

Barry Pennock-Speck and María Milagros del Saz-Rubio, eds. 2013. *The Multimodal Analysis of Television Commercials*. Valencia: U de València. 214 pp. ISBN: 978-8-4370-9145-7.

IZASKUN ELORZA

Universidad de Salamanca

iea@usal.es

Multimodal analysis has received great attention in the last decade, partly due to the development of new ways of analysing complex text forms (i.e., Dreyfus, Hood and Stenglin 2011; Machin and Mayr 2012; Unsworth 2008), and *The Multimodal Analysis of Television Commercials* adds to this wealth of studies at the adept hands of two discourse analysts with a long experience in the description of media discourse. As Pennock-Speck and del Saz-Rubio state in the introduction, this volume aims to provide readers with “food for thought” and to “spark new approaches to the analysis of television advertising” (14). In order to achieve this, eight contributions are presented in an attempt to account for “the exegesis and explanation of TV commercials from several different cultures and from different theoretical stances” (14). As the editors explain, the motivation for this volume comes from the fact that previous studies, especially those focusing on gender and marketing, tend to reduce their analyses to only a small number of features and, therefore, cannot account for the complexities involved in advertising. Although the need for a multimodal approach to language produced and accessed through television is not surprising, considering its intrinsically multimodal nature, in the case of TV advertising it is also justified by the fact that there has been “a progressive shift in advertising strategies involving a greater use of images and music rather than words in order to influence the audience” (del Saz-Rubio and Pennock-Speck 2009, 2539), thus restating in practical terms that, in the so-called “era of multimodality,” semiotic modes other than language are treated not only as fully capable of representation, but also for communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 46).

When trying to answer the question of how meaning is constructed in TV commercials, linguistics places the focus on the very core of semiotics. Hence, Pennock-Speck and del Saz-Rubio take into consideration the semiotic modes which are involved in getting meaning across in TV commercials. However, they do not restrict themselves to following a fixed theoretical meaning-making model of intersemiosis such as Halliday’s (1978) hierarchical three-strata model of meaning construction, or the well-known non-hierarchical four-strata model developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), or even the model presented by O’Halloran, Tan and Marissa K.L.E. in chapter five of the book, developed for the multimodal description of advertisements.

On the contrary, in order to give room to all kinds of perspectives on the analysis of TV commercials, Pennock-Speck and del Saz-Rubio adopt a broad perspective on the interplaying semiotics, distinguishing three main modes which interact simultaneously in meaning-making in TV commercials: The “visual” (still and moving images); the “ear” (music, diegetic and extra-diegetic sound, and paralinguistic features of voice), which, according to Pennock-Speck and del Saz Rubio (2009), can be linked to features such as prestige; and the “structure” (lecture-type ads, montage or mini-dramas), which subsumes or informs the other levels, modes or strata. Considering the difficulties involved in the multimodal description of TV commercials, even from a comprehensive approach, the main questions that the editors set out to answer are whether it is possible to delve into each of the intersemiotically participating modes in the same amount of detail, and also whether it is possible to carry out analyses of ads on a large scale (14). The volume constitutes a positive answer to these questions.

Readers will find that the contents of this volume reflect both the inherent complexities, as well as the inspiring possibilities, involved in the multimodal analysis of advertising discourse. Although all the contributions deal with practical analyses of TV commercials, the theoretical frameworks employed are also sound and relevant, ranging from the above-mentioned model which O’Halloran, Tan and Marissa K.L.E. have developed for this specific type of communication situation, to the application of frameworks developed in other contexts, such as Fludernik’s narratology (chapter four), or Riggotti’s and Rocci’s application of argumentation theory and congruity theory (based on Austin’s and Searle’s Speech Act Theory) in chapter seven.

In chapter one, Llorca-Abad analyses nine Catalanian commercials from channel TV3 in order to identify a Catalanian advertising model. In chapter two, Andersen studies the use of irony in advertising, a feature typically linked to Danish culture (44), analysing one advertisement from Danish TV and concluding that it is the ironic function of the music in the ad which allows the advertisers to engage with a broader audience than if the music had been presented as a form of testimonial (57). In chapter three, the 2012 Peugeot car campaign “Motion and Emotion” is discussed by Bouvier and Machin, focusing on the role of sound and music for communicating ideas, attitudes and identities. In chapter four, Martínez Martínez, Kraljevic Mujic and Hidalgo-Downing analyse two hundred commercials from the British channel ITV2 to show how the closure plays a crucial role in the projection of the storyworld narrated as well as in the pragmatic creation of the persuasive function, which is typically constructed multimodally by simultaneously coordinating language, image and sound. In chapter five, O’Halloran, Tan and Marissa K.L.E. use their theoretical social-semiotic approach to the multimodal description of advertisements, which distinguishes three levels of meaning-making (denotative, connotative and mythological), to analyse one advertisement (“Dreams”) for the Republic of Singapore Air Force. In doing so they show how ad-hoc digital technology helps analysts obtain an integrated view of how these meanings are created multimodally. In chapter six, an ad for the Volkswagen New Beetle Cabriolet car from German TV is analysed

by Wahl. Although she considers all the modes interplaying in the advertisement, her analytical perspective focuses on the role that the music and the lyrics play in the overall construction of meaning. Rocci, Mazzati-Lurati and Pollaroli (chapter seven) emphasise the argumentative and dialogical nature of advertisements, as the argumentative superficial form is not “immediately transparent and explicit” (163). One advertisement for the Fiat Panda in Italian TV is analysed to illustrate how it “orchestrates arguments” (178) in order to persuade the viewer. Finally, in chapter eight, Hardin compares the slogans of Spanish commercials in three different countries, focusing on how “novelty” is reflected in slogans, concluding that its presence occurs in a highly conventionalised way, although with subtle differences in the meanings of the slogans with respect to the countries of origin.

The descriptions above show how, although there is a general emphasis on the need to analyse the relations which arise from the interaction of the semiotic choices made in each of the semiotic modes for the construction of meaning, this perspective which focuses on the intersemiosis of TV commercials, also gives room for analyses on the grammar of one specific semiotic mode (both chapters three and six focus on the “ear” mode, as realised in the commercials for two different cars). In addition, we also find analyses dealing particularly with one or more strata or “domains of practice” in which meanings are dominantly constructed (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). Chapter one deals with features related to the stratum of design, which Kress and van Leeuwen understand as the means to realise discourses in the context of a given communication situation, whereas the stratum of discourse is also accounted for by some of the contributions, when it is understood as socially constructed knowledge developed in a specific social context in a way which is appropriate to the interests of social actors in that context (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 4). In this sense, specific meanings present in TV commercials are identified and analysed, including (Catalonian) identity (chapter one), irony (in Danish culture, chapter two), persuasion (chapter four), and also the construction of novelty in chapter eight, where it is interesting to see how novelty is “translated” as a process of resemiotization (Iedema 2001) in three different cultural settings which share the same language (Chile, Spain and the US). To sum up, readers will find within this volume, practical examples of all the array of concerns of the analysis and description of TV commercials in a wide variety of languages and in different communication settings.

The studies collected will be of interest not only to linguists concerned with media discourse but also to people with a general interest in how advertising is produced. In this sense, the volume does indeed provide food for thought for a variety of potential readers, its most outstanding assets being the variety and number of languages and cultures involved, and the quantity of commercials analysed. However, a flaw is the uneven distribution of these examples, some of the studies dealing with only a single commercial or campaign (chapters two, three, five, six and seven), whereas others attempt far larger-scale analyses; chapter four, for example, focuses on 200 British TV adverts and chapter eight considers 723.

As Machin and Mayr claim, language is a form of social practice intertwined with how we act and how our societies are maintained and regulated in such a way that “language is part

of the way that people seek to promote particular views of the world and *naturalise* them, that is, make them appear natural and commonsensical” (2012, 2-3). This is especially true when TV commercials try to convince consumers that they have a problem that a specific product will solve, thus trying to elicit a certain response (buying the product) by creating a previously non-existent need. Discourse analysts seek to answer the question of how meaning is constructed so that this process of naturalisation takes place successfully. In this sense, readers will clearly find this volume helpful in interpreting “the complex semantic space which unfolds within and across multimodal phenomena” (O’Halloran 2011, 121), of which TV commercials are a good example, and which O’Halloran has identified as one of the major challenges in multimodal discourse analysis. The contribution of this volume to the analysis of advertising discourse is beyond question.

The importance of this volume lies in the variety and richness of the data presented (a total of 214 advertisements, as well as 723 commercials in 6 languages, broadcast in 10 countries from which 629 slogans have also been analysed), which constitutes a unique contribution to the multimodal discourse analysis of this area of enquiry. However, the variety of analyses, together with a lack of uniformity of the features analysed, the variety of languages and cultures involved, and the range of products advertised, are at the same time its main drawback. The mixture of perspectives adopted, albeit reflecting the fruitful potential of the area, also implies a lack of systematicity. Even though this is also the case in other similar collections which avoid sticking to a pre-categorisation of the object of analysis (i.e., Royce and Bowcher 2007), readers will find that the mosaic of analyses makes it difficult gather a holistic view of how the results contribute to multimodal discourse analysis. However, after this warning to readers to be ready to deal with a sequence of chapters which may seem disconnected, all the contributions will be of interest for those who are curious about the making and meaning making of TV commercials. Advertising discourse analysts in particular, especially those with intercultural or cross-cultural interests, will find extremely valuable information for contrastive multimodal analysis.

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Izaskun Elorza is Associate Professor in the Department of English Philology at the University of Salamanca (Spain). She is interested in and has published on discourse analysis, with an emphasis on the analysis of newspaper discourse and advertising discourse from a contrastive perspective. In the last years she has become particularly interested in the use and function of authorial voices in newspaper discourse in English and Spanish, especially in science popularization articles.

Address: Departamento de Filología Inglesa. Universidad de Salamanca. c/ Placentinos 18. 37007, Salamanca, Spain. Tel.: +34 923292500 Ext. 1752. Fax: +34 923294568.