



Theoretical frameworks in the study of
press advertisements

Polish, British and Chinese perspective

Adam Wojtaszek



University of Wrocław



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Katowice, ul. Mieszka I 15
wacek@oficynaww.pl

Projekt okładki:
Michał Motłoch, Gall Anonim and Adam Wojtaszek

Wydanie I

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	9
Abbreviations used in the text	11
Preface	13

Chapter One

Academic reflections on the phenomenon of advertising

1.1. Introduction	17
1.2. The scope of analysis	19
1.2.1. The medium	21
1.2.2. Analysts' favourites	25
1.2.2.1. Code-mixing in advertising	26
1.2.2.2. The wordplay in commercials	28
1.2.2.3. The application of gender stereotyping in advertisements	31
1.2.3. Dissecting advertisements	35
1.2.3.1. Illustrative elements: pictures, videos, music, sound effects	35
1.2.3.2. Slogans	37
1.2.3.3. Brand names	39
1.2.3.4. Disclaimers and disclosures	44
1.3. The input/output perspective	46
1.3.1. The content analysis	47
1.3.1.1. The size of the sample	48
1.3.1.2. The selection of focus	48
1.3.1.3. Aspects of bottom-up and top-down design	51
1.3.1.4. Exemplification of inductive content analysis	53
1.3.2. The processing and responses	55
1.3.2.1. The selection of the input material and the area of focus	56
1.3.2.2. The perspective of the subjects' responses	62
1.3.2.3. The participant characteristics	66
1.3.2.4. Summary	67

Chapter Two

Politeness Theory in the analysis of advertisements

2.1. Introduction	69
2.2. Brown and Levinson's model	70
2.3. Reflections on politeness, face and the applicability of the model	75
2.4. Modeling the selected aspects of face	78
2.5. Content-analysis-based illustration	80
2.6. The theoretical basis of the study design	87
2.6.1. The materials and the subjects	89
2.6.2. The questionnaire construction	90
2.7. The qualitative investigation	94
2.7.1. The Polish responses	94
2.7.2. The British responses	105
2.7.3. The Chinese responses	110
2.8. The survey-based intercultural comparison	115

Chapter Three

The new perspectives

3.1. Introduction	124
3.2. Salient meanings in advertisements	125
3.2.1. Graded Salience Hypothesis – an overview	125
3.2.2. Static and dynamic attributes of salience	129
3.2.3. Salience as the feature of linguistic and extra-linguistic units	138
3.2.3.1. The exploitation of font	139
3.2.3.2. Pictorial metonymy	146
3.2.3.3. Visualisations of idiomatic meanings	151
3.2.3.4. Visuals directing the interpretation	155
3.2.3.5. Summary	159
3.2.4. Optimal innovation in press advertisements	160
3.2.4.1. Study design and elicitation method	161
3.2.4.2. Gauging the level of innovativeness	162
3.2.4.3. Measuring the attractiveness of innovation	163
3.2.4.4. Discussion of the results	164
3.2.5. Salience in advertising: the new territory	167
3.3. Dynamic Nature of Context	172
3.3.1. Dynamic Model of Meaning – an overview	173
3.3.2. The perspective of the sender and the recipient	179
3.3.2.1. Reconstruction of the creative process	180
3.3.2.2. Predicting the viewers' reactions	185
3.3.2.3. Peculiarities of the low-involvement processing of commercial mes-	
sages	187

3.3.3. The role and components of context in advertising communication . .	191
3.3.3.1. Activation of multiple consenses	191
3.3.3.2. The Stratified Model of the actual situational context	197
3.3.3.3. Modelling the interpretation of advertisements	204
3.3.4. Expansion and extended application of the model	206
3.4. Summary	215
References	219

Appendix 1

Transcript of advertisements used in the study of face-work	239
The Polish advertisements	240
The British advertisements	246
The Chinese advertisements	250

Appendix 2

Investigation of the elements of face and face-work	255
The Polish questionnaire	256
The English questionnaire	257
The Chinese questionnaire	258

Appendix 3

Investigation of optimal innovation	259
Originality and innovation: Polish version	260
Originality and innovation: English version	261
Appreciation: Polish version	262
Appreciation: English version	263
Index of names	265
Subject index	271

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Although placed at the very beginning, this part of the book is usually the last to write. There are at least two very positive aspects of that. Firstly, it rounds up the whole work and gives me incredible satisfaction stemming from the fact that the task has been completed. Secondly, it offers me the chance to look back and reflect upon the contribution of all those important people whose kind presence and assistance have brought me to this point.

Although modesty and reticence are usually required under similar circumstances, I cannot help emphasising how enormous an achievement the completion of this book is for me. Only those who have already accomplished a similar task know exactly what I am talking about. It needs to be stressed in this context that in all my efforts I have been inspired and supported by many people, without whom this accomplishment would not be possible.

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Abbreviations used in the text

CI	– Collectivism Index (a culture-related variable)
CSCPs	– Culture-Specific Conceptual Properties (aspects of word meaning)
DMM	– Dynamic Model of Meaning
EAM	– Exhaustive Access Model (of meaning processing)
EEG	– Electroencephalography (a neuroimaging technique)
fMRI	– functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (a neuroimaging technique)
FTA	– Face Threatening Act
GSH	– Graded Salience Hypothesis
MEG	– Magnetoencephalography (a neuroimaging technique)
MP	– Model Person (in Politeness Theory)
NFC	– Need For Cognition (a cognitive variable)
OALDE	– Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of English
OAV	– Ordered Access View (of meaning processing)
OIH	– Optimal Innovation Hypothesis
PET	– Positron Emission Tomography (a neuroimaging technique)
RAM	– Reordered Access Model (of meaning processing)
SAM	– Selective Access Model (of meaning processing)
SST	– Steady State Topography (a neuroimaging technique)
UAI	– Uncertainty Avoidance Index (a culture-related variable)
WSSPs	– Word-Specific Semantic Properties (aspects of word meaning)

Preface

Science can be viewed as a peculiar transaction: in exchange for better understanding of the world we have to accept that whatever we describe is just an approximation and secondary rendition of the surrounding reality. Additionally, all those who attempt to focus their scientific attention on surrounding phenomena are aware of the fact that all acts of observation involve a certain amount of intrusion into the object of observation. The so-called observer effect has been postulated a long time ago and recognised by many scientific disciplines. A well-known example is the double-slit experiment in quantum physics in which a single photon is released to pass through a shield with two slits on its way to the screen. If there is no detector attached to the slits, the interference pattern is produced by the passing light, which is only possible when the signal behaves in a wave-like fashion, passing through both slits simultaneously. Placing the detectors at the slits results in the disappearance of the interference pattern, because the photon will physically interact with one of them on its way to the screen, exhibiting a particle-like behaviour. In such a situation, its continued path goes forward only from the slit where it was detected (Greene, 1999, pp. 97–109). This shows that the awareness of the observer effect has to be constantly at the back of our head, moderating the strength of our claims about whatever we study and describe.

The impossibility of truly objective (whatever it means) description of reality, echoing the philosophical disputes between believers of realism and those who profess idealism, does not question the sense of scientific inquiry, however. In a certain sense it is a factor contributing to even better quality of our descriptions and theories, as the acknowledgement of the secondary nature of our insights only reflects the true nature of relationships and interdependencies between the universe and the conscious observers who experience it. The quest for better and better theoretical accounts of the surrounding world is in itself a fascinating object of observation and reflection, often generating inspiration for novel conceptualisations and discoveries in the realm of phenomena which seem to be familiar and well described.

The initial inspiration for the present book came unexpectedly with one of articles which I found in one of the spring issues of *Journal of Pragmatics* in 2008. It was Istvan Kecskes's paper 'Duelling contexts: a dynamic model of meaning', which seemed to be just another interesting conceptualisation of the process of meaning encoding

and decoding. However, read in the context of my prior research and current interests, it turned out to be the necessary catalyst which initiated a chain reaction of inspirations and ideas, whose final product comes in the form of the present work.

For many years preceding the completion of this book I have been fascinated by and interested in the discourse of advertising. A large part of my research was devoted to this continuously evolving and changing, peculiar form of mass communication. Yet, there were certain aspects of the phenomenon which, although subconsciously perceived, escaped attempts at more systematic and reflective elaboration. Reading Kecskes's reflections on the nature of *context* and its role in different types of communication felt like putting on new glasses through which the blurred and indistinct script suddenly became decipherable. I have noticed the analytic potential of his conceptualisations and decided to apply it to the discourse of advertising.

About the same time I also came across the book by Rachel Giora *On our mind*, which provided yet another illuminating perspective and offered one more powerful descriptive tool. Her conceptualisation of *salience* seemed to offer a very useful framework for analysing both the content of advertising messages, as well as the responses which they evoked in the viewers.

Additionally, I have decided to return to the largely unexplored area of applying the theorems of *face* and *politeness* to the analysis of advertising communication, which I touched upon in Wojtaszek (2007a), with a view to expand it in future. In connection with the two above-mentioned frameworks, it seemed to constitute a promising and solid basis for new analytic insights.

At the same time, the question of material for analysis had to be addressed. The choice of press advertisements reflected my recent interest in this particular advertising medium, following the earlier focus on radio commercials, represented by my previous book *Deciphering Radio Commercials – A Pragmatic Perspective* (2002a). In terms of the contrastive range I have decided to follow the advice of Professor Janusz Arabski to incorporate the Chinese perspective into the project, which not only reflected the current trends in the development of global economy and politics, but also offered a very intriguing comparative angle.

The potentially disputable issue is the selection of the advertising discourse as the object of focus. Many publications have accumulated over the past years, dissecting and analysing multifarious aspects of this peculiar form of communication, so yet another book on advertising might seem unnecessary. In spite of the above, however, the choice seems to be well grounded for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the discourse of advertising is a continuously evolving phenomenon, breeding new forms and tendencies on almost daily basis. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that this object of study will ever be exhaustively described. There will always be something new to notice, inspect and account for. Additionally, given its complex nature, it invites insights from many different perspectives, rendering the investigation of advertising discourse a truly interdisciplinary venture.

Secondly, in spite of many efforts of deconstructing and exposing the persuasive and manipulative practices of the advertisers by crowds of critical commenta-

tors and theoreticians, the commercials still perform their roles around the whole world. And if certain tricks stop being effective, they are immediately replaced by new ones, creatively elaborated by never-weary advertisers. It is therefore fascinating how it is possible that in spite of changing times and fashions, in spite of the rising awareness of the consumers, even in spite of their frequently antagonistic attitude, the commercial messages are invariably successful in serving their main purpose. The above observation additionally points to how little we still know about the mechanisms of composition and interpretation of advertising discourse.

Finally, advertisements constitute a fascinating object of reflection not only for scientists investigating the phenomenon from different perspectives, but also for the general public, who treat them as a form of entertainment, a source of information and an interesting subject of conversations. That is why publications on the advertising discourse are usually very popular and inspire many young people in their choices of the topics for dissertations and theses, not only in strictly economic departments. The present book might prove useful, in this context, for many students of the discourse of advertising as a valuable source of information.

There are several aspects in which the present book is unique. First of all, it tests the analytic potential of theoretical concepts and constructs which have not yet been applied to the analysis of the advertising discourse, although such a possibility was envisaged by some of the authors (e.g. Giora, 2003). Secondly, it offers a comparative elaboration of advertising corpora from three different cultural backgrounds: Polish, British and Chinese; a combination which has not yet been, to the best of my knowledge, covered in literature. Finally, it is also heavily biased towards critical methodological reflection, exposing many aspects of making certain choices vis-à-vis the analytic perspective and material. It was possible thanks to the application of such a viewpoint to unmask and appreciate the contribution of the observer effect in the study of the advertising discourse. Especially in the context of application of the *Politeness* framework to the analysis of commercials the book has managed to demonstrate how big may be the impact of the way of viewing. The evaluation of the practicality, usefulness and common sense of such applications is left to the readers, who may disagree with the author in this respect.

The book unfolds in three stages. In the first chapter the contributions of particular types of selective focus applied in the study of advertisements are presented and critically evaluated. In particular, the impacts of choices pertaining to the object of the study, the preference for the approach (*bottom-up* versus *top-down*) and the alternatives implicit in opting for the content analysis or the investigation of responses were examined. The second chapter elaborates on an attempt to look at the advertising discourse from the perspective of *Politeness Theory*, as a peculiar forms of communication between the advertiser and the recipients. Following an extensive discussion of the applicability of the framework and the necessary methodological modifications, a two-step study is presented in which Polish, British and Chinese participants were reflectively commenting on a selection of press advertisements from three corresponding corpora. The subsequent comparative in-

vestigation of their responses allowed for identification of language- and culture-related idiosyncrasies. The third chapter, which is the most extensive, is divided into two major parts. The first one draws upon Giora's (2003) *Graded Salience Hypothesis* in proposing the constructs of *static* and *dynamic salience* which are subsequently used in the analysis of the corpora, followed by the investigation of *Optimal Innovation Hypothesis* applied to selected advertisements. In the second part of the third chapter, Kecskes's (2008) model is applied to the description of advertisements from Polish, British and Chinese newspapers and magazines. In particular, the notion of *context* is decomposed into several distinct sub-categories, conveniently summarising and explicating the contributions offered by each of them. The visualisation of the context takes the form of the *Stratified Model*, whose levels perform specific roles in the model of the process of interpretation of advertising messages, outlined in the final parts of the chapter. In connection with Giora's concepts, the constructs of *endo-* and *exo-links* of varying degrees of salience are suggested as useful descriptive tools in the analysis of advertisements. Throughout the whole book many methodological comments are offered, pertaining to the consequences of applications of the models under consideration.

It is my hope that in spite of applying a relatively wide range of viewpoints and illustrating a multitude of aspects the book is not excessively eclectic in its approach and that the leading theme of critical methodological reflection is sufficiently explicit throughout its contents. In elaborating on the elements of intercultural comparison I do not make any claims to the exhaustiveness of the conclusions, which were formulated on the basis of comments of relatively small groups inspired by a relatively small selection of advertisements. Nevertheless, it is arguably not incidental that my observations seem to find strong support in a much more extensive (in terms of scope) publications, such as Bogdanowska-Jakubowska (2010). Finally, I hope that the methodological suggestions and analytic constructs introduced in this book will prove illuminating and useful for many scholars fascinated, like myself, by the discourse of advertising.

Index of names

A

Ahn, Jungsun 40, 42
Alexander, M. Wayne 40, 58
Allan, David 36
Allan, Kenneth 32, 48
Allen, Graham 202
Aman, Reinhold 44
Ambler, Tim 63
Andersen, Robin 33
Andrews, J. Craig 45
Ang, Swee Hoon 40, 56, 58, 60, 61, 64, 65
Arabski, Janusz 9, 14
Ariel, Mira 127
Arima, Akie N. 32, 48
Arribas-Baño, Ascensión 37, 38, 49
Arundale, Robert 70
Asato, Noriko 79

B

Babitzkow, Matte 32, 48
Badzinski, Diane M. 58
Bakir, Aysen 45, 46
Bargiela-Chiappini, Francesca 70
Barron, Anne 24
Barsalou, Lawrence W. 173–175
Bates, Elizabeth 125, 127
Bator, Joanna 33, 34, 48
Baumgardner, Robert J. 26, 27, 38, 42, 50, 143
Bechtold, John I. 56, 63, 65
Beentjes, Hans 47, 49, 56, 61, 62
Belch, George E. 57, 58
Belch, Michael A. 58

Belk, Russell W. 49
Beltramini, Richard F. 28, 48, 49
Berkowitz, Ira 17
Best, Jo 25
Bhatia, Tej K. 26, 42, 48, 49, 143
Biardzka, Elżbieta 49
Bjerke, Rune 58
Blasko, Dawn G. 127
Blasko, Vincent J. 28, 48, 49
Bock, Michael 187
Bogdanowska-Jakubowska, Ewa 16, 77, 79, 117, 119, 123
Boltz, William G. 144
Bosman, Jan A. 56, 61, 62
Bradley, Samuel D. 63, 65
Braeutigam, Sven 63
Bralczyk, Jerzy 39, 49, 198
Bravo, Diana 70, 77–80, 90, 91, 115, 119
Bretl, Daniel J. 32, 48
Brown, Penelope 69–74, 76–82, 85, 88–92
Bruthiax, Paul 37
Buijzen, Moniek 66
Burgess, Curt 129

C

Cacioppo, John T. 29, 58, 67, 190
Cantor, Joanne 32, 48
Cap, Piotr 18
Carroll, John B. 129
Chan, Allan K. K. 43
Chandler, Daniel 202
Chang, Chingching 58
Chang, William Li 43

Chen, Cheryl Wei-Yu 10, 26, 27, 38, 50, 143
 Cheshire, Jenny 26, 38, 42, 48, 50, 51, 53, 143
 Cheung, Ming 24
 Childers, Terry L. 61, 63
 Chłodzińska, Ewa 66
 Chłopicki, Władysław 26, 28, 29, 42, 48, 143
 Cho, Chang-Hoan 58
 Clark, Herbert H. 176
 Cohen, Philip R. 176
 Coltrane, Scott 32, 48
 Comstock, George 33
 Connine, Cynthia M. 127
 Cook, Guy 18, 20, 21, 31, 39, 49, 139, 160, 186, 192, 198, 202
 Cooley, Delonia O. 58, 67
 Cooper, Elizabeth-Anne 127
 Courtney, Alice E. 33, 48
 Craighead, W. Edward 64
 Crijns, Rogier 26, 42
 Croft, William 173
 Crook, John 29, 131
 Cruse, D. Alan 178
 Culpeper, Jonathan 69
 Curran, Tim 127

D

Dascal, Marcelo 127
 Davies, Peter 129
 De Langhe, Bart 65
 DeRosia, Eric D. 58
 Diao, Fangfang 25, 37, 56, 62, 63
 Dickson, Peter R. 58
 Dimitratos, Pavlos 34, 48
 Djafarova, Elmira 28, 29, 160
 Doliński, Dariusz 49, 186, 198, 199
 Dowling, Grahame R. 49
 Dudley, Sid C. 58
 Durkheim, Émile 79
 Durkin, Kevin 33, 48
 Dwivedy, Ashish Kumar 33, 48
 Dybalska, Renata 49
 Dyer, Gillian 21, 31, 39, 160

E

Eagly, Alice H. 67
 Eastman, Carol M. 143
 Ehlich, Konrad 76, 77
 Elnatan, Idit 162, 165, 216
 Esteban, Gabriel 58
 Evans, Vyv 173–175
 Eves, Annemarie 49

F

Falkowski, Andrzej 49
 Fauconnier, Gilles 170, 173
 Fein, Ofer 129, 162, 165, 216
 Florczak, Jacek 139
 Fodor, Jerry A. 125
 Forceville, Charles 21, 31, 49, 58, 59, 65, 67, 139
 Foss, Mark A. 127
 Foxman, Ellen R. 44, 45
 Francis, W. Nelson 129
 Frazier, Lyn 138
 Frątczak-Rudnicka, Barbara 34
 Frey, Kurt P. 67
 Friedrich, James 65
 Friedrich, Patricia 26, 42, 50
 Fuertes-Olivera, Pedro A. 34, 37, 38, 49
 Fukada, Atsushi 79
 Furnham, Adrian 32, 33, 48

G

Gale, Harlow 17
 Gałkowski, Artur 39
 Ganahl, Dennis J. 32, 48
 Garcia, Eli 57, 65, 66
 Gee, James Paul 174, 175
 Geeraerts, Dirk 50, 51, 82, 84
 Geis, Michael L. 21, 36, 39
 Gelb, Betsy D. 56–58, 61, 65, 66
 Gentner, Dedre 61
 Gerritsen, Marinel 127
 Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr. 127
 Giedz, Teresa 47
 Gijsbers, Inge 27, 65, 143
 Gilbert, Daniel T. 65
 Giora, Rachel 14–16, 30, 124–130, 138, 160–162, 164–165, 168, 170, 172, 173, 212, 216

Goffman, Erving 32–34, 48, 76
 Goldenberg, Jacob 49, 159
 Goodrich, Kendall 62, 63, 79
 Gopaiakrishna, Pradeep 58
 Grazer, William F. 58, 63
 Greenbaum, Sidney 37
 Greene, Brian 13
 Grice, Herbert Paul 54, 70, 127
 Grinnell, J. D. 28, 39
 Grzenia, Jan 21
 Gu, Yueguo 78
 Gutiérrez-Arranz, Ana M. 58, 67
 Gutiérrez-Cillán, Jesús 58, 67

H

Haarmann, Harold 26, 143
 Hand, Chris 37
 Haque, Ahasanul 66
 Harich, Katrin R. 40, 41
 Harris, Richard Jackson 56, 63, 65
 Haugtvedt, Curt 67
 Heath, Robert 186, 189
 Heckler, Susan E. 58, 61, 63
 Henthorne, Tony L. 58
 Hermerén, Lars 26
 Hill, Beverly 78
 Hilliard, D. Vanessa 127
 Hinton, Leanne 29, 30, 56, 59, 60, 65
 Hintzman, Douglas L. 127
 Hoeken, Hans 29, 30, 56, 59, 60, 65
 Hofstede, Geert 57, 61, 66
 Hofstede, Gert-Jan 57
 Hogaboam, Thomas W. 127
 Holgerson, Barbro E. 57
 Holtgraves, Thomas 69
 Hong, Chan-pyo 58
 Hong, Weiyin 37
 Honomichl, Jack 17
 Hopkins, Claude C. 29
 Houston, Michael J. 61, 63
 Hoy, Mariea Grubbs 57
 Hsu, Jia-Ling 26
 Huang, Ming Hui 58
 Huang, Yue Yuan 43
 Huhmann, Bruce A. 66, 67
 Hurtz, Wilhelm 33, 48

I

Ide, Sachiko 70, 76–78
 Ignatowicz-Skowrońska, Jolanta 49
 Ikuta, Shoko 79
 Ismail, Hishamudin 66

J

Jackson, Sally 58, 63
 Jakobson, Roman 101, 104, 185
 Janiszewski, Chris 40, 64
 Jansz, Jeroen 40
 Jeong, Se-Hoon 58
 Johnson, Mark 127
 Jones, Lawrence E. 127
 Judd, Ben Jr. 40, 58
 Jurafsky, Daniel 129

K

Kabanoff, Boris 49
 Kamińska-Szmaj, Irena 39
 Kang, Mee-Eun 34, 48
 Kaplan, Oren 63
 Kardes, Frank R. 64, 67
 Karolczuk, Agnieszka 49
 Karson, Eric J. 58
 Katz, Albert 174
 Kawasaki, Akiko 79
 Kecskes, Istvan 13, 14, 16, 124, 128, 129, 138, 170, 172–180, 182, 184, 191, 192, 194, 196, 211, 214, 216
 Keesling, Garland 58, 63
 Kelly-Holmes, Helen 26, 48–50
 Kenning, Peter 63
 Ketelaar, Paul E. 47, 49, 56, 61, 62
 Khatibi, Ali 66
 Kim, Juran 24
 King, Karen Whitehill 67
 Kirshner, Harold 28
 Klassen, Michael L. 56, 65
 Klink, Richard R. 40, 41
 Kochan, Marek 39
 Kohli, Chiranjeev S. 40, 41
 Kolbe, Richard H. 45, 46
 Kopertowska, Danuta 49
 Koppman, Jerry 57
 Korgaonkar, Pradeep K. 58
 Korzilius, Hubert 27, 65, 143

Kotliński, Artur 22
 Kouts, Tiffany 33, 48
 Kristeva, Julia 202
 Kronrod, Ann 162, 165, 216
 Krzanowska, Agnieszka 39
 Kubiszyn-Mędrala, Zofia 49
 Kučera, Henry 129

L

La Ferle, Carrie 40, 42
 Lacznia, Russell N. 46
 Lagerwerf, Luuk 29, 39, 58, 60, 61, 65–67
 Lakoff, George 127
 Lakoff, Robin 69
 Lambiase, Jacqueline J. 58
 LaTour, Michael S. 58
 le Pair, Rob 58, 65, 67
 Lee, Yih Hwai 56, 58, 60, 61, 63, 65, 66, 210
 Leech, Geoffrey 18, 21–24, 31, 35, 37–39, 44, 49, 52, 59, 69, 70, 160, 192
 Leigh, James H. 29, 39, 49
 Leong, Siew Meng 56, 60, 61, 63, 65, 210
 Leuthesser, Lance 40, 41
 Levinson, Stephen 69–82, 85, 88, 92
 Lewicki, Andrzej Maria 39–49
 Lewiński, Piotr H. 21, 34, 39
 Licheński, Jakub Z. 49
 Lii Peirchyi 43
 Lim, Elison Ai Ching 40, 56, 58, 61, 63, 65
 Lim, Wee Khee 60
 Lin, Shengdong 43, 44
 Lindner, Katharina 33, 48
 Liu, Hua 127
 Lizak, Jadwiga 38, 39, 49
 Locher, Miriam A. 70
 Loewe, Iwona 49
 Loiacono, Eleanor T. 37
 Lord, Kenneth R. 58, 66, 67
 Lovdal, Lynn T. 32, 48
 Lubocha-Kruglik, Jolanta 49
 Lund, Kevin 129
 Lwin, May O. 45

M

MacWhinney, Brian 125

Maćkiewicz, Jolanta 49
 Madupu, Vivek 58, 67
 Majkowska, Grażyna 49
 Malaviya, Prashant 58
 Malone, Patrick S. 65
 Marks, Lawrence J. 37
 Martin, Elizabeth 26–28, 38, 42, 48, 50
 Mathioudaki, Kalliopi 34, 38
 Matsumoto, Yoshiko 79
 Mazursky, David 49, 159
 McArthur, Leslie Z. 31, 48
 McMillan, Sally J. 24
 McQuarrie, Edward F. 21, 22, 28, 36, 49, 56–60, 64, 65, 67, 99
 Meeds, Robert 63, 65
 Meijers, Anoe 58, 65–67
 Mervis, Carolyn B. 127
 Messairs, Paul 36
 Meyers-Levy, Joan 58
 Mick, David Glen 28, 49, 58, 67
 Miller, Darryl W. 37
 Miniard, Paul W. 58
 Mitchell, Nancy 58
 Mizelińska, Joanna 34
 Molek, Katarzyna 49
 Monk-Turner, Elizabeth 33, 48
 Moore, Patrick A. 44, 45
 Morgan, Fred W. 45
 Morgan, Jerry L. 58, 59, 65, 176
 Moser, Lise-Marie 26, 38, 42, 48, 50, 51, 53, 143
 Mott-Stenerson, Beth 66, 67
 Muehling, Darrel D. 44–46
 Munch, James 56, 58, 60, 62, 63, 67, 128
 Myers, Greg 39, 49, 160

N

Neijens, Peter 40
 Neill, W. Trammell 127
 Netzey, Sara Baker 32, 48
 Nichols, Johanna 41
 Nickerson, Catherine 26, 42
 Nield, Geoffrey E. 63

O

O'Barr, William M. 49
 O'Donnell, Karen J. 32, 48

O'Donnell, William J. 32, 48
 Ogino, Tsunao 79
 Ohala, John J. 41
 Ortony, Andrew 127
 Ożóg, Kazimierz 22

P

Palan, Kay M. 46
 Papasolomou, Ioanna 58
 Parris, Kevin 33
 Patnaik, Priyadarshi 33, 48
 Pawlowski, Donna R. 58
 Pechmann, Cornelia 58
 Peleg, Orna 129
 Percy, Larry 29
 Perfetti, Charles A. 127
 Peters, Oscar 40
 Petty, Richard E. 29, 58, 67, 190
 Phillips, Barbara J. 21, 22, 28, 36, 49, 56–60, 64, 65
 Piller, Ingrid 26, 27, 51
 Pitts, Robert E. 58
 Placencia, María Elena 79
 Plakoyiannaki, Emmanuella 34, 48
 Plassmann, Hilke 63
 Pollack Martha E. 176
 Powell, Tracy 127
 Prinsen, Thomas J. 32, 48
 Proctor, Stella 58
 Proctor, Tony 58
 Pstyga, Alicja 38
 Pstyga, Michał 38
 Puntoni, Stefano 65
 Putrevu, Sanjay 56, 57, 65–67

Q

Quirk, Randolph 28, 37

R

Redfern, Walter D. 28
 Reichert, Tom 57, 58, 65
 Reid, Leonard N. 67
 Resko, Beth G. 31, 48
 Richman, Barry 129
 Robinson, Helen 37
 Rohlinger, Deana A. 34, 48
 Rosch, Eleanor H. 127

Rosendahl, Tom 58
 Rosselli, Francine 33, 48
 Rossiter, John 29
 Rush, Susan 49, 169, 213
 Rutkiewicz-Hanczewska, Małgorzata 42

S

Samaniego-Fernández, Eva 37, 38, 49
 Sandier, Dennis 58
 SanJosé-Cabezudo, Rebeca 58, 67
 Schaller-Schwaner, Iris 26, 39
 Schmitt, Bernd 40, 41
 Schofield, Sandra 33
 Schröder, Kim 21, 28, 31, 39, 49, 160
 Scollon, Ron 70
 Scollon, Suzanne Wong 70
 Severn, Jessica 58
 Sheldon, Esther K. 28
 Shuval, Noa 162, 165, 216
 Silberstein, Richard B. 63
 Simpson, Paul 47
 Skowronek, Katarzyna 49
 Smit, Edith 40, 65, 198
 Smith, Paul 65
 Snook-Luther, David C. 58
 Sobocińska, Magdalena 22
 Soh, Hyeonjin 67
 Solomon, Sorin 49, 159
 Speelman, Dirk 50, 51, 82, 84, 199
 Spencer-Oatey, Helen 70
 Sperber, Dan 127
 Staaren, Marianne 26, 42
 Stankiewicz, Julie M. 33, 48
 Stayman, Douglas M. 64, 67
 Stein, Roberta F. 143
 Stoltman, Jeffrey J. 45
 Strauss, Susan 50, 51
 Sturm, Ruth E. 56, 65
 Suar, Damodar 33, 48
 Sun, Shu-nv 26, 89
 Sundar, S. Shyam 25, 37, 56, 62, 63
 Sutherland, Max 29, 131
 Svartvik, Jan 37
 Sylvester, Alice K. 29, 131
 Szyszko, Urszula 39

Ś

Świątek, Jerzy 28, 38, 39, 42, 48, 49, 143

T

Tafarodi, Romin W. 65

Takahashi, Kyoko 26, 50

Tam, Kar Yan 37

Tan, Joni 60, 66

Tan, Soo Juan 67

Tanaka, Keiko 21, 28, 49, 160

Tao, Qiuju 43, 44

Taylor, Nolan J. 37

Terkourafi, Marina 70

Thomson, Louise 33, 48

Thong, James Y. 37

Tjernlund, Anders 33, 48

Tom, Gail 49

Toncar, Mark 56, 58, 60, 62, 63, 67

Trusty, Michael L. 63–65

Turner, Mark 43, 48, 170, 173

U

Uguccioni, Smerelda 32, 48

Ustinova, Irina P. 26, 27, 42

V

Valkenburg, Patti M. 66

van Enschoot-van Dijk, Renske 29, 30, 56, 60

van Gijsel, Sofie 50, 51, 82, 84, 199

van Gisbergen, Marnix S. 47, 49, 56, 61, 62

van Hooft, Andreu 26, 42

van Meurs, Frank 27, 65, 143

van Mulken, Margot 29, 30, 56, 58, 60, 65, 67

van Noort, Guda 40

van Osselaer, Stijn M. J. 65

van Reijmersdal, Eva A. 40

Velasco-Sacristán, Marisol 33, 37, 39, 49

Vestergaard, Torben 21, 28, 31, 39, 49, 160

Violi, Patrizia 174, 175

von Rack, Wilfried 187

Vondruska, Richard J. 127

W

Wang, Hongyuan 144

Wang, Qinling 43, 44

Wasilewska, Monika 32, 34, 48

Wasilewski, Jacek 66

Wasinger, Louise 63–65

Watson, Richard T. 37

Watts, Richard J. 70, 75–77

Webb, Cynthia 33, 48

Weiner, Irving B. 64

Werkhofer, Konrad T. 76, 81

Whipple, Thomas W. 33, 48

White, Roderick 186

Wierzbicka, Anna 79

Wiles, Charles R. 33, 48

Wiles, Judith A. 33, 48

Wilkes-Gibbs, Deanna 176

Wilson, Deirdre 127

Wojtaszek, Adam 14, 21, 24, 26, 27, 33, 34, 36, 37–39, 42, 45, 48–50, 52, 53, 63, 64, 66, 80–84, 86, 87, 93, 99, 115, 122, 131, 160, 167, 186, 187, 198, 199, 206, 208, 213

Wolff, Phillip 127

Woon, Wee Lee 144

Wulfeck, Beverly 127

Wyrwas, Katarzyna 49

Wysocka, Anna 37

X

Xue, Fei 48, 49

Y

Yang, Kenneth C. C. 57, 65, 66, 149, 159

Yigang, Pan 40, 41

Z

Zabawa, Marcin 26, 42, 50

Zhang, Yong 56–58, 61, 65, 66

Zhao, Xin 49

Zhou, Peiqin 48, 49

Zhou, Shuhua 48, 49

Zimny, Rafał 34, 39

Zinczuk, Magdalena 66

Zotos, Yorgos 34, 48

Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 161

Zur, Adi 162, 165, 216

Ż

Żurowski, Sebastian 38, 39

譚

譚卫国 112

Subject index

A

ADTRUST scale 67

advertisement(s) (form)

billboard 22, 23, 39

Internet 24, 37, 39, 45, 62, 63, 130

leaflet 21, 46, 86

press 9, 14, 22, 23, 28, 33, 35, 39, 45, 48, 60, 61, 89, 92, 104, 117, 130, 131, 139, 155, 158–160, 168, 169, 184, 186–188, 190, 194–196, 198, 199, 204, 205, 210, 214, 215, 217, 257

print 27, 32, 33, 40, 45

radio 14, 21, 23, 27, 33–37, 39, 46, 49, 50, 53, 80, 81, 85, 86, 143, 158, 190, 194, 202, 208

television 21, 23, 25, 27, 31–33, 35–37, 39, 40, 45, 49, 50, 53, 66, 81, 86, 92, 142, 152, 158, 186, 190, 194, 200, 202

advertiser(s) 14, 15, 22, 24–30, 34, 36, 45–47, 50, 52, 58, 59, 61, 67, 73, 77, 80–93, 95–104, 107–113, 115–122, 134, 138, 141, 143, 148, 152, 155, 157, 164, 167, 171, 179–188, 190–192, 194, 198, 199, 201, 206, 208, 209, 213, 215–217, 257, 258

advertising

audience 20, 23, 25, 29, 34, 35, 40, 45–47, 51, 60, 66, 80–85, 87, 88, 90, 92, 93, 101, 102, 105, 108, 110, 111, 115, 117, 119, 185, 190, 216, 217

campaign 24, 29, 30, 81, 130, 142, 143, 148, 158, 190, 191, 201, 202, 204, 205, 245

claims 46, 62–64

communication 14, 20, 38, 46, 47, 76, 77, 81, 82, 88, 117, 121, 130, 172, 191, 192, 216–218

copy 22, 27, 45, 139, 202, 204, 218

corpus/corpora 9, 10, 15, 16, 47–49, 80, 81, 85, 86, 89, 92, 99, 110, 130–132, 134, 136–138, 144, 146–149, 152, 155, 157, 159–161, 164, 187, 192, 202, 208, 215

discourse (of) 14–16, 18–21, 26–29, 37, 38, 49, 51, 53, 55, 69, 70, 72, 73, 76, 77, 80, 82, 87, 88, 110, 124, 129, 139, 160, 166, 167, 172, 173, 175, 179, 182, 185, 191, 192, 194, 198, 209, 212, 213, 215, 218

effectiveness 17, 24, 37, 63

Internet, *see* advertisement(s), Internet

leaflet, *see* advertisement(s), leaflet

outdoor 17, 22

press, *see* advertisement(s), press

radio, *see* advertisement(s), radio

strategy 29–31, 38, 46, 53–55, 58, 59, 61, 62, 65, 72–74, 84–87, 97–99, 107, 110, 113, 117, 118, 136–138, 142, 144, 145, 148, 149, 151, 154, 180, 182, 185, 190, 207, 208, 215, 216

television, *see* advertisement(s), television

affiliation (aspect of face) 78, 79, 89, 91–93, 100, 102, 103, 105, 115–119

affiliation (advertiser- or recipient-oriented) 92, 93, 102, 103, 113, 115–119

ambiguity 28, 52, 60, 67, 135, 142

Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) 67

- appreciation of advertisements 29, 30, 41, 56, 60, 65, 91, 95, 98, 110, 111, 141, 158, 159, 161, 162, 164, 166, 170, 187, 201, 202, 209, 218, 262, 263
 artful deviation 59, 187
 autonomy (aspect of face) 78, 79, 89, 91, 92, 98, 99, 105, 115–121
 Autonomy Face, *see* face, autonomy
 autonomy (advertiser- or recipient-oriented) 92, 98, 115–121
 axiological aspects 49
- B**
- backgrounding 112, 118
 banners 25, 37, 62
 billboard 22, 23, 39, 202
 body copy 22, 23, 35, 36, 44, 54, 96–99, 100, 106, 107, 135–137, 141, 157, 189, 194, 195, 207, 211, 240–254
 borrowings, *see* code-mixing
 bottom-up 5, 15, 38, 51–55, 68, 75, 80, 87, 88, 115, 126, 128, 179, 192, 193, 198, 218
 brain imaging 63
 brand name 36, 39–44, 63
 construction 41
 liking 40, 61
 recall 40, 61
 translation 44
 brand 24, 40, 51, 57, 63, 84, 96, 100, 103, 131, 160
 attitude(s) 41
 awareness 25
 meaning 41
 naming 40
 placement 40
 recall 40
- C**
- central route (to persuasion) 58, 190
 code-mixing 26–28, 38, 39, 50–52, 143
 cognitive profile (of participants) 59
 Collectivism 61, 66
 commercial break 46, 81
 compounding pattern 43
 conative function (of language) 185
 conceptual system 55, 171–173
 connotation 26, 50, 75, 178, 182, 184, 185, 191, 194, 209
 connotative 41, 192
 consense 177–180, 184, 186, 191–196, 201, 206–210, 214–217
 constituents (elements of ad processing) 195, 197, 206, 207, 210, 216
 content analysis (of commercials) 15, 31, 47, 48, 50, 53, 67, 68, 80, 81, 83, 85, 88, 89, 124, 130, 168, 180, 217
 context effects 125
 context 14, 16, 20, 30, 31, 33, 35, 36, 40, 42, 50, 52–54, 58, 70, 73, 74, 76, 77, 79, 81, 85, 88, 90–92, 94, 98, 101, 103, 104, 108, 109, 115, 117–121, 123, 125–128, 132, 139, 141, 147, 151, 155, 159–162, 165, 166, 168
 actual situational 171–174, 176, 177, 181, 185, 187, 188, 191, 192, 195–198, 205, 206, 208, 214, 215
 private 174–177, 179, 182, 185, 191, 196, 198, 209
 public 174
 contextual embedding 60, 160, 166, 171–173, 180, 182, 184, 198
 contextual information 125, 126, 128
 contextual matching (top-down) 128
 contextualisation 52, 98
 copywriter 22, 26, 41, 49, 82, 139, 209
 coresense 177–180, 184, 186, 192, 193, 207, 211–214
 creative link 182
 cultural background (of participants) 15, 66, 76, 79–81, 198
 Cultural Face Model 116
 Culture-Specific Conceptual Properties (CSCPs) 177–179, 196, 201
- D**
- deductive
 analysis 55
 approach 18, 53
 perspective 51
 reasoning 93
 deictic items 38, 135
 deixis 49, 199

denotation 41, 144, 167, 177, 178, 184, 192
 denotational consense 192
 denotative value 37
 diachronic analysis (perspective) 33, 47, 49, 129, 135, 177, 179, 184
 dialectic view (of comprehension system) 173, 174, 207
 direct address, *see* primary address
 direct mail 21
 direct marketing 24
 disclaimers 22, 23, 36, 44–46, 64, 107, 112, 118, 240–242, 248, 249, 251
 disclosure
 informational 44–46
 insertion 46
 presentation 45
 restrictive 46
 disclosures, *see* disclaimers
 disjunctive style 37
 Dynamic Model of Meaning 13, 124, 172–177, 179, 196, 214, 216, 217

E

Elaboration Likelihood Model 58
 elicited recall 64, 65
 emphatics 38
 endo-link(s) 16, 207, 208, 211, 216
 endophoric markers 37
 endorsement (commercial format) 110, 113, 199
 ethnic identity (of participants) 66
 evidentials 37
 Exhaustive Access Model (EAM) 125
 exo-link(s) 16, 208–210, 214
 experimental design 56
 experimental setting 56, 62
 exposure conditions 58, 62
 exposure time 22, 25, 62, 121, 186
 externalist view (of meaning) 173, 174
 extra-linguistic elements 31, 37, 138, 139, 214

F

face
 autonomy 79, 116, 119
 emic 75, 77, 81, 122

enhancement 81, 92, 107, 119, 138, 208
 first-order 75, 76, 81, 122, 123
 folk notion of 75, 77
 individual dimension 79, 116
 interactional 70, 71, 73, 175
 loss 90, 106, 113, 130, 147, 218
 maintenance 75, 113, 115, 117
 negative 71, 76, 78–81, 83, 85–93, 115, 117, 118, 120, 121
 positive 71, 78, 79, 83, 84, 91, 92, 99, 115–117, 119, 122
 preservation, *see* face, saving
 redress 72, 73, 85
 relational 70, 117, 173
 saving 76, 89
 second-order 70, 75, 77, 79, 122
 social dimension 116, 117
 solidarity 79, 117, 119
 threat 71–75, 77, 90, 116
 threat mitigation 75
 Face Threatening Act (FTA) 71–73
 face-wants 81, 82, 87, 118
 Federal Trade Commission 45
 flattery (advertising strategy) 85, 95, 108, 109, 111, 113, 119
 font size 22, 45, 139
 foregrounding 38, 39, 54, 98, 217

G

garden path (mechanism) 54, 138
 gaze 62, 168
 gender roles 31–35, 48, 52, 53
 gender stereotyping 31–35
 genre-borrowing 49, 54, 208
 Graded Salience Hypothesis 16, 124–129, 141, 168, 174, 215
 grammaticalisation 178

H

headline 22, 35, 37–39, 49, 60
 hearer-processing 196
 hedges 38, 85
 homographs 28
 homonyms 28
 homophones, *see* homophonous (items)

homophonous (items) 113, 166, 194, 208, 251

hypothesis testing 54

I

ideograms 144

ideophonic terms 50

idiom 60, 61, 128, 129, 151–154, 177, 195, 207, 208, 210, 215, 216

compositionality 61

familiarity 61

literality 61

illustration(s) 35, 36, 139, 150, 155, 156, 160, 195–197, 210

graphic 20

musical 36, 39, 54

pictorial 23, 196, 209

visual 23

illustrative elements 28, 32, 35–37, 159, 161, 180, 194, 195, 200, 205, 217

implied claims, *see* indirect claims

indirect address, *see* secondary address

indirect claims 64

inductive

analysis 38, 90

approach 18

reasoning 52–55, 80

study 218

inferential system 173

information processing 37, 55, 58, 59, 65, 67, 127, 186

in-group identity markers 85

innovative links 192

intake 45, 46, 62, 211

interactionist view (of language processing) 125, 126

interactive goals 75

inter-label processing 179

internalist view (of meaning) 175

internationalism(s) 26, 28

Internet commercial(s), *see* advertisement(s), Internet

interpersonal metadiscourse 38

interscorer reliability 131

intertextuality 37, 202

intra-label processing 187–191

involvement 57, 60, 62, 66, 67, 85, 186, 187, 189

high 57, 60

low 57, 60, 186, 187, 189

L

layout 40, 95, 101, 105, 114, 197, 200, 205

lexical access 125, 126, 178

lexical ambiguity 28

lexical information 128

lexical processes (bottom-up) 126–128, 192, 193, 198

lexical units as the creators of the present context 159, 179, 192

lexical units as the repository of prior contexts 174, 175

lexicalisation 179, 198, 201, 211

linguistic deviation(s) 38, 39

linguistic innovation 22, 37

linguistic sign 157, 170, 195

linguistic system 170, 171, 173, 195

links (elements of ad processing) 16, 159, 160, 171, 172, 180, 182, 185, 191, 192, 195, 201, 205–211, 214, 216

logo 23, 180, 182, 184, 203, 248–250, 254

logographic characters, *see* logographs

logographs 41–43, 210

long-term memory 63

Low Involvement Processing 186, 187, 189

low-involvement setting 60

M

macro-textual analysis 31

magazine advertisement(s), *see* advertisement(s), press

mean score 162–164, 167

meaning

coresense-based 192, 193, 207

decoding 14, 30, 82, 124, 171, 172, 198

encoding 13, 38, 41, 42, 111, 198

propositional 20, 213

situated 175, 179, 184, 186, 192, 200

meaning-prompting system 173

metadiscourse 37, 38

metadiscursive elements 37

metadiscursive function 38

metaphor 19, 22, 40, 49, 58–60, 139, 140,
150–153, 155, 184, 190, 195
 abstract 59
 concrete 59
 incongruous 59
metonymic link 150
metonymy 146–148, 150, 215
mini-drama 36, 50, 86
modality 45, 49
Model Person (MP) 71, 81, 84, 115
modular view (of language processing)
 125, 126
multiple consenses 191, 195, 207, 209,
 214, 217
musical background, *see* illustration(s),
 musical

N

natural exposure 62
Need For Cognition (NFC) 57, 67
neologism(s) 41, 135, 153, 161, 166, 194,
 201

O

observer effects 13, 15, 214
optimal innovation 160, 161, 165, 168,
 169, 215, 259, 260, 262
Optimal Innovation Hypothesis 16, 160,
 216
Ordered Access View (OAV) 125
orienting response 37, 62

P

paradigmatic relation 192
paralanguage 20
parallel consenses, *see* multiple consenses
participant characteristics 66, 67
participant roles 38, 81
participant-dependent variables 67
peripheral route (to persuasion) 58, 190
person markers 38
persuasive function 23, 27, 32, 36, 38, 44,
 45, 60, 93, 101, 104, 131, 138, 155, 185,
 190, 209, 211, 215
persuasive strategy 31
pharmaconyms 42
phatic function (of language) 104

phonetic similarity 166, 181
phonotactic constraints 41, 42
pictograms 144
pictorial elements, *see* illustration(s), pic-
 torial
pictorial metonymy 146, 147, 215
pictorial neologism 153
politeness
 first-order 75, 76, 81, 122, 123
 negative 72, 73, 86, 120, 121
 positive 72, 73, 91, 120
 relativity of 75
 ritualistic 75
 second-order 75, 77, 79, 122
 strategy 72–74, 84–87

Politeness

 framework 15, 38, 87, 124, 130
 Theory (of) 15, 69, 70, 80, 82, 124, 217
polysemous items 28, 129
pop-ups 25, 37, 62, 104
primary address 24, 55, 85, 118, 119, 191
primary announcer, *see* primary partici-
 pant(s)
primary participant(s) 24, 55, 118, 119,
 191
prime-time 36, 46
prosodic features, *see* prosody
prosody 211
puns, *see* wordplay

Q

qualitative
 analysis 20, 94–114, 168
 approach 55, 87, 218
 investigation, *see* qualitative, analysis
 study, *see* qualitative, analysis
quantitative
 analysis 50
 approach 55, 87, 168
 investigation, *see* quantitative, analysis
 study, *see* quantitative, analysis

R

radicals (elements of Chinese characters)
 210
radio commercial(s), *see* advertisement(s),
 radio

reaction times 168, 211
 reading time technique 164
 referential function (of language) 127, 184, 185
 referential consense 192
 relational view (of comprehension system) 173
 Reordered Access Model (RAM) 125
 rhetoric 85, 118
 rhetorical figures 49
 role stereotype(s) 33
 role-play (commercial format) 24, 86

S

salience 14, 52, 54, 125, 127–131, 134–136, 138, 140, 152, 153, 157, 159–161, 164, 167, 168, 170–172, 174, 180, 184, 185, 188, 191, 201, 202, 207, 208, 211–218
 collective 129, 130, 174
 dynamic 16
 diachronically 129, 135
 synchronically 130, 134, 138, 208, 215
 individual 130, 174
 perceptual 40
 static 16, 129
 symbolic 143
 visual 38, 168, 210
 secondary address 23, 24, 55, 112, 118, 119
 secondary participant(s) 24, 52, 95, 101, 103, 112, 158
 Selective Access Model (SAM) 125
 semantic field 43, 195
 semantic links 41
 semantic load 40, 159
 semantic pattern 43
 sense relations 41
 sex object(s), (men or women as) 33, 34
 sex role attribution 48
 sex roles, *see* gender, roles
 sex stereotyping, *see* gender, stereotyping
 signature line 22, 27, 35, 135, 240–254
signifiant, *see* signifier
signifié, *see* signified
 signified (component of linguistic sign) 157, 170, 185, 206
 signifier (component of linguistic sign) 37, 170, 185, 206
 simplified script (Chinese) 145
 Situation-Bound Utterances 128, 177, 211
 slogan 20, 22, 23, 30, 37–40, 49, 52, 56, 60, 61, 64, 83, 96, 97, 99, 105–108, 110, 113, 114, 125, 131, 133–137, 140, 142–147, 150–158, 161, 163, 166–169, 171, 180, 181, 183, 186, 189–191, 193–195, 204, 207, 208, 210, 211, 240–254
 slogo 153, 154, 249
 Solidarity Face, *see* face, solidarity
 sound effect(s) 20, 23, 35, 36
 sound symbolism 41
 spam 21, 24
 speaker-processing 179
 standard deviation 162–164, 167
 standing details 22, 35, 52, 54, 101, 188, 189, 239–254
 stereotype(s) 19, 27, 32–35, 190, 191
 stereotyping 32–35
 Stratified Model 16, 197, 216, 217
 the atmosphere 108, 197, 198, 205
 the core 197, 198
 the flesh 194, 197, 198
 the skin 197, 198, 205
 style shifting 50
 syllable pattern 43
 synaesthetic metaphor 118
 synaesthetic presentation 50
 synchronic analysis (perspective) 129, 208
 synecdoche 150, 156
 syntagmatic relation 192, 207

T

telegraphic (language) 20, 37
 television commercial(s), *see* advertisement(s), television
 templates 49, 159
 testimony (commercial format) 86, 199
 textual metadiscourse 38
 Tolerance Of Ambiguity, *see* Ambiguity Tolerance (AT)

tone pattern 43
top-down 15, 51, 52, 55, 68, 75, 80, 87,
88, 90, 115, 124, 128, 179
traditional script (Chinese) 146
tropes 22, 28, 60
TV commercial(s), *see* advertisement(s),
television
type size, *see* font size

U

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) 57,
61, 66

V

viewing conditions, *see* exposure condi-
tions
visual field 63

visualisation (of meaning) 16, 118, 151,
152, 154, 155, 197

W

wordplay 22, 28–31, 52, 56, 60, 105, 110,
137, 141, 192, 208, 217
Word-Specific Semantic Properties
(WSSPs) 177–179, 196, 201, 211

Adam Wojtaszek

Modele teoretyczne w badaniach nad reklamą prasową w odniesieniu do reklam polskich, angielskich oraz chińskich

Streszczenie

Książka stanowi próbę poszerzenia metodologii badań nad reklamami prasowymi poprzez wypracowanie nowych modeli analizy tego szczególnego typu tekstów oraz wykazanie ich zasadności i przydatności w oparciu o obszerny korpus przykładów zaczerpnięty z prasy polskiej, brytyjskiej i chińskiej. Praca podzielona jest na trzy rozdziały, z których pierwszy stanowi wprowadzenie teoretyczne oraz przegląd badań nad dyskursem reklamowym, natomiast dwa następne najpierw omawiają i poszerzają wybrane modele teoretyczne, a w dalszej części demonstrują ich wykorzystanie w badaniach o charakterze analitycznym oraz empirycznym.

Rozdział pierwszy zawiera przegląd bogatej literatury przedmiotu, siłą rzeczy ograniczony do opracowań zorientowanych językoznawczo. Dwa główne podrozdziały wydzielone zostały ze względu na dwie istotne kwestie metodologiczne: po pierwsze, jaki aspekt dyskursu reklamowego został wybrany przez autorów opracowań jako główny motyw badawczy, i po drugie, czy badanie koncentrowało się na analizie samych reklam, czy też na ich przyjęciu i ocenie przez odbiorców. I tak w pierwszym ze wspomnianych podrozdziałów przewijają się motywy medium reklamowego, zastosowania zapożyczeń w reklamie, wykorzystania gry słownej i wieloznaczności, stereotypowego przedstawiania świata w reklamie, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli kobiet, oraz analizy podstawowych elementów składowych reklam, takich jak slogan, ilustracje wizualne i dźwiękowe, nazwy firm i produktów oraz informacje zamieszczane „drobnym drukiem”. Drugi podrozdział przedstawia najpierw omówienie ważnych aspektów decyzji metodologicznych istotnych dla badań wpisujących się w trend analizy zawartości, dotyczących kwestii takich jak rozmiar korpusu badawczego, zakres badania oraz indukcyjny bądź dedukcyjny jego charakter, a następnie skupia się na studiach reakcji odbiorców komunikatów reklamowych, porządkując je pod względem wyboru i opracowania przedstawianych respondentom próbek, typu badanej reakcji, oraz doboru i charakterystyki samych osób uczestniczących w badaniach.

Rozdział drugi stanowi próbę zastosowania teorii grzeczności, a ściślej rzecz biorąc modelu teoretycznego autorstwa Brown i Levinsona (1987), do analizy dyskursu reklamowego. Na wstępie przedstawione są główne założenia modelu, następnie jego krytyka

i modyfikacje powstałe na przestrzeni lat po ogłoszeniu teorii, potem następują uwagi metodologiczne pozwalające na przystosowanie modelu do opisu dyskursu reklamowego, i wreszcie w ostatniej części zamieszczony został opis badania przeprowadzonego na grupie respondentów z Polski, Wielkiej Brytanii i Chin. Jego celem było z jednej strony uchwycenie reakcji odbiorców na strategie uprzejmościowe stosowane przez reklamodawców, a z drugiej strony identyfikacja podstawowych różnic kulturowych występujących pomiędzy trzema wspomnianymi grupami narodowo-kulturowymi na poziomie kodowania relacji pomiędzy nadawcą i odbiorcą komunikatu reklamowego.

Trzeci rozdział odwołuje się do nowszych modeli dekodowania znaczenia w komunikacji językowej: Hipotezy Stopniowalnej Wyrazistości [*Graded Salience Hypothesis*] (Giora, 2003) oraz Dynamicznego Modelu Znaczenia [*Dynamic Model of Meaning*] (Kecskes, 2008). Obydwa główne podrozdziały mają podobną strukturę: najpierw przedstawiane są podstawowe założenia danego modelu, następnie wyodrębniane są i odpowiednio modyfikowane te elementy, które są najbardziej istotne z punktu widzenia badań nad dyskursem reklamowym, a w końcu wypracowane dzięki temu narzędzia analizy stosowane są w badaniach nad wybranymi aspektami komunikatów reklamowych oraz ich odbioru przez respondentów. We wszystkich badaniach wykorzystywany jest, całkowicie lub częściowo, ten sam korpus reklam prasowych pochodzących z polskich, brytyjskich i chińskich czasopism, liczący odpowiednio 300, 300 oraz 200 reklam. Wiele z nich zamieszczonych jest w książce jako materiał ilustracyjny, uzupełniając tabele, schematy i wykresy sporządzone przez autora. Dodatkowo zamieszczone zostały w pracy załączniki, zawierające transkrypt wykorzystywanych w badaniach reklam oraz formularze ankiet.

Adam Wojtaszek

Theoretische Modelle bei Untersuchungen von Pressewerbung am Beispiel polnischer, englischer und chinesischer Werbebotschaften

Zusammenfassung

In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird ein Versuch unternommen, neue Modelle für Analyse von Pressewerbung als besonderen Texttyp auszuarbeiten, und zwar auf der Grundlage aktuell vorhandener jedoch hier erweiterter Untersuchungsmodelle. Es sollen darüber hinaus Zweckmäßigkeit und praktischer Wert dieser Modelle bei Analyse von Werbetexten an umfangreichen Beispielen aus polnischer, britischer und chinesischer Presse gezeigt werden.

Die Arbeit besteht aus drei Teilen. Im ersten wird der aktuelle Forschungsstand im Bereich des Werbediskurses präsentiert. In zwei folgenden werden ausgewählte theoretische Modelle erörtert und erweitert, dabei wird gleichzeitig auf ihre praktischen Einsatzmöglichkeiten bei empirischen und analytischen Untersuchungen hingewiesen.

Im ersten Kapitel finden wir umfangreichen Überblick über aktuelle Werbeforschungen, die jedoch auf sprachwissenschaftliches Gebiet begrenzt werden. Zwei Hauptunterkapitel sind den wesentlichen methodologischen Aspekten gewidmet, d.h. erstens dem Problem, was für Bereich des Werbediskurses durch Autoren dieser Veröffentlichungen als Hauptmotiv der Untersuchung gewählt wird, und zweitens der Frage, ob diese Untersuchung allein auf Analyse der Werbung, oder vielleicht auf Analyse ihrer Wahrnehmung und Auswertung bei Empfängern konzentriert wird. Somit werden im ersten von den oben genannten Unterkapiteln folgende Aspekte erörtert: Motive des Werbemediums, Entlehnungen in der Werbung, Verwendung der Sprachspiele und ihre Mehrdeutigkeit, stereotype Welt Darstellung in der Werbung, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Frauenrolle, bzw. Analyse von Hauptbestandteilen der Werbung, wie z.B. Slogan, visuelle und akustische Illustrationen, Firmen- und Produktname, so wie beigefügte Informationen, die mit Kleindruck geschrieben werden. Im zweiten Unterkapitel werden erstens relevante Aspekte methodologischer Entschlüsse dargestellt, die einen wesentlichen Beitrag für Untersuchung der Trends bei Inhaltsanalyse leisten. Sie beziehen sich auf solche Problembereiche, wie Menge des Untersuchungsmaterials, Umfang des Forschungsgebiets, sowie sein induktiver bzw. deduktiver Charakter. Weiterhin wird in diesem Unterkapitel Analyse menschlicher Reaktionen beim Empfang von Werbebotschaften geschildert. Diese werden entsprechend geordnet, je nach Auswahl und Be-

arbeitung der für die Befragten vorbereiteten Probeprodukte, nach untersuchter Reaktionsart, sowie nach Auswahl und Auslese der Befragten selbst.

Im zweiten Kapitel wird versucht, die Höflichkeitstheorie anzuwenden, und genauer gesagt das theoretische Modell für Analyse vom Werbediskurs von Brown und Levinson (1987). Zunächst werden Grundsätze dieses Modells vorgestellt, dann folgt seine Kritik und Modifizierungen, die im Laufe der Jahre nach seiner Bekanntmachung entwickelt wurden. Weiterhin findet man methodologische Kommentare, die erlauben das Modell der Beschreibung vom Werbediskurs anzupassen. Im letzten Teil wird die Untersuchung geschildert, die an Befragten aus Polen, Großbritannien und China durchgeführt wird. Mit dieser Untersuchung wird beabsichtigt, Reaktion der Empfänger auf Höflichkeitsformeln zu prüfen, die Autoren der Werbebotschaften angewendet haben, sowie Identifizierung grundsätzlicher Kulturunterschiede, die zwischen den drei oben genannten Nations- und Kulturgruppen beim Kodieren von Relationen Sender und Empfänger der Werbebotschaften auftreten.

Das dritte Kapitel ist den neuesten Modellen vom Bedeutungsdekodieren in der Sprachkommunikation gewidmet, und zwar: der Hypothese für graduellen Ausdruck [*Graded Salience Hypothesis*] (Giora, 2003) und dem dynamischen Bedeutungsmodell [*Dynamic Model of Meaning*] (Kecskes, 2008). Beide Unterkapitel sind ähnlich aufgebaut: zunächst werden Grundsätze jeweiligen Modells geschildert, folglich werden entsprechend Faktoren unterschieden und modifiziert, die aus Perspektive der Forschung am Werbediskurs am wichtigsten sind. Auf dieser Grundlage werden Analysemittel ausgearbeitet, die bei Untersuchung von ausgewählten Aspekten der Werbebotschaften, sowie ihrem Empfang bei Befragten angewendet werden.

Bei allen durchgeführten Untersuchungen wird dasselbe Werbematerial entweder im ganzen oder nur zum Teilen eingesetzt, das polnischen, britischen und chinesischen Zeitschriften entnommen wird, und zwar insgesamt sind es entsprechend 300, 300 und 200 Werbebotschaften. Vieles davon wird in der vorliegenden Arbeit als Beispiele präsentiert, die als Ergänzung für Tabellen, Schemata und Diagramme des Autors gelten. Der Arbeit wird zusätzlich ein Anhang beigelegt, in dem Transkription der in Untersuchungen eingesetzter Werbebotschaften und Umfrageformulars zu finden sind.