

Cognitiv Analysis of Some Clothing Brands

Djalilova Zarnigor Bakhodirovna

Associate professor of English linguistics department, PhD
Bukhara State University, z.b.djalilova@buxdu.uz

Sevindikova Sabohat Kuchkorovna

Master student of BSU

Abstract:

This paper looks at how meanings are created in advertising using cognitive linguistics theory. The research looks at the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, frame semantics and semantic network analysis and how this can be used to analyze advertising from the campaigns from Zara, Puma and Under Armour who use CLOTHING IS IDENTITY, SUCCESS IS SPEED and WILLPOWER IS FORCE respectively. Research concludes that advertisements use the systematic mapping between an abstract concept and a concrete one in order to simplify and make easily understand such concepts as identity, success and willpower. Using minimalistic design and commonly understood frames, advertising works on restructuring a given semantic network to focus on the given concept of clothing, speed and force. It is argued in this paper that it is not simply how meaning is imparted, it is also how that meaning affects how the individual conceptualises themselves and their world. Advertising is not only a method for conveying meaning but is also a crucial tool in its conceptualization and construction.

Keywords: advertisements, conceptual metaphors, frames, semantic network, domain.

Introduction

In today's society, advertising has expanded beyond just product promotion, so it plays a vital role in shaping our identity and our perception of the world. Today's advertisements rely not just on visually stimulating imagery or persuasive rhetoric, but on cognitive principles to create and interpret meaning. Within cognitive linguistics, meaning is not derived from words and images alone but through thought processes rooted in human experience [1].

A framework to understand this process is Conceptual Metaphor Theory, where abstract notions are apprehended through more concrete, embodied concepts. Based on the work of scholars such as

Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors do not merely describe; they create thought patterns, influencing how we think, reason, and act. Advertisers take these metaphors and make complex ideas like identity, success, and willpower readily comprehensible [2].

Frame semantics and semantic network theory supplement conceptual metaphors. Frame semantics suggests that interpretation is affected by our background knowledge and cultural schemas, whereas semantic networks establish links between concepts, aiding access to complex meanings. Together, these approaches demonstrate how ads manipulate our thought processes.

This study analyzes how advertisements create meaning through conceptual metaphors, frames, and semantic networks. Through analyzing Zara, Puma, and Under Armour advertisements, this paper demonstrates how ads don't just reflect the world; they modify the way we conceptualize our own identities, accomplishments, and capacity for agency [3]. .

Methodology

The foundation of this study is in cognitive linguistics, a school of thought that understands language as being closely linked to human thought, and meaning as grounded in embodied experience. A major theory that supports this premise is Conceptual Metaphor Theory, proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980, where abstract concepts are mapped onto concrete ones to be phenomenon. Kövecses demonstrated the pervasive use of culturally specific metaphors across discourse and media, including advertising.

Another significant element of this theory is frame semantics, or the idea that interpretation relies on knowledge structures, called frames, which define how concepts are defined, and the roles, relations and expectations associated with these frames. Advertisers manipulate frames such as “fashion” which consists of expectations on clothing and personal appearance, to influence perceptions. [4]

Semantic network theory offers a complementary view of knowledge, representing concepts as nodes with associative links that, when activated, lead to the retrieval of related meanings. Aitchison explained that this is what happens in the case of advertising, when words or images prompt the activation of complex associations that promote memorability and persuasiveness. Numerous studies show that metaphors are widely utilized to shape consumption, where abstract concepts like SUCCESS IS SPEED, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, and POWER IS FORCE allow ads to present their products through experiences valued in society such as achievement, identity, and control. [5]

Moreover, the other research findings in studies of the advertising use of conceptual metaphors reveal that metaphor is used as both a cognitive and an appeal strategy to influence audience interpretation and emotion. In their research on conceptual metaphor in advertising discourse between Chinese and Western cultures, Dongyan Li and Qingfeng Guo state that conceptual metaphor is beneficial to advertising effect, on the one hand, it increases efficiency on terms of innovativeness, brevity and generating meaning as well as taking culture into consideration, on the other hand it represents the differences of Chinese and Western cognitive and socio-cultural backgrounds. The writers maintain that metaphorical expressions allow advertisers to transform abstract notions into concrete ones, in this way to generate memorable emotions with consumers. Zihan Duan, Yue Liu, Yuhan Lin and Jun Hou also conducted research on cognitive linguistics of multimodal metaphor in advertising and case study on automobile advertisement. According to their research findings, the use of multimodal metaphor, by a combination of visual, language and auditory information in advertisements for automobiles influences the cognition and emotion of consumers and the communicative efficacy of advertising through various senses and audience understanding. The studies suggest that conceptual and multimodal metaphors are instrumental in advertising discourse by stimulating memorability, emotional attachment and effective communication. [6]

This paper, however, seeks to provide a multi-layered view by demonstrating how conceptual metaphors interlink with frame semantics and semantic networks in advertising discourse, ultimately influencing individual conceptualizations of success, identity, and self-efficacy.

Results and Discussion

ZARA advertisement

The minimalist advertisement style of Zara can serve as a prime example of how meaning is made via discourse, through the application of conceptual metaphor. Zara advertisements typically display models in a neutral state, without a detailed background, with sober colors, and with no specific story. From discourse perspective, the minimalism cannot be incidental, but the context is a strategic reduction of noise which focuses the meaning in only one semiotic means: clothes. [7]

In terms of conceptual metaphor theory, the metaphor that rules these ads can be conceptualized as: CLOTHING IS IDENTITY. The Table 1. function of this metaphor is to help the viewer make sense of an abstract and complex concept, like identity, through a concrete and perceptually grounded source domain, clothing. In cognitive terms this constitutes a systematic mapping of information from two domains:

Table 1. Source and target domains in ZARA advertisement

Source domain (clothing)	Target domain (identity)
<i>Personal appearance</i>	<i>Personality</i>
<i>Clothing style</i>	<i>Social role</i>
<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Self-expression</i>
<i>Color</i>	<i>Self-image</i>

As given in the Table 1 the mapping works by transferring structure from one domain to another. For instance, just like the attribute of clothing can be *chosen, changed, combined, or displayed*, while the attribute of identity is implicitly interpreted as something that can be *constructed, modified, and presented* in public. This reinforces a socially held cognitive model where identity is not fixed, but performative, and can be displayed through one's look. [8]

In terms of frame semantics, In Zara's minimalist campaigns, meaning is mainly built through a fashion frame, which is the mental structure people use to understand clothing in everyday life. This frame includes simple roles like the person wearing the clothes, the clothes themselves, and the viewer who interprets what is being seen, along with shared cultural ideas that clothing expresses style, taste, and social meaning. In these advertisements, the fashion frame becomes especially strong because everything else is reduced because there is no story, no emotional expression, and no detailed background. Therefore, the viewer's attention naturally focuses on the clothes. As a result, people interpret the model mainly through what they are wearing rather than through personality or situation. The clothes become the key element that carries meaning, and the viewer starts to associate clothing directly with how a person is seen and understood in society. [9]

In addition, meaning construction Table 2. could also be described by a nodes within a semantic network: concepts are linked with others through semantic links in form of nodes. Normally, the node identity is positioned in the central network and is linked strongly with nodes like *personality, emotions, memories, social relations* providing an internal, and social understanding of the self. [10]

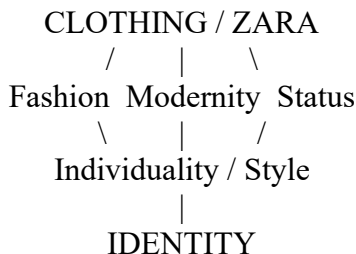


Figure 1. Nodes of semantic network.

However, as described in the Table 2 in Zara’s advertisement context, such nodes pattern has been re-structured. The node clothing (Zara products) moved to the center, and formed strongly associative links with nodes like *fashion, modernness, success, individual style, art*. The nodes of emotions, autobiography, social relations which used to be in the center, are then either weakly connected with other nodes, or pushed away to the edge of the semantic network. Through repeated presentation of this new semantic framework, the node of clothing starts to be the major entrance toward node of identity for human cognitive system. So Zara’s advertisement is not just reflecting a pre-existing meaning network, but actively altering and establishing the relation between the nodes and setting up the priority, enabling human subjects conceptualize identity as primarily through clothing [11].

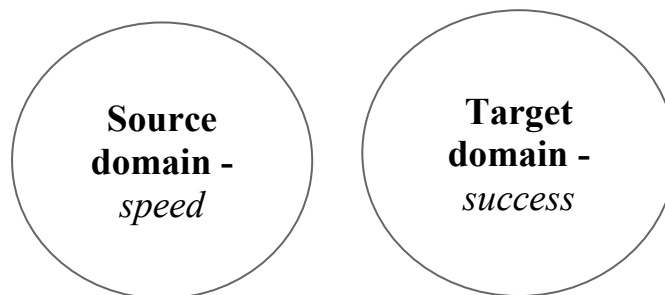


Figure 2. Source and target domains of PUMA advertisement.

Moreover, this is also considered a discursive operation because the meaning is not intrinsic to the image alone, but a result of interaction between minimalism in advertising and the cognitive background knowledge of fashion and social models. The advertisement is participating in a broader societal discourse which tends to construct identity through fashion as the predominant vehicle of visual self-expression. By emphasizing clothing as the primary signifier, Zara’s ads convey a message about clothing as something that can be worn, viewed and thus inscribed in one’s identity.

Finally, the conceptual metaphor CLOTHING IS IDENTITY does not only apply to individual cognition but also affects our wider discourse and understanding of self and others. The minimalist advertising of Zara brings clothing into prominence as a central component in meaning construction, influencing how viewers make sense of identity through its display on their own bodies and on the body of the models on the magazine and screen displays. [12]

PUMA advertisement. The Table 3. Puma slogan “Forever Faster” is a key example of a conceptual metaphor SUCCESS IS SPEED, in which an abstract and complex concept such as success is structured using a more concrete and embodied source domain of physical motion. Conceptual Metaphor Theory states that abstract target domains are understood systematically through mappings from a concrete source domain, grounded in bodily experience

In this slogan source domain involves speed representing motion, acceleration and outpacing opponents, and the target domain involves success representing achievement, dominance and competitive victory. Through this cross-domain mapping, properties from the source domain (physical motion and speed) are mapped onto the target domain (success, achievement, competitive superiority), and therefore fast motion equates to achieving goals efficiently and outrunning competitors implies dominance. This Table 4. metaphor is underpinned by a competition or race frame where people are seen as competitors on a path toward a goal or finish line, and speed is the deciding factor for victory. Success under this frame is not a fixed, end state, but a fluid, continuous process driven by movement and comparison with other individuals.[13]

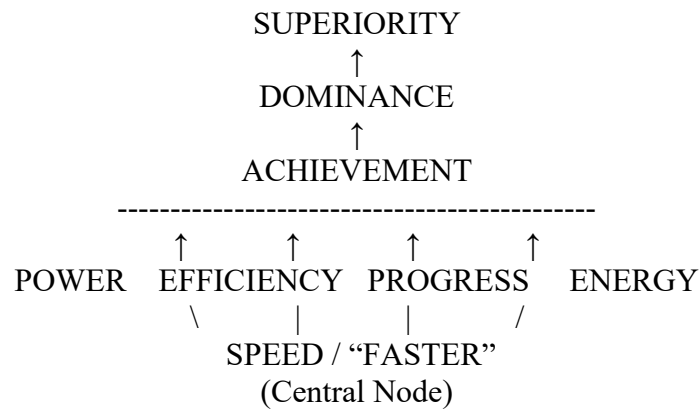


Figure 3. Nodes of semantic network in the conceptual metaphor “SUCCESS IS SPEED”

On a semantic network level, meaning is organized by connections between nodes. Speed is the central node, linked to other semantic nodes such as “power”, “efficiency”, “progress” and “energy”. These intermediate nodes are in turn linked to more abstract nodes such as “superiority”, “dominance”, and “achievement”, creating a hierarchical web of meaning. When the slogan is consumed, the activation spreads from “faster” along this network, providing an access point to all the related meanings associated with speed, and allowing a simple lexeme to invoke a complex network of conceptual knowledge. This metaphor is more than just linguistic, it is also cognitive.

On a discursive perspective, the slogan also works ideologically, because the phrase “forever faster” implies continuity and permanence. It suggests that the competition has no beginning or end and that people need to be continuously accelerating to maintain superiority and victory. In the advertising context, Puma becomes a symbol of non-stop progress, movement and dominance, as well as sportswear. The consumer is thus subtly invited to experience this mapping themselves by wearing Puma clothes, allowing them to embody speed and, consequently, success. In this way, the slogan draws on deeply embedded cognitive mechanisms in an advertising context, linking speed and success, and reinforcing the widely held belief that life, and specifically achievement, is a continuous race. [14]

Under Armour advertisement. The table 5. advertisement campaign of Under Armour “I Will What I Want” can be understood effectively through the frame of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of cognitive linguistics and central to this discourse is the conceptual metaphor WILLPOWER IS FORCE, which structures the formation of meaning. Instead of viewing willpower as an abstract psychological state residing in the mind of the agent, it is conceptualized as a force acting on the world which exerts pressure and has tangible effects.

Table 2. Source and target domains of Under Armour advertisement.

Source domain (physical force)	Target domain (willpower)
<i>Energy exertion</i>	<i>Mental effort</i>
<i>Resistance</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
<i>Directionality (moving forward)</i>	<i>Goals</i>
<i>Impact or effect on other objects</i>	<i>Achievement</i>

This conceptualization is explained from the perspective of cognitive linguists, through a systematic mapping of concepts between two domains, the source and target domains. As shown in the table, in this metaphor, physical force domain that is characterized by such features as resistance, effort, motion and impact is mapped to willpower domain, while mental effort is understood as physical effort and resistance is seen as another opposing force that must be overcome to achieve a

goal. Therefore, willpower is something that individuals actively use to alter and influence their environment and make them strong and resilient against any form of resistance.

As an illustration of such mapping, willpower which is associated with concepts such as motivation or discipline in the normal semantic network, acquires stronger associations and links to words such as *strength, energy, power, and control*, which in turn elicit even higher-level abstractions in semantic networks, such as *success, independence, and self-actualization*. Through this spreading of activation, the slogan effectively and persuasively makes connections to culturally significant concepts.

In addition to that, force dynamics framework plays an important role in conceptualizing the discourse, as in it the human being is conceptualized as the center of force application. Within the framework, “I” stands as the protagonist, or the actor force of will, and challenges and obstacles represent the antagonists, the opposing forces. Hence the campaign essentially conveys a message that the power of ‘human beings’ willpower is superior to all oppositions and constraints.

From discourse perspective, the slogan works by representing values such as individual agency, self-determination, and empowerment and at the same time, it clearly connects these values with the brand itself. The product is not directly illustrated as a source of power, but it possesses an indirect link with the expression of willpower as force. As a result, beside just promoting sportswear, the advertisement constructs a conceptual model of identity in which the consumer is positioned as strong, autonomous, and capable of overcoming limitations.

Overall, the campaign depicts how conceptual metaphors function within discourse to shape meaning beyond the level of individual words. With the interaction of domain mappings, frames, and semantic networks, “I Will What I Want” alters willpower into a dynamic, force-like entity, allowing audiences to experience determination as something concrete, embodied, and powerful. [15]

Conclusion and Recommendations

The data illustrates that advertisement discourse is not just about the enactment of already existing meanings, but about constructing the cognitive models that form our perceptions of reality. Each case has successfully conceptualized something quite abstract (human life and its related concepts) through concrete embodied terms. Conceptual metaphors are a crucial element used to do so.

Identity in Zara ad is constructed through minimalism where the attire takes up most of the semiotic resources and no narrative and emotional context is provided. Thus the advertisement relies on culturally shared values about fashion, thus reifying the notion of identity as something external which can be constructed and displayed. Reduction in discourse can thus be seen to have increased its potency. Success in Puma’s tagline “Forever Faster” is framed through the metaphor of movement, a constantly moving competitive process rather than a final achievement. This taps into the ideologies about life in modern day where one is considered to be worthwhile and important if one keeps on doing and achieving, speed and progression become synonymous with personal value. Similarly in Under Armour’s campaign, will power is conceptualized as an act of physical force, this empowers the person and he feels in control, able to overcome the resistance. In turns, the brand becomes indirectly linked to this concept of personal strength and control, it becomes incorporated into the cognitive framework of the individual.

All these advertisements clearly demonstrate how they not only work at linguistic/visual level but a deeply cognitive level, reshaping people’s perceptions of identity, success and agency by imposing new meanings by reorganizing existing ones.

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