Dos and don’ts in pictorial and multimodal consumer information: Visual rhetoric and/vs. cognitive semantics

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1. Introduction

Research on pictorial elements in consumer information

• focus on highly persuasive genres like advertising (cf. e.g. Jeong 2008, Stöckl 2009)
• few accounts of material that aims at providing factual information (cf. e.g. McComiskey 2004)
1. Introduction

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Background and basics – Material and theories
   – The material and its properties: What assembly instructions and warning symbols have in common
   – The theories and some of their main tenets: Visual rhetoric vs. cognitive semantics
3. Applying the frameworks – Analysis of some examples
   – General issues
   – Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes
4. Conclusion
2. Background and basics: Material

Assembly instructions and warning symbols: Properties of the material

• Primary function: vital information about products and the dos and don’ts connected to them
2. Background and basics: Material

Assembly instructions and warning symbols: Properties of the material

• Primary function: vital information about products and the dos and don’ts connected to them
2. Background and basics: Material

**Assembly instructions and warning symbols: Properties of the material**

- **Primary function:** vital information about products and the dos and don’ts connected to them
- **Information conveyed:** exclusively or predominantly by way of largely standardized visuals

![Warning symbols](image)
2. Background and basics: Material

Assembly instructions and warning symbols: Properties of the material

• Which means are used to ascertain a smooth understanding?
• Which principles underlie the pictorial elements?
• Why are sometimes linguistic elements interspersed?
2. Background and basics: Theories

Visual rhetoric: Some basics

  - rhetoric as “symbolic action” (Olson 2007: 1)
  - symbols not only in language, but also in many other systems (e.g. mathematics, music, sculpture, painting)

- *Symbol* as central notion
  - an instance of visual rhetoric must be symbolic in the sense that “the relationship [...] between image and referent is arbitrary” (Foss 2005: 145).
Visual rhetoric: Some basics

  - communicative artifacts
  - scholarly perspective:
    - the nature of the communicative artifact
    - its function for an audience
    - its evaluation
Visual rhetoric: Some basics

• Visual rhetoric and multimodality?
  – e.g. interaction of verbal and visual elements in comics (cf. e.g. Turner 1977) or poems (cf. e.g. Cao & Chen 2014)

2. Background and basics: Theories

Visual rhetoric: Some basics

• Visual rhetoric and multimodality?
  – e.g. interaction of verbal and visual elements in comics (cf. e.g. Turner 1977) or poems (cf. e.g. Cao & Chen 2014)
  – interaction between verbal and visual elements in any kind of written/printed text: “verbal text is a kind of visual” (Amare & Manning 2007: 58)

Same text – different ways of presentation (Amare & Manning 2007: 59, 61, 64)
Cognitive semantics: Some basics

• focus on language, but only as a source of information regarding the mechanisms of cognition

• thinking motivates language, but also other ways of expression
  – e.g. semantic overlap between speech and gestures (cf. e.g. Müller&Cienki 2008) \(\Rightarrow\) multimodality as norm
  – application of theories to language-picture interaction (cf. e.g. Lundmark 2005) or sculptures (cf. e.g. Coulson& Oakley 2003)
2. Background and basics: Theories

Cognitive semantics: Some basics

• key interest: identification of motivation underlying the expressions
• broad conception of motivation: pragmatic, sociolinguistic and cognitive factors (cf. e.g. Radden & Panther 2004; Ungerer 1991)

⇒ motivation as omnipresent:

“It is easier to learn something that is motivated than something that is arbitrary. It is also easier to remember and use motivated knowledge than arbitrary knowledge”. (Lakoff 1987: 346; original emphasis)
2. Background and basics: Theories

**Visual rhetoric and vs. cognitive semantics: Interim summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual rhetoric</th>
<th>Cognitive semantics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>focus on pictorial, graphic elements</td>
<td>focus on language (as a mirror of cognition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no exclusion of other modes of expression</td>
<td>keen interest in other modes of expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainly arbitrary signs</td>
<td>mainly motivated signs</td>
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3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• frequency of metonymy
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• frequency of metonymy

FACIAL EXPRESSION FOR EMOTION CAUSING IT

Photo removed due to copyright
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• frequency of metonymy

QUESTION MARK FOR PROBLEM

Photo removed due to copyright
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• frequency of metonymy

HAMMER FOR ANY TOOL
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• frequency of metonymy
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

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• frequency of metonymy
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

**General issues**

- motivated character of pictorial elements representing concrete situations/objects
  - iconic character of many objects: e.g. person, hammer, telephone, house, etc.
  - many conventional metonymies: e.g. MEMBER FOR CATEGORY (hammer), INSTITUTION FOR PEOPLE, PRINCIPAL PART FOR WHOLE (telephone), etc.

→ issues for cognitive semantics
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• relations between motivated and arbitrary elements:
  – e.g. relevance of question mark for CAUSE-RESULT metonymy: arbitrary character for sentence type?

Photo removed due to copyright
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• relations between motivated and more arbitrary elements:
  — e.g. crossing outs
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• tendencies regarding a division of labour between cognitive semantics and visual rhetoric
  – situations and behaviours mostly represented by motivated elements
    ➔ cognitive semantics
  – attitude towards situations and behaviours (i.e. distinction between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’) represented by more arbitrary elements
    ➔ visual rhetoric
  • not only the presence of a ‘negation’ symbol is significant, but also its absence

wrong: marked situation

right: unmarked situation
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• tendencies regarding a division of labour between cognitive semantics and visual rhetoric: more examples
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• processing difficulties can arise regarding both parts

wrong: marked situation: ✔

visual rhetoric: standardized ‘negation’ symbol, easy to process

TYPICAL (?) MEMBERS FOR CATEGORY:
- sun: ✔
- furnace: ✔
- TV set: ???

cognitive semantics: potential problems regarding identification of relevant category
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

General issues

• processing difficulties can arise regarding both parts

→ visual rhetoric:
  standardized, easy-to-process ‘negation;
  BUT: potential problems regarding identification of dog

→ cognitive semantics:
  typical members, easy to process

wrong:
marked situation: ✔

correct rendering of:
girl: ✔
animal: ???

TYPICAL MEMBERS FOR CATEGORIES:
girl: ✔
dog: ✔
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

- variations in the concrete rendering of symbols

vs.

[Diagram of symbols]
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

• ‘no alcohol during pregnancy’: official version vs. real-life examples

Original version of pictogram proposed by French government (source: wikimedia)

Photos removed due to copyright

Some international traffic signs (source: www.bildwoerterbuch.pons.com)
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

- ‘no alcohol during pregnancy’: official version vs. real-life examples

Original version of pictogram proposed by French government (source: wikimedia) vs.

Contextualized version on wine bottle: Colours and framing

Photo removed due to copyright
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

• ‘no alcohol during pregnancy’: official version vs. real-life examples

Original version (source: wikimedia) vs. Contextualized versions: Colours and framing
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

• ‘gluten free’: playing with basic shapes

Label for gluten free foodstuff primarily used in German-speaking countries (source: wikipedia)
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

**Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes**

- ‘gluten free’: playing with basic shapes

![Diagram](image)
Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

- playing with basic shapes
  - visual rhetoric: cf. esp. literature on technical communication (e.g. Allen 1996, Amare & Manning 2007)
  - cognitive semantics: cf. recent work
    - e.g. Pérez Hernández (2014): “role of image schemas in the design of international bands”; “effectiveness of subtle variants of the same visual cues” (2014: 204f)
    - cognitive linguists (e.g. Pérez Hernández 2014, Koller 2009) often partly rely on work belonging to visual rhetoric (e.g. van Leeuwen 2006; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Phillips & McQuarrie 2004)

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<tr>
<td>ASDFÑLJKJ</td>
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(Pérez Hernández 2014: 232)
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

- ‘gluten free’: shape variations + a challenging metonymy
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

• ‘gluten free’: shape variations + a challenging metonymy

TYPICAL SHAPE FOR SOME MEMBERS OF THE CATEGORY SHARING IT:
SOME MEMBERS OF THE CATEGORY FOR SUBSTANCE THEY CONTAIN
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

• ‘gluten free’: shape variations + a challenging metonymy ➔ necessity of linguistic cue

Photo removed due to copyright
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

**Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes**

- ‘gluten free’: shape variations + a challenging metonymy ➔ necessity of linguistic cue: audience-/company-dependent
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

• ‘gluten free’: shape variations + a challenging metonymy ➔ necessity of linguistic cue: audience-/company-dependent
3. Applying the frameworks: Examples

Further features: Context, colours, concrete shapes

• ‘gluten free’: shape variations + a challenging metonymy ➔ necessity of linguistic cue: audience-/company-dependent
4. Conclusion

Summary of the findings

- full explanation of all features of the material often presupposes a combination of visual rhetoric and cognitive semantics
- some common interests of the two theories (e.g. framing)
- cognitive semantics:
  - recent work incorporates findings from visual rhetoric (cf. e.g. PérezHernández 2014, Koller 2009, Pinar Sanz 2013)
- visual rhetoric:
  - especially metaphor has found its way into its repertoire (cf. e.g. McQuarrie&Mick 1999)
  - less striking features (e.g. metonymic and image-schematic patterns) still often underestimated
Thank you!
References


References: Figures

*Barefoot Cabernet Sauvignon* bottle, back label (details).
BILLY Assembly instructions (details), Inter IKEA Systems B.V., 2006.
*BioveganKaramellParadies Pudding*, packaging (front and detail).
International traffic signs (http://www.bildwoerterbuch.pons.com; 01.09.2014)
Label for alcoholic beverages as proposed by the French Interministerial campaign for the fight against drugs and addiction
Label for gluten free foodstuffs used primarily in German-speaking countries
*Lorenz Naturals*, packaging (front, back, and details).
*Naturata Bio Reisnudeln*, packaging (back label and detail).
*NoillyPrat* bottle, back label (detail).
*Ramazzotti* bottle, back label (detail).
Warning signs (details) taken from leaflet accompanying candles, Depot GmbH (according to European Norm 15494 of 2007).