the same pile of ashes is shown but the sentence now says: "This is what is left after a 2000 USD cremation". What is important here to emphasize is that in ads what is said is totally related to what is in pictures. Relevance and context are important for every kind of communication, especially that communication in advertisements.

2.3. Puns

Punning is defined as 'a humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest different meanings or applications, or a play on words. (Britannica, 2011)'. Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines puns as 'the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words.' Thus, using a word with normally only one meaning² in communication can be accounted for by the assumption that the use of this word would disambiguate any ambiguity which could appear. However, words with multiple meanings are used in case of puns since both meanings are important to draw the impression the speaker wants (Riemer, 2010).

3. Methodology

3.1. The Relevance Theory

In this research the Relevance Theory (henceforth, RT) is adopted as a method to investigate the use of irony and pun in advertisements. RT is largely deemed as one of the most influencing theories used in understanding the prime mechanisms of overt and covert communications (Wilson and Sperber, 2002; Alves and Gonçalves, 2003; Carston, 2004). In this regard, communication in RT revolves around implicit inferences (Sperber and Wilson, 1987). In any communication, there will be at least two main entities: the source and the hearer and/or the reader. The source begins a communication by sending a message which can be framed in various forms, including a sentence or words providing that the latter convey a meaning.

Moreover, another underlying tenet of the RT concerning communication and perception is that there might be one or more linguistic expressions, whether spoken or written, with more accessible meanings. Using such linguistic expressions, people in a communicative situation extract the most relevant (consuming less effort and having much effect) meaning from the message. So, the message is considered as a linguistic expression produced in a communicative situation. When the message is conveyed, a hearer attempts to process the message and seek for the meaning. The question of relevance comes in when the message is relevant to the hearers meets his/her expectations. In order to maximize this effect and minimize the processing effort, a picture is used therein. As an example, an ad for baby food with an image of a chubby baby will be relevant to a mother with a young baby.

² Words with only one meaning are dubbed as 'monosemic' contra words with more than one (inter-related) meaning: polysemic. See Riemer (2010) for further details.

It may not be relevant to a weight lifter who needs energy foods. In the case of the young mother with the baby, the ad may move her sufficiently so that she buys the product.

In any communication instance, the context in which the message is sent is important. In RT, context is counted as a set of assumptions involved in the interpretation of the message and the relation of that message to the situation in which it was built. A simple message such as "You know what time it is?" has different meanings depending on the context per se. A person waiting for the bus and who is not wearing his watch may use this message as a question to find out the exact time. Differently, a person who is waiting for his friend for two hours might use this question as an ironic "intended interpretation" with sarcasm. For the message to be received by the hearer as intended by the sender, both the hearer and the sender should be aware of the same context.

3.2. RT and Irony

In relation to irony, RT emphasizes that irony has an echoic use. This echoic use is depicted in the assumption that every utterance is an interpretation of the thought that the speaker wishes to communicate. Yet, this thought can be presented as an interpretation of another speaker's thought. Thus, an utterance which is intended as an interpretation to a certain thought is not simply always relevant by virtue of the notion that this utterance informs mainly that someone said or thought something, rather than reporting someone's thoughts which the speaker may indicate his/her own attitude towards them. Sperber & Wilson call this kind of utterances as echoic (Díez Arroyo, 1998).

In other words, the echoic nature of irony means an echoic utterance that expresses the speaker's/ the advertiser's attitude towards a thought. Moreover, in echoic interpretation, the speaker dissociates himself/herself from the thought which is being echoed. Sperber & Wilson puts it as follows: "The attitude expressed by an ironical utterance is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind" (Sperber and Wilson, 1986; Carston and Uchida, 1998). In order to derive the ironic interpretation/ message, the addressee needs to go through three steps in order to grasp the irony in a given advertisement following a set of steps: recognition of the utterance as echoic, identification of the source of the opinion echoed, and finally recognition of the speaker's attitude to the opinion echoed such as rejection or dissociation (Carston and Uchida, 1998; Escandell Vidal, 1998).

3.3. RT and Punning

In RT, the communication is considered successful when the speaker's intended interpretation is recovered by the hearer in spite of the fact that there are more than one possible interpretations of an utterance. That is to say, the addressee is exposed to two or more interpretations and has to seek the intended one. Accordingly, the use of puns does intrinsically activate two or more interpretations, and the addressee needs to pay an extra processing effort for the recovery of the ultimate interpretation which is initially intended by the addresser. In the RT-theoretical account, the most accessed interpretation is the "easiest one" has to be rejected by the addressee in order gain the intended one (Yus Ramos, 1998). Thus, the decreasing use of puns in advertisement can be ascribed to the assumption that pun requires greater processing effort than straightforward utterances. However, when punning is used, an extra contextual effects are yielded, resulting in outweighing the greater effort exerted (Tanaka, 1999). Indeed, the use of puns in advertising can effectively give the advertisers the merit of sustaining of the audience's attention. By punning, the audience has to make extra processing effort and thus the audience will be attracted in order to solve the ambiguity of a given pun (Dyer, 2008).

4. Discussion and Analysis

This section presents irony and puns in some well-chosen advertisements that appear online and in print media. Advertisements on TV and online movie clips are not considered because these ads are too complex for the present goals and objectives of this paper.

4.1. Ironic Advertisements

4.1.1. Colgate Tooth Paste Advertisement

In Ad 1, the image of an old toothless man 'modelling' for Colgate toothpaste is clearly given. The ironic message in this advertisement could be that "use Colgate and have strong teeth or you will end up like this grandpa!". It is obvious that the old man has lost all of his teeth and the caption in the background says: "Strong Teeth" which is in turn very apparent and repeated several times. The irony is that the brand is used to provide for strong teeth and presumably, long use can provide such teeth.



Ad 1: Colgate Toothpaste

The advertisement attempts to show what happens when one does not brush his teeth. The grinning old man, thin and emaciated, seems to show 'sarcastically' his misfortune. The use of a carefully-selected picture to depict the end of not using the product is full of irony stemmed from the contradiction best-manipulated in the ad. This ironic depiction entices who watch this ad to buy the product since the notion of buying the product is meant to be the most accessible conclusion the watcher can yield. Thus, the irony used in the ad is purposely oriented towards giving the watcher the potential end of not using the product, which reduces any effort the watcher can process in his/her search for the optimal relevance. On the other hand, this ironic use of picture and background caption maximizes the effect impinging on the watcher when comparing the use of the product with not using it.

In RT, the above message is not overtly expressed. However, it is ironically implied once the inferences are drawn. The advertisement echoes a common belief that most people share which is "using toothpastes can protect people's teeth". Furthermore, the purpose of advertiser is not only to endorse the opinion that the product provides strong teeth but rather to make the consumer takes action and buy the product in order to avoid ending up toothless. This again brings to focus the importance of relevance and context.

4.1.2. Saatchi Ad Against Overconsumption

As is seen in ad 2, a poor and malnourished African tribal woman is 'modelling' an expensive handbag. A small sentence asks for a donation of 1.5 Euros while the handbag is supposedly worth 32 Euros. In the copy, it can be seen the sentence "food for a week 4 Euros".



Ad 2: Advertisement by Agency Saatchi

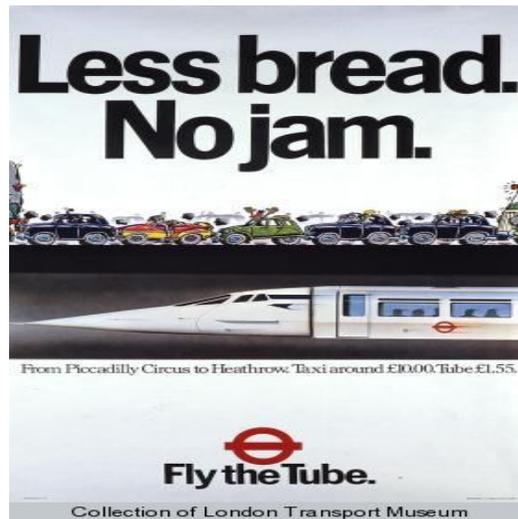
The irony is generated by the fact that the poor woman has barely anything to eat while other people can splurge huge amounts on something as trivial as a handbag. For RT, ad 2 has an echoic nature since it reflects common knowledge or beliefs (for instance, the huge social gap between high and the low class, living lavishly while others suffer from famine, etc.). Put it differently, this advertisement echoes the sort of advertisements which promote luxury goods and services. It suggests that there are more significant things to spend money on. When an addressee reads the caption at the end of the advertisement which says: "Text 'aid' to 2255 and donate € 1.50", he/she will definitely deduce that the advertiser endorses the idea of donating to people in need, as part of charity works, instead of spending expensively on things considered trivial.

Irony is used and employed to echo the life of poor and deprived people. The ironic expression is imported using the contradiction found in the picture. This contradiction is highly generated by the virtue of the existence of anomaly in the picture: a poor African woman with a cozy luxurious handbag which is a preserve of the rich. This anomaly and its concomitant contradiction lessen any effort the addressee might exert in his/her relentless search for optimal relevance of the advertisement. Simultaneously, this anomaly maximizes its resulting-based effect which the addressee needs to demarcate his/her stand against the advertisement.

4.2. Punning in Advertisements

4.2.1. London Underground Advertisement

Ad 3 comprises the following main caption: *'Less bread. No jam'*. There are several taxis evidently seen along with the London underground which its front compartment is Concorde, the supersonic airliner. When the audience first reads the main caption, the audience will come up with different associations and interpretations. The reader might think for a while that the given ad is about food as "bread" and "jam" is foodstuffs. That is because this interpretation is counted as the easiest to be accessed by the audience due to the regularity of both "bread and jam" consumption amongst the addressees. To the contrary, appealing to the relevance-theoretic account, the previous interpretation has to be declined as it violates the principle of relevance. When an addressee spends more time in processing the contextual effects in this ad, taking into consideration the caption written in small size: *'From Piccadilly circus to Heathrow; Taxi around £ 10.00. Tube £ 1.55'* and when he/she observesthe tube sign of London underground and also reading the following caption at the end of the ad: *'Fly the tube'*, he/she will find out that this advertisement is strongly related to London famous transport "the tube" with a professional and creative use of puns since the advertisement is not by no means about food. The reader will hopefully concludes that the word "bread" as a slang³ in English means "money", while "jam" also means "traffic jam" or "traffic congestion". The ambiguity here is manipulated as a result of the use of puns that give two possible interpretations.



Ad 3: London Underground Advertisement

In this advertisement, the use of punning deliberately activates two sets of interpretations. The first interpretation of the foodstuff "bread" and "jam" is intended to be recovered first and then declined by the audience, as the food interpretation is irrelevant to the advertised service. The second interpretation "bread" as "money" and "jam" as "traffic jam" is intended to be communicated by the addressee. Generally speaking, in normal speech when a speaker uses an ambiguous word only one meaning is important that is communicated and the other can be neglected which is not the case of puns where both meanings are important and need to be noticed.

³In origin, the word 'bread' is commonly used as slang for 'money' in American English. Moreover, it is not highly accessible interpretation in British English. Therefore, such creative employment and usage in London underground gives the advertiser a privilege since it sustains the attention of the English audience as the intended meaning is uncommon in environment utilizing British English, resulting in a more contextual effect on the part of the reader.

Referring back to ad 3, the double meaning of "bread" and "jam" are both noticed and gained by the audience. Ultimately, the addressee will yield and conclude the following implicature:

- *Travelling by London underground, means spending less money compared with travelling by car, and avoiding traffic jams.*

In fact, the addressee needs to spend more processing effort so that he/she can recover the intended interpretation as it takes some time in order to access the punning message. In ad 3, using puns allows the advertisers to sustain the audience attention and attract them as well. Moreover, advertisers can avoid being boring to their audience in the messages they send through punning. For instance, the given tube ad can enable the advertiser to opt for a more sophisticated message such as: Take the underground, its cheap and convenient. The advertiser could simply choose the words "money" and "traffic" instead of "bread" and "jam" which the advertiser actually used.

However, the advertiser probably is aware of the notion that such replacement would not have the same effect on the audience and would not allow a more contextual processing effort that lastly leads to the intended interpretation.

Indeed, this advertisement is on the whole an indication of the use of punning words with more than one meaning. It is also a signal of the notion that to leverage such punning words, one has to use those frequent words in order to maximize the contextual effect on the part of the addressee once he/she finds out and absorbs the real message. If punning words with less frequent words are used, this contextual effect would be minimized and thus becomes at stake to comply with the underlying goals of the advertisement. In addition, using such frequent punning words obviate any need the addressee may need to determine their meanings pertaining to the ad in question.

4.2.2. Advertisement for Lloyds Bank

When reading the following slogan, addressees will gain the most obvious and accessible interpretation which is the branch as a part of tree that grows, as the word "branch" first meaning is "a secondary woody stem that grows from the trunk or the main stem of a tree". However, this explicit interpretation is declined by the addressee appealing to Relevance Theory. The addressee will find out that this is an outdoor advertisement for Lloyds bank. Therefore, a new association will be made for the sake of the recovery of the intended interpretation. The addressee will recover the second meaning of the word "branch" as "a division of a business or organization" which in this case a division of Lloyds bank. The addressee rejects the "tree-blossom-branch" context in favor of the "bank-flourish-money" interpretation.

- *'Money doesn't grow on trees, but it blossoms at our branches.'*

In other words, the addressee (as a customer) will make association between the first interpretation and the second one. In doing so, he/she will recover the most acceptable contextual effects and ultimately gain the following proposition:

- *If you deposit your money in Lloyd's banks, your money will increase dramatically, just like a fruitful flourishing tree.*

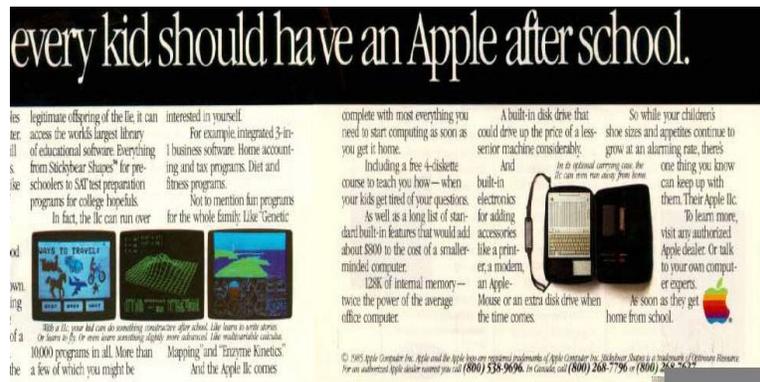
In a nutshell, Lloyds bank has effectively exploited the advantage of the pun that is in the word "branch", which indeed has a significant influence on the bank's customers.

This advertisement shows how context is of paramount importance in search for relevance and optimal relevance. Had this ad been posted on a wall of school, the implicature yielded would be quite different to what can be yielded in the above case. Thus, in order to search effectively for relevance for this advertisement, the addressee is first obligated to find out the most suitable context which he/she has no say on. What is vital to underpin this context is rather the advertisement maker. Thus, in such advertisements, the makers, designers, and so on have inescapable effect on the addressee's own search for optimal relevance.

4.2.3. Apple Company Advertisement

As seen in Ad 4, the advertisement includes the following caption '*every kid should have an Apple after school*'. When the audience first reads the given caption for the first time, he/she will gain the explicit meaning which is a kid should have an apple after school where "apple" is treated as a kind of food "fruit".

However, when the reader takes longer time in processing the caption associating it with the American computer company "Apple"⁴, the former interpretation will be rejected by the addressee.



Ad 4: "Every Kid Should Have an Apple after School" Ad for Apple firm

With the help of the cognitive environment, where an apple is good for kids' health as well as associating it with the Apple computer, the addressee will ultimately recover the intended interpretation as follows:

- Every kid should have an Apple computer as they are good for their study, simply just like an apple is good for one's health.

This advertisement is a good example that illustrates a particular kind of pun, which is according to (Tanaka (1999)), is called "Puns with rejected interpretation contributing to the intended one". In other words, the rejected interpretation plays a significant role in recovering the intended interpretation. Once more, the significance of the RT and its pertinent tenets are well-observed from the analysis of the above advertisement in particular and in the language of advertising in general.

4.2.4. I'm More Satisfied Advertisement

Ad 5 is for 'More' cigarettes. This advertisement exemplifies a particular kind of pun which is called (puns with two communicated meanings) where the addressee needs to communicate both interpretations in order to come up with a comprehensive picture of a given advertisement. Please refer to the following image.



Ad 5: 'I'm More Satisfied' Advertisement for 'More' Cigarettes

As we can see in the above advertisement, the caption appears as in: 'I'm more satisfied'. When the audience reads the caption in (5), the audience will find out that the word 'More' is used in this advertisement as an adverb in to describe the degree of how people are satisfied after smoking cigarettes. Moreover, when we look it up in the dictionary, the word 'More' appears as a comparative adverb used to modify an adjective, which in this advertisement the word 'satisfied', and also to stress a greater degree of satisfaction.

⁴ The word "Apple" appears deliberately capitalized in the given advertisement to help the reader to recover the word 'Apple' as a brand name, not just a kind of fruit.

Furthermore, the word 'More' appears capitalized in the given advertisement to give the audience a hint that it is also employed as a brand name for 'More' cigarettes.

The addressee will make association between the two interpretations and will hopefully gain the following intended contextual effects: '*By smoking more cigarettes, the addressee will have more satisfaction than other brand cigarettes*'. Indeed, the 'More' Company has cleverly used this particular kind of puns, homophonic puns, as an effective attempt to persuade its customers in buying 'More' cigarettes. Furthermore, this advertisement provides one word 'More' that has two different meanings where the first one is 'more as an adverb to describe to what extent people are satisfied?' and the second one is 'More' as the brand name of cigarettes. Such creative usage goes on with Redfern's remark⁵ that one privilege of puns is that it provides advertisers with two meanings for the price of one word (Redfern, 1984). On the other hand, in contrary to the previous instances of puns, nonsense puns, we have examined so far, where one interpretation needs to be rejected in favor of the recovery of intended one. However, in this particular kind of puns both interpretations needs to be communicated first in order to gain the ultimate interpretation in intended contextual effect stated above. Finally, the above example draws the attention of the importance of Relevance Theory and its applicability to the language of advertising.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper briefly introduced irony and pun and the pertinent advantage as far as advertising is concerned. Additionally, it showed how RT provides a better interpretation in the analysis of advertising in terms of advantage of context, effort-effect trade-off. When RT was applied to the selected advertisements, it turns out that the use of irony and pun as covert communication means assist the advertisement designers and makers to attract addressees' attention in a fashion enticing him/her to process effects to decode the message therein. Once the addressees starting this cognitive operation, specific contextual effect originated on the part of the addressees, inciting him/her to make use of the advertisement in question. Thus, the chances to buy the product advertised will be exceedingly enlarged.

Acknowledgment

I am indebted to Professor Bob Borsley for the insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. It goes without saying that I remain fully responsible for any remaining errors.

References

- Alves, F. and Gonçalves, J. (2003) 'A relevance theory approach to the investigation of inferential processes in translation', BENJAMINS TRANSLATION LIBRARY, 45, pp. 3-24.
- Benwell, B. (2013) 'New sexism? Readers' responses to the use of irony in men's magazines', MAPPING THE MAGAZINE-HOLMES: Comparative Studies in Magazine Journalism, p. 18.
- Blakemore, D. (1992) Understanding utterances: An introduction to pragmatics. Blackwell Oxford.
- Britannica, E. (2011) 'Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011', Web. Apr, 6.
- Burgers, C., van Mulken, M. and Schellens, P.J. (2012) 'Type of evaluation and marking of irony: The role of perceived complexity and comprehension', Journal of Pragmatics, 44(3), pp. 231-242.
- Carston, R. (2004) 'Relevance theory and the saying/implicating distinction', Handbook of pragmatics, pp. 633-656.
- Carston, R. and Uchida, S. (1998) Relevance theory: Applications and implications. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Creusere, M.A. (1999) 'Theories of adults' understanding and use of irony and sarcasm: Applications to and evidence from research with children', Developmental Review, 19(2), pp. 213-262.
- Crook, J. (2004) 'On covert communication in advertising', Journal of Pragmatics, 36(4), pp. 715-738.
- Dictionary, O.E. (2013) 'Oxford English Dictionary'. Oxford University Press, Oxford, available at: www.oed.com/view/Entry/252092 (accessed 23 April 2013).
- Díez Arroyo, M. (1998) 'On the echoic nature of irony'.
- Dyer, G. (2008) Advertising as communication. Routledge.

⁵Redfern (1984) points out that advertising space is costly. Economy is essential, and puns are highly economical (two words for the price of one word or phrase), and are in fact much more of a labour-saving device than many of the products they seek to promote. (1984: 130)

- Escandell Vidal, V. (1998) 'Politeness: A relevant issue for relevance theory', *Revista alicantina de estudios ingleses*, No. 11 (Nov. 1998); pp. 45-57.
- Fuertes-Olivera, P.A., Velasco-Sacristán, M., Arribas-Baño, A. and Samaniego-Fernández, E. (2001) 'Persuasion and advertising English: Metadiscourse in slogans and headlines', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33(8), pp. 1291-1307.
- Gibbs, R. and Izett, C. (2005) 'Irony as persuasive communication', *Figurative language comprehension: Social and cultural influences*, pp. 131-151.
- Guang-xiang, R.A.O. (2013) 'The Irony of Advertising', *Journal of Fujian Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 1, p. 016.
- Haverkate, H. (1990) 'A speech act analysis of irony', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14(1), pp. 77-109.
- Kotler, P. (2006) 'Kotler on Marketing, How to Create, Win and Dominate Markets', P. Kotler.-282 c.
- Lagerwerf, L. (2007) 'Irony and sarcasm in advertisements: Effects of relevant inappropriateness', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(10), pp. 1702-1721.
- Martínez, R.D. (2005) 'Covert communication in the promotion of alcohol and tobacco in Spanish press advertisements', *RAEL: revista electrónica de lingüística aplicada*, (4), pp. 82-102.
- McQuarrie, E.F. and Mick, D.G. (1996) 'Figures of rhetoric in advertising language', *Journal of consumer research*, pp. 424-438.
- Pérez, F.J.D. (2000) 'Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory and its applicability to advertising discourse: evidence from British press advertisements', *Atlantis*, pp. 37-50.
- Piller, I. (2003) '10. advertising as a site of language contact', *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 23, pp. 170-183.
- Redfern, W. (1984) *Puns: More Senses Than One*. Penguin books.
- Riemer, N. (2010) *Introducing semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, T. (2005) 'Pumping irony: The construction of masculinity in a post-feminist advertising campaign', *Advertising & Society Review*, 6(3).
- Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1986) '1995', *Relevance: Communication and cognition*, 2.
- Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1986) *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1987) 'Précis of relevance: Communication and cognition', *Behavioral and brain sciences*, 10(04), pp. 697-710.
- Stern, B.B. (1990) 'Pleasure and persuasion in advertising: rhetorical irony as a humor technique', *Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 12(1-2), pp. 25-42.
- Tanaka, K. (1999) *Advertising language: A pragmatic approach to advertisements in Britain and Japan*. Psychology Press.
- Williamson, J. (1981) *Decoding advertisements: Ideology and meaning in advertising*. Marion Boyers.
- Wilson, D. (2006) 'The pragmatics of verbal irony: Echo or pretence?', *Lingua*, 116(10), pp. 1722-1743.
- Wilson, D. and Sperber, D. (2002) 'Relevance theory', *Handbook of pragmatics*.
- Xinren, C. (1998) 'Pragmatic presuppositions in advertising language [J]', *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 5.
- Yus Ramos, F. (1998) 'A decade of relevance theory', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 30(3), pp. 305-345.