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## METAPHORS IN COPYWRITING

### Abstract

This paper explores the creating, functioning and decoding processes of metaphor in copywriting and discusses the results based on the emotional background of a decoder. In addition, the significance of creative work, conceptual and linguistic bases of metaphor are examined, and the emphasis is placed on the background knowledge and a mood of a decoder. Moreover, the significance of how the intended message is formed and delivered to the decoder is discussed. The data-based analysis and survey as well as the comparative method were used to analyse the findings of the research.

The goals of the paper are as follows:

1. To show the importance of metaphor for creative thinking and creative work and to demonstrate the function and significance of metaphor in copywriting.
2. To reveal the building process of intention in metaphor and define the difference between a metaphor and other stylistic or cognitive figures of speech.
3. To define the significance of educational, cultural and emotional background knowledge of the target audience in the process of decoding metaphor.

The empirical data of this paper embrace the relevant examples from social networking sites.

**Keywords:** *metaphor, creative work, copywriting, decoder's background knowledge.*

### 1. Introduction

The theoretical basis for this paper combines the linguistic and marketing (copywriting) approaches to identify the function of metaphor. Consequently, the overall aim of this paper is to observe the creative and interpretation process of metaphor in copywriting. The findings of the study are analysed using the methods of data-based analysis, survey, and critical analysis. The survey was done through Facebook. A specially designed questionnaire and examples (brought from social media copies created by the author for a restaurant and an art gallery), were used as the empirical data of the study.

In the 21st century, creative thinking is becoming an essential part of life. Innovative thinking, problem-solving and critical thinking skills have gained vital importance for an individual (Ola W. A. Gafour, Walid A. S. Gafour & May 2020). Creativity does not belong to specific fields such as art, literature etc. Rather, it occupies a big space in a daily round; more specifically, in the field of marketing. Therefore, there are two so-called ‘members’ of modern creative society: those who create and others who perceive the created product and make conclusions accordingly.

Creativity might be defined as a problem-solving skill, observing a given problem from different perspectives and trying to deal with the tasks individually (Sternberg and Lubart, 1996). Creativity may seem to model something authentic. However, it is always connected to the previous thought or experience. Therefore, the creating process involves making parallels with the previous knowledge, thought or experience, as well as interpreting them to build up an authentic product (Bessis, 1973).

Torrance claims that creativity has always been an active part of a human’s life as its necessity springs up based on the existing problem. It is followed by the need to find some solutions and cope with the given task in particular reality (Torrance, 1974).

Therefore, the following questions arise:

1. What is the function of metaphor in copywriting?
2. How is a mono-modal or multimodal metaphors created and decoded in copywriting?
3. What is the significance of metaphor in marketing, and what are the specific characteristics that must be taken into account during its creation and decoding processes?

As a social creature, a human being needs to share or understand an experience as well as knowledge. In order to do so, language as a tool is used for structured communication. Social discourse gives us an opportunity to share and understand sent or received messages. Verbal communication has always been a primary means of communication. However, for centuries, mankind has developed an additional aspect of communication based on the already gained experience, knowledge and logic. Douglas Hofstadter claims that a concept is nothing but a unity of analogies. Therefore, a concept-defining process is connected to the chain of analogies ( Hofstadter, 2013).

Metaphor, as a figure of speech, literary, stylistic or rhetorical device, governs concept or thought rather than only verbal language. As Forceville proposes, the metaphor

should be investigated in semiotic modes as it crosses verbal barriers (Forceville, 2006).

As metaphor can be verbal and non-verbal, it can be expressed via oral communication, written text, gestures and visuals. Metaphors are used in literature as well as theatrical performances, advertisements or films. Moreover, the metaphor does not belong to a single mode only, but it can also be set in two or more modes. According to Forceville, “mono-modal metaphors are metaphors whose target and source are exclusively or pre-dominantly rendered in one mode (Forceville 2006, 383), while multimodal metaphors are metaphors whose target and source are each represented exclusively or predominantly in different modes” (Forceville 2006, 384).

This article investigates the creating and functioning processes of metaphor in written text, more specifically, in copywriting, published on social media. Additionally, decoding dynamics and interpretation characteristics are examined based on specific examples.

## **2. Metaphor in marketing**

The decoding process of metaphor is directly connected to the age of an individual. Understanding metaphor requires cognitive thinking that is developed based on experience and gained knowledge.

While building creative work, it is important to keep in mind that the power of words lies in their inner space. Therefore, the context and educational/cultural background of the audience should be taken into account to avoid the miscommunication. A metaphor consists of three independent layers: 1. presented metaphor; 2. its generalized meaning; 3. cultural background of the given metaphor (Rusieshvili, 2005).

Thus, to create a relevant metaphor, it is essential to understand the background and demands of an audience. Moreover, the association and analogy of metaphor must be pictured as accurately as possible to ease the decoding process and avoid vague cognitive thoughts.

Lakoff and Johnson discuss a metaphor as a means of communication in everyday life and emphasize its importance from various perspectives. They define it as a part of “thought and action” together with the language (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003).

Having a great impact on an individual’s behaviour, viewpoint and perception, metaphor took a primary place in the marketing industry so that it defines the context of a specific product. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are more likely mediators between the existing reality and human beings (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). The authors consider conceptual metaphor to be a

bridge between a product and an audience as it gives a disguised idea that needs to be interpreted by a decoder.

Fillis and Rentschler, on the other hand, discuss the danger of seeking a metaphor in any marketing work (Fillis and Rentschler, 2006). Confusing a metaphor with some other stylistic or cognitive figure of speech might lead to miscommunication.

According to Fillis and Rentschler, the following two basic marketing concepts are sometimes confused with metaphors: USP (unique selling proposition) and metaphors which have become idioms (Fillis & Rentschler, 2006).

One of the most iconic examples of USP is the copy created by M&Ms: The milk chocolate melts in your mouth, not in your hand (<https://www.optimonk.com/what-is-your-unique-selling-proposition-usp-examples>).

Based on the given example, it is obvious that the copy directly provides its intention and guarantees a consumer's convenience. Eating chocolate is mostly associated with getting dirty hands and other inconveniences. M&Ms, on the contrary, offers a product which satisfies the expectations as well as makes the eating process easier.

A magnificent example of a multimodal, verbal/visual metaphor is a "Leaky Umbrella" made by the British insurance company:

*"Would you buy an umbrella, if it didn't keep you dry?"*

*Neither would we. So why should you pay for an insurance policy that won't keep you properly covered?*

*Unlike 8 out of 10 standard home insurance policies, we include cover for your belongings if they are accidentally damaged or lost – as standard"* (<https://www.abccopywriting.com/2010/02/22/metaphors-copywriting>).

The given metaphor makes an indirect analogy taken from everyday life and creates an association so that the intended message leads to the target audience.

No one would pay for an insurance policy, which does not cover all the costs. It is as simple as the fact that no one buys an umbrella that does fully protect from rain.

Another suggestion to bear in mind is the existence of some metaphors that have been used so frequently, that they transformed into idioms. The two examples below demonstrate the above-mentioned statement:

1. *"Owen is the black sheep of his family"*

Owen does not fit his surroundings just like a black sheep does not fit its flock;

2. “*You can ask me anything, I’m an open book*”

Just like an open book is easy to read, an individual, who is like an open book, can easily provide information (<https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/vs/idiom-vs-metaphor-how-recognize-difference>).

Thus, while creating or interpreting a copywriting work, cognitive thinking, cultural/educational background, context-related metaphors, and marketing concepts must be taken into account.

### **3. Insight in copywriting**

George Felton claims that a brand’s mission is to adapt the copy to the specific characteristics of the product itself. A consumer’s needs and background play a vitally important role (George Felton, 2013). The basic mission of a copywriter is to develop a slogan, profile or image of a company. While doing so, finding the proper brand voice is essential to build up the basis for the copy.

Another way to find the insight of a brand is its personification. Once a copywriter can create a profile of a brand based on its characteristics as a person, then it is easier to set the intended message inside the copy (Felton, 2013).

Therefore, after finding the brand voice, a copywriter starts to develop copy that does not involve many methodological options, rather personification remains the basic tool.

According to Felton, the first step a copywriter should make is to understand the character or persona of the brand. Then it will be easier to find its authentic voice (Felton, 2013).

Dave Bedwood believes that a copywriter should not be focused on creating an advertisement, but rather on the authentic characteristics of the brand and the actual voice of the targeted audience (Bedwood, 2010). Only this way, it is possible to create a genuine, at the same time, catchy piece of copy.

### **4. Methodology**

The study focuses on the examination of creating and decoding metaphors in copywriting, specifically-on social media.

The examples of mono-modal/multimodal metaphors are brought from the copies of the author of the paper, who works as a copywriter and has got theoretical knowledge as well as practice-based

experience regarding the topic. A survey was done on social networking sites such as Facebook to examine the creative, functioning and decoding processes of metaphors in copywriting. The participants of the survey were chosen from different age groups, professions, gender and background. The survey aimed to investigate the creative process of metaphors in copywriting text, the way specific intentions are directed to the target audience and how they meet the proper perceptive or decoding consequences. The questionnaire (including the examples from copywriting analysed below) was used to collect the empirical data for the study.

Overall, 20 respondents participated in the survey (age: 23-45, 7 males, 13 females). Four of the respondents were artists, five were musicians, and three respondents were philologists and acknowledged the metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon. The rest of the participants occupy job positions in the fields of science and technology.

The questionnaire included the following questions:

Question 1: What is your profession?

Question 2: Choose your age group

Question 3: Have you got any associations between the name of the dish and *Noah's story*? If yes, do you find the analogy amusing?

Question 4. Do you think that the metaphor *Big Bang* expresses the meaning of synesthesia, as an art process?

Question 5. What are your associations with the following phrase: *it's Pippi time to go out and water flowers*”?

## **5. Results and Discussion**

The findings of the study aim to investigate the function of mono-modal and multimodal metaphors in copywriting, their creative process and specific characteristics that should be taken into account to reach a relevant interpretation.

Human beings, as social creatures, experience the urge to understand and share the gained experience or knowledge. Verbal, as well as non-verbal language (including gained experience, knowledge, logic and analogies), are used for social discourse. Creativity takes a vitally important part in everyday life as well as in the field of marketing. As we live in the era of social media and endless informative availability, copywriting, specifically on social networking sites, has gained vital importance. Thus, what is the mission of a copywriter? Which aspects should be taken into

account while creating a text, and are there any writing “tricks” to make up a metaphor that would effectively be directed to the target audience? The given examples provide some solutions to the above-mentioned issues.

The examples are created by the author of this paper. The copies were written for social networking sites and demonstrated the creative as well as the functioning process of metaphors daily.

**Example 1.**

**There are parallel universes out there**

**Noah’s Ark**



The copy was made for a restaurant (Sheen. Aura) serving a new dish: eggplant stuffed with various vegetables. To attract the attention of an audience, especially on social media, the text must be as short and as catchy as possible. Due to their busy routines, people do not have much time to read three-page copies. Therefore this process must be time-saving. The previous text regarding parallel universes prepares the decoder for the following pictorial metaphor: Noah’s Ark. A biblical allusion suggests the association and analogies that eggplant can be as richly stuffed as Noah’s Ark was crammed with various creatures. The given metaphor, apart from its copy regarding parallel universes, attracts the attention of vegetarians. Vegetarian varieties of dishes are not as available as non-vegetarian ones. Therefore, the copy maintains that as the existence of parallel universes is

theoretically possible, a new dish full of delicious ingredients may be available somewhere out there.

Thus, one metaphor in a text can be targeted at various types of audiences.

Moreover, according to the finding of the study, a metaphor in the copy can be of a wider or narrower range.

The metaphor in the above-given example belongs to the wider range as the bible or Noah is known to most audiences with various cultural or educational backgrounds.

### **Example 2.**

*“They say that the universe used to be a singularity, before the Big Bang. And then, some colours and sounds, the sky and the earth, the stars and the sun were created. And this process is endless and lost in infinity. We are compassing this direction through our perceptions. For all these perceptions, we refer to the sky as blue and classify the sounds as Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, and Ti. But, what if the major chord is actually fiery red, or purple fade becomes a minor? For that bang of jazz and painting is what makes a harmonious singularity.”*

The text was written for an art event (at Arteria) that aimed to demonstrate a new tendency in art, synesthesia. Like in science, synesthesia is a “crossing of the senses” in art. The process includes the stylistic diversity of a painting artist, at the same time, accompanied by a band or an orchestra. During the creative process, artists paint what they hear, and musicians play what they see, making a unity of colour and music.

A multimodal metaphor *Big Bang* was chosen at the beginning of the text to express the concept of the event. The mixture of music and art makes similar analogies with the big bang that happened in space resulting in the chaos that, in the end, turned into a settled infinity. Another metaphor compass is used to demonstrate that an audience attending the event is trying to orientate in the proper direction, based on their subjective perceptions. The process is similar to a compass seeking the north. The following metaphors the *blue sky*” and classified *Do, Re, Mi* demonstrate the suggestion that as there is no objective reality, at least visual or auditory, the new art tendency offers quite the contrary. Here sky may not be blue, or Do mix with Re might turn into some dissonance. As art, just like the universe itself, cannot be set in one shape, the perceptive process of the audience is genuinely unique.



The above-mentioned metaphors belong to the narrow range of metaphors as without specific educational or cultural background, the decoder might find the decoding process extremely difficult.

**Example 3.**

A metaphor in the copy can be sentimental, entertaining, nostalgic, encouraging, funny, manipulative etc. Metaphors aiming at sending some emotional signal to the audience work the best, especially on social media. While creating these types of metaphors, the reality, needs of the target group and their background should be taken into account. The following example demonstrates the above-mentioned statement: “*When the pandemic and rainy days attack, maybe it’s Pippi time to go out and water flowers?!*”



The copy was written during the lockdown (at Sheen. Aura). This is the time when people were upset, sad and tired of the existing reality. *Pippi* as a metaphor, certainly makes some analogies with *Pippi Longstocking*. On the other hand, a beautiful episode where she is watering flowers on a rainy day claiming that no weather can affect her mood is so memorable. *Pippi* as an emotional metaphor can be encouraging as well as informative, or even nostalgic.

Here we have to mention that as Georgia is a sunny country, some people are not fond of rainy days and feel extremely demotivated or sad when it rains. Therefore, this metaphor encourages them and reminds them of Pippi, a little girl, who swims against the tide. Moreover, during the pandemic lockdown, people used to spend most of their time inside. The restaurant encourages them to go out as it offers a nice garden space with flowers and a beautiful exterior painted by artists. Additionally, *Pippi* can lead to some nostalgic emotions as it is connected to childhood memories. Also, it is significant from the informative point of view suggesting that the place is child-friendly. However, the given metaphor belongs to the narrow range of

metaphors. *Pippi* is a fictional character and belongs to a specific audience, children. Nevertheless, as the place is artistic and focuses on its specific audience, the given metaphor works effectively.

According to the results of the survey, all of the respondents found some analogies between *Noah* and the given copy (Example 1, *Noah's Ark*). All of them found the copy amusing as connecting a vegetable dish with the biblical character creates humorous associations. Here it is worth mentioning that as Georgia is a highly religious country, the author had some doubts that the copy might trigger an aggressive reaction due to the biblical connections. Still, taking into account the fact, that Noah belongs to the old Bible, his story maintains a mythological meaning and significance. Therefore, using it as a metaphor did not lead to any unpleasant experiences.

Nine of the respondents precisely decoded the *Bing Bang* metaphor and made some connections with art, (Example 2) not surprisingly, as they were artists and musicians. Thus, the educational background made their interpretation process easier. As for the rest, only three of the philologists (who are fond of modern art and music) could get to the point of the intended analogies.

As for the *Pippi* (Example 3), it is worth mentioning that all of the 20 respondents have heard of *Pippi*, although their emotional attitudes towards the metaphor itself differed drastically. All of the 13 females and 4 of the youngsters considered *Pippi* to be a nostalgic, or cute analogy as they could find some connections between it and their own childhood. Here we have to mention that in Georgia there are still some gender-based literacy tendencies (Gelovani, 2021). Gender stereotypes affect lots of fields, including literature and fairy tales (Totibadze, 2021). The stereotypes or prejudices define the gender roles practiced in society. For instance, it is considered that particular literature is for females and the other type is for males. Here *Pippi* belongs to the children or female literature. Thus, due to the gender basis, mostly female respondents gave emotional feedback regarding the given metaphor.

## **6. Conclusions**

The study has discussed mono-modal/multimodal metaphors and the creative, functioning, as well as interpretation process in copywriting. The aim of the study was to show the significance of the metaphor in creative work, the importance of intention sent as a message via metaphor, and the significance of the emotional background of the decoder during the interpretation process. The

research discusses the deep connection between metaphor and its usage in copywriting based on the relevant linguistic context. In addition, the conceptual and functional significance of metaphor was investigated. Several examples (from social media) were analyzed in order to find out the usage and interpretation processes of metaphors in copywriting.

Based on the findings of the research, it can be claimed that metaphor governs concept and thought rather than verbal language only. Its usage in copywriting is of essential importance. Moreover, a multimodal metaphor (verbal or non-verbal) creates a harmonious concept in copywriting. Metaphors that are used in copywriting can be personalized as they include specific characteristics and features. Furthermore, metaphors in copywriting should meet the existing reality and the needs of an audience as they can reach, or be intended for wide as well as the narrow audience. While creating a metaphor, it is important not to confuse it with some other marketing concepts. In order to form a mono-modal or multimodal metaphor based on its authentic intention, a copywriter should be focused on the brand's mission. Analogies in metaphor must be pictured clearly and should be catchy to be interpreted precisely. Educational, cultural, emotional background knowledge, age and gender of an audience must be taken into consideration to create a proper discourse between the brand product and the decoder. It is worth mentioning that personalized metaphors used in copywriting can be emotionally manipulative and affect the decoder's mood.

The findings of the research reveal the importance of metaphors in copywriting and the significance of their proper formation in a text. A monomodal or multimodal metaphor, that is built on the relevant context, is the guarantee of a successful discourse in the field of marketing. More specifically, it acts as an intermediary between an audience and a copy.

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