METAPHOR AND MULTIMODALITY IN MEANING-MAKING

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ABSTRACT

When talking with people face to face, we usually complement verbal language with gestures, facial expressions and sometimes images and sounds present in the speech scene, which constitutes multimodality. When we write to absent people, we can recover multimodal resources employing what Greeks called "didaskalía". We, human beings, are the only creatures in the planet able to refer in absence. We can talk about a horse – which lives in a farm – in our living room. In doing so we trigger pre-existing multimodal senses from our addressee's long-term memory, related to its shape (image), its whinny (hearing), its strength (touch). When we use a metaphor as my cousin is a horse with his girlfriend, we intend to focus mainly on the horse strength, blending this aspect to the way he acts (physically or psychologically) towards his girlfriend. Our aim is, therefore, to discuss multimodal resources for metaphorical meanings, multimodal constructions in advertising discourse and multimodal metaphors of concepts in embodied mental sense simulation. All these assets have the functional objective of framing the way the audience should build in their minds the world we are talking about according to our conscious or subconscious intentions. Language is part of the way we construct the world within our and our addressee´s minds.

Keywords: Blending; Multimodality; Multimodal metaphor; Multimodal concept; Advertising.

RESUMO

Ao conversar com as pessoas face a face, geralmente complementamos a linguagem verbal com gestos, expressões faciais e, por vezes, imagens e sons presentes na cena da fala, o que constitui multimodalidade. Quando escrevemos para pessoas ausentes, podemos recuperar recursos multimodais empregando o que os gregos chamavam de "didaskalía". Nós, seres humanos, somos as únicas criaturas do planeta capazes de fazer referência em ausência. Podemos falar de um cavalo - que vive em uma fazenda - em nossa sala de estar. Ao fazê-lo, acionamos os sentidos multimodais pré-existentes da memória de longo prazo de nosso destinatário, relacionados à sua forma (imagem), seu relincho (audição), sua força (toque). Quando usamos uma metáfora como meu primo é um cavalo com sua namorada, pretendemos nos concentrar principalmente na força do cavalo, integrando conceptualmente esse aspecto com a maneira como ele age (física ou psicologicamente) com sua namorada. Nosso objetivo é, portanto, discutir recursos multimodais para significados metafóricos, construções multimodais no discurso publicitário e metáforas multimodais de conceitos em simulação de sentido mental corporificado. Todos esses recursos têm o objetivo funcional de enquadrar a forma como o público deve construir em suas mentes o mundo de que estamos falando, de acordo com nossas intenções conscientes ou subconscientes. A linguagem é parte da maneira como construímos o mundo dentro de nossas mentes e da de nossos destinatários.

Palavras-chave: Integração conceptual; Multimodalidade; Metáfora multimodal; Conceito multimodal; Publicidade.

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INTRODUCTION

From the outset, we find it important to propose a new way of understanding text and discourse. Text is what a speaker says, or a writer writes down. A text is not something encoded that must be passively decoded by the listener or reader. It is only a meaning-making proposition. The meaning of a text is built up into the brain of the listener or reader in an operation we call discourse. Discourse is constructed by the listener or reader pairing the received text with his encyclopedic knowledge of the world, stored into his long-term memory. As Steen says (2017:4) "It is a general assumption that discourse guides, organizes and constrains the structures and functions of utterances as well as their production, reception and exchange."

Whenever we hear or read a sentence as *This beach is safe*, we are able to retrieve this form-meaning pairing from our long-term memory and construct a discourse in which it is not the beach that is protected from or not exposed to danger or risk, but people who go there. Reading the New York Times headline "Seven reasons banks pay peanuts on saving accounts", we construct a discourse retrieving the saying "If you pay peanuts, you will get monkeys". This leads us to interpret, first, that according to common sense, monkeys have neither motor coordination nor adequate brain to perform complex tasks, implying stupidity. Second, that paying peanuts is a metaphor of paying very little, a slang term for low wages, which is exactly the focus of the discourse construction related to the headline in question.

1 MEANING CONSTRUCTION, MULTIMODALITY AND EMOTIONS

When constructing our discourses, we mentally simulate their content, using the same neural structures that we would use if we were actually practicing the action or actually activating at least one of our five senses, in a somatotopic way, that is: the point-to-point correspondence of an area of the body to a specific point on our central nervous system. As Bergen says (2012: 15): "While we listen to or read sentences, we simulate seeing the scenes and performing the actions that are described. We do so, using our motor and perceptual systems, and possibly other brain systems, like those dedicated to emotion." These simulations are multisensory or multimodal, as we do them using our five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. An excellent example would be this excerpt by Fitzgerald (2016 [1934], p. 47): "There were about thirty people, mostly women, and all fashioned by Louisa M. Alcott or Madame de Ségur; and they functioned on this set as cautiously, as precisely, as does a human hand picking up jagged broken glass". By reading this excerpt, besides mentally visualizing the broken pieces of glass, we unconsciously simulate not only the tactile sense of being accidentally wounded by glass, but also how to carefully handle the broken pieces.

These multimodal discourse constructions are not just rational. They are always steeped in our emotional memories. Damasio (2018:164) says that:

> In conclusion, most images that enter our minds are entitled to an emotive response, strong or weak. The origin of the image does not matter. Any sensory process can constitute a trigger, from taste and olfaction to vision, and it does not really matter whether the image is being freshly minted in perception or recalled from the stores of memory.

Summing up, spoken texts are considered multimodal in nature since they include not only words orally delivered, but also gestures, body language, facial expressions, stress and intonation, and so on. Written texts, on the other hand, are only considered to be multimodal when they include images, maps, graphics, diagrams and the like. The discourse constructed by the addressee, however, is always multimodal without any exception.

Therefore, one of the most important tasks to be carried out when producing any kind of text is to provide our listeners and readers with plentiful and creative prompts so that they are able to take advantage of their previous multimodal experiences, stored in their long term memories, to build up richer and more motivating discourses.

2 BLENDING: CREATIVITY IN TEXT PRODUCTION

According to Evans (2015: 228), "Language guides how our conceptual system is engaged in meaning construction", which means that not only does language provide us with the forms we need to encode our ideas, knowledge, feelings, concepts and so on, but it also prompts our addressees to construct a discourse which is directly based on his/her previous experiences, emotions and any other memory related to the sensory-motor system. And he goes on: "If the conceptual system is the orchestra, then language is the conductor, which coordinates and directs the way the instruments are played, and without which the full splendour of the symphony couldn't be realized" (ibid.:229). Therefore, let's go deeper into the subject and examine what Turner (2018) means when he states that the production of a text is a creative task.

Thinking about languages in general, we know there is systematicity and creativity involved in communication. Languages are systematic since each one has its own system. Systematicity implies a limited number of sounds or symbols that combined by a limited number of rules provides us with an unlimited number of constructions of any kind from words and chunks to sentences and texts. However, even though being somehow limited by its linguistic nature and structure, language can be used to express thoughts related to any situation, virtual, real or even imaginary. That's what Turner (2018) calls "linguistic equipotentiality", whose key is blending. And it is exactly where language creativity takes place.

If we analyze the New York Times headline previously mentioned, we understand how such a creative headline makes sense for English speakers who know the meaning of both "monkey" and "peanuts" in this specific context. Blending enables them to apply meaning to a metaphorical saying related to economics:
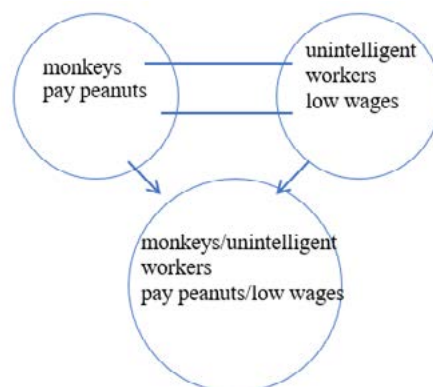
According to the Cambridge Dictionary Online[1] *peanuts* can be informally used meaning "something so small it is not worth considering, especially an amount of money." In fact, this meaning has been attached to this form since 1840, but only came to be used as a financial term in the 1940s. Monkeys are thought to like eating peanuts, and according to the free dictionary online[2] the word can be used as a slang meaning "a person who is mocked, duped, or made to appear a fool". As a conclusion, when the reader interprets the headline, s/he builds a cross-space mapping connecting counterparts in the input spaces: it connects the terms *monkeys* and *pay peanuts* in one space to *unintelligent workers* and *low wages* in the other space, respectively. Then, the forms are projected to the blend space to pick out corresponding meaning there - "This blend is not an algorithmic unification of these two quite different input spaces, but instead a new mental space constructed through selective projection from these inputs and conceptual elaboration to produce emergent structure in the blend." (TURNER, 2018: 359). As a result, equipotentiality is solved in this case by the blending of the terms projected in the inputs: *monkeys* can now be referred to *unintelligent workers* and *pay peanuts* to *low wages*.

As we can notice, the production of any text requires a lot of creativity. The writer or speaker must first evaluate the addressee's knowledge about the topic or the subject in question, adjust his text according to the situation and creatively combine a set of prompts clearly enough so that the addressee builds up his discourse effectively. The meaning construction (discourse) is also a creative task in which the reader/ listener should be able to retrieve from his past experience memories information (categories, mainly) to attribute meaning to that text at hand.

3 AN ANALYSIS OF MULTIMODAL METAPHORS IN AUTOMOBILE ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

In this article, we present a purely qualitative analyses of an excerpt of a small corpus composed of 49 pieces of print advertisements of automobiles published in Brazil. Our goal is to illustrate how the cognitive approach to language, especially the process of blending, operates in the advertising discourse.

When Henry Ford's remarkable Model T was introduced in Detroit, back in 1908, competition among automakers was not as harsh as it is nowadays. As time went by, however, we have seen an array of companies from all over the world rise and enter the market and, as a consequence, competition has also skyrocketed. In order to thrive in such complex environment, car manufacturers had to invest in advertising.

The advertising industry has been breeding ground for metaphorical language ever since it became popular in the late 19th century fueled by industrialization. Modern-day advertisement rhetoric has been refined in order to create seductive appeal to customers who are more and more immerse in vast amounts of information. Professionals have deliberately resorted to metaphorical constructions to convey meaning and make sure that their products and services stand out in a sea of options.

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1   Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/>
2   Available at:< https://www.thefreedictionary.com>

According to Koller (2009), corporate brands are cognitively structured by the metaphor BRANDS ARE LIVING ORGANISMS, often more specifically BRANDS ARE PEOPLE. Consequently, multimodality is evident in the careful construction of companies' visual identities and logo layouts, which in turn take part in an accurately orchestrated interplay with textual material as a way of attributing human-like traits to them.

We can infer, thus, that advertising plays a key role in conveying companies' 'personalities' every day. The processes by which these metaphorically structured mental models are brought about have been theorized as mappings from a source to a target domain, or blends of two or more input spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008), as previously mentioned. Multimodality, as commonly seen in genres produced in the advertising field, is explored by the combination of multiple elements, including images and written texts.

We can see an example of blending in the logo of Korean car manufacturer Hyundai. The word "Hyundai" is the Korean 現代 ("*hanja"*) which means "modernity." An exact transliteration into English would be "Hyeondae." In order to enter the market in western countries, the company faced a natural challenge regarding cultural aspects. As a solution, their current slogan, in English (*New Thinking. New Possibilities),* helps to explain the meaning of the company's name.

In addition, while the "H" in Hyundai's automobile logo does stand for the company's name (Picture 1), it is also a stylized picture: a silhouette of two individuals shaking hands (Picture 2). One individual is a company representative and the other is a satisfied customer. Their exchange is a handshake of trust and satisfaction between company and consumer.

Picture 1 – Hyundai logo.

Picture 2 – Hyundai logo - handshake.

In this case, the logo prompts a multimodal blend involving the concept of handshaking (image) and the letter "H" (written text). In most cultures, handshaking symbolizes the closing of a deal always based on trust. By combining these elements, people are induced to link the idea of closing a successful deal to buying a Hyundai car.

In the next session, we analyze a few examples of multimodal metaphors in car ads produced in Brazil. These advertisements are based on the combination of imagens and written text as they were designed for print media.

3.1 Cars are wild animals – 2009 Mitsubishi Pajero Full

The following (Picture 3) is an advertisement of a Mitsubishi SUV published in a Brazilian magazine in 2009.

Picture 3 - 2009 Mitsubishi Pajero Full - CAR IS ANIMAL.

The creators of this advertisement induce viewers to make a blend of the power and strength of the rhino and their car through a combination of visual elements.

Furthermore, when we consider the written text accompanying the picture, they propose another blend (Picture 4).

Picture 4 - Mitsubishi Pajero's written element.

The English translation is: *with the AWC-R system, the Mitsubishi Pajero Full decides for itself how to stabilize, break and correct its trajectory. It's more than technology, it's instinct.*

Considering all the props in this advertising work, in a nutshell, we can experience two major blends:

1   The Mitsubishi Pajero Full is as strong and powerful as a rhino. Although there are many other strong and powerful wild animals, like lions, for instance, the choice of a rhino specifically reinforces the projection of such attributes to the car, as it is designed for off-road trails that demand sheer sturdiness.

2   You can trust the Mitsubishi Pajero Full to safely endure difficult off-road trails because, just like a wild animal, it has instincts and it controls itself in dangerous situations. As the concepts of mechanics and electronics related to the AWC-R system are probably too technological and extensive to explain on a one-page-ad, the multimodal combination proposed in the advertisement fulfills the need to give information to prospective customers in a way that it is both effective and appealing.

3.2 Cars are people – 1970 Chevrolet Trucks

In this section we present and analyze an advertisement of a series of Chevrolet trucks published in a Brazilian newspaper in 1970. It is mandatory that we take a particular synchronic perspective in order to study this piece of work because its metaphors rely on a cultural historical concept that is considered both inhumane and politically incorrect at present, namely slavery.

Assuming that all of us were born after 1888, when slavery was finally abolished in Brazil, we don't have any actual past experience with it to blend with the prompts in the advertisement. So, we must provide our reader with the context that anchors our selected advertisement.

Back when slavery was legal in the country, slaves were advertised just like any other kind of merchandise in the classified ads of newspapers. No matter how repulsive this might sound nowadays, at that time, people would buy, sell and rent them as valuable assets. Here is an example of a slave newspaper ad dating from the late XIX century in Brazil (Picture 5):

Picture 5 – Female slave.
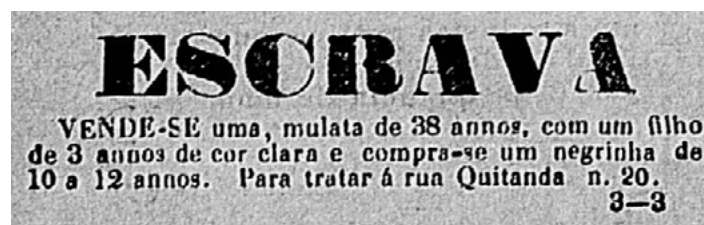
Text in English: *Female slave for sale. Mulatto, 38 years-old, with a 3-year-old son of light color and we want to buy a young black girl aged 10 to 12. Information at 20 Quitanda Street.*

Inspired by these old ads, the advertisers of Chevrolet in 1970 designed the following piece (Picture 6):

Picture 6 - Chevrolet slavery ad.

In English: *Family of slaves for sale. Put a slave to work for you. Guaporé (Chevrolet dealer's name) has a whole family for you. The truck, the pickup and the Veraneio (SUV). This family of slaves is strong and resilient. You just pay for the maintenance of your slave, that is, gasoline and oil. If it complains about anything, take it immediately to Guaporé. Our assistance will take care of it. Quickly, it will resume working for you for free. We're open every day until 8 pm, Saturdays until 5 pm and Sundays until 1 pm.*

Once we have previously established a context to operate the blends in the metaphors in this advertisement, we can understand that the designer of this work would like the readers to project some characteristics of slaves to the cars they sell. In this case, we should highlight the following positive attributes of slaves, from a slave owner's standpoint:

1   being hard-working;

2   being strong;

3   being resilient;

4   doing every kind of heavy duty free of charge, in exchange only for basic things, such as food and shelter, or in the case of the cars, gasoline and oil.

As an analysis of the interplay between images and written text we can see that the graphic design of the advertisement itself resembles those of the slave ads in newspapers prior to 1888.

In conclusion, if you were looking for trucks that were designed for hard work and had low maintenance costs, your best choice, according to the metaphors presented in the advertisement, would be a Chevrolet.

3.3 Subaru is Volvo - Beyond multimodality: a metaphor of a metonym

The advertising world is so devoted to creating associations between brands and concepts that some ideas they propose gradually become cultural facts. A living example of it is when people use metonymy evoking brands in order to refer to certain products. They say, for example, that they bought a box of Kleenex instead of a box of tissues, or Q-tips instead of cotton swabs.

In this context emerges the marketing concept of brand positioning. Brand positioning has been defined by Kotler (2003) as "the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market". In other words, brand positioning describes how a brand is different from its competitors and where, or how, it sits in customers' minds. A brand positioning strategy, therefore, involves creating brand associations in customers' minds to make them perceive the brand in a specific way.

Based on this marketing theory, Swedish automaker Volvo, which has always invested in the safety of its cars, has also invested in spreading the word about it around the world by creating multimodal ads like these (Pictures 7, 8 and 9):

Picture 7 - Be safe, be Volvo

Picture 8 - Not a Volvo

Picture 9 - Volvo crash test

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In Brazil, Japanese automaker Subaru took advantage of all the work developed by Volvo's branding team through years, based on the conceptual cognitive framework of blending by presenting the following advertisement:

Picture 10 - Subaru - Volvo from Japan.

In English: *Subaru. The Volvo from Japan. Maximum grade in the world's main crash tests.*

The designers of this advertisement consider that Subaru's target audience is the same as Volvo's. They also consider that these people have already seen at least one of the Volvo's ads around, which are mostly multimodal. Therefore, instead of creating their own concepts in order to point out the qualities of their cars, they take a humorous step and simply mention that they are the Volvo from Japan. In this case, however, we must point out that in order to fully decode the humorous message of the advertisement the reader must be previously aware of Volvo's brand positioning; otherwise, s/he will have to rely only on the picture of the car and the textual information about crash tests, which convey very little meaning, as they are presented.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen in all these multimodal examples, human beings are programmed to use language in many situations, adapting constructions and creating blending in a creative manner. As Turner says (2018: 358):

Someone who has something to communicate recruits form-meaning pairs and blends them in such a way as to create a performance that, in context, will prompt other members of the community to imagine a network of form-meaning pairs that can blend to that perceived performance; this network then guides the perceivers as they construct meaning.

Using only text or images or using both text and images we can produce prompts enabling people to build creative meaning in different genres, such as newspaper articles, scientific texts, and advertisements.

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