Relevance and Intertextuality in Print Modern Advertising – A Conceptual Approach

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Résumé: Dans une première étape, notre étude va introduire les notions d'intertextualité et relevance, en bref. Puis, on va réviser ces notions en les transposant au domaine de l'analyse du discours, plus exactement, au discours publicitaire modern imprimé.

Dans ce cadre théorique, nous allons avancer une hypothèse regardant la relevance du discours publicitaire modern – domaine pragmatique de manifestation des opérateurs de l'intertextualité.

Ensuite, on va subordonner – et développer, aussi –, notre hypothèse à notre approche conceptuelle, à fin de démontrer qu'un discours publicitaire moderne et relevant, grâce aux opérateurs de l'intertextualité, devient plus relevant – surtout parce que la relevance n'est pas une notion absolue, elle peut être décrite en degrés –, à la condition que les opérateurs de l'intertextualité soient conceptualisés, projetés au niveau conceptuel. Et, si la projection est concentrée autour d'une seule représentation conceptuelle majeure pour l'illustration du produit du discours publicitaire, c'est dans ce stage que nous considérons que le discours en discussion atteint la relevance optimale – le desideratum de tout acte de communication.

Mots clef: propriété/fonction d'intertextualité, opérateurs d'intertextualité, relevance, conceptualiser, discours publicitaire moderne imprimé.

1. Argument

We conceived the present related studies ("Relevance and Intertextuality in Print Modern Advertising – A Conceptual Approach" and "Relevance and Semiotics in Print Modern Adver-

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tising – A Conceptual Approach") in order to demonstrate that conceptual print advertising imposes treatment in terms of "norm", surpassing the "use" stage. With the "norm" term we understand a partial socio-cultural norm, much less general than the system, but a normal variant of the system achievement – while other variants may be either abnormal or stylistically valuable (Coseriu, 2004: 87). Much of the advertising discourse is inspired by a community's linguistic use, often translated in "the occurrence and functioning of cultural stereotypes" which "is closely related to intertextuality" (Net, 1996: 303). The same author continues with a pessimistic perspective on the issue – consequence of a deficient cognitive approach: "It is also common knowledge that interpretation stops (at least, temporarily) once stereotypes have been appropriated in a given culture. It stops and it fails. Things, events and phenomena have to be reconsidered." Mention must be made that, in a cognitive relevant framework (such as the one provided by Relevance Theory – Wilson and Sperber, 1986), the fact that interpretation stops is equivalent with positive cognitive effects achievement. The failure aspect is taken into account within a linear intertextual perspective, in which intertextuality is considered in terms of "property", not *function* – we will develop this idea later on.

Regarding the above mentioned issue of interpretation failure, we remind Coseriu's ideas concerning language as activity and faculty simultaneously (thus, language – and advertising discourse as well – are essentially cognitive activities), and more precisely, his concern with the existence of a "linguistic sense", translated in terms of symbols influence over individuals able to create language, possible metaphorical visions governing creation and re-creation of symbols, cultural facts which are word-associated myths (Coseriu, 2000: 30) and also of a "creative activity in language", which consists in discovering new associations related to significance or formal aspects such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, which are possible within the system, but come in unexpected form (Coseriu, 2004: 89). The same author states that the issued norm is not established or imposed according to

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different assessment criteria; the issued norm is objectively established and necessarily obeyed since we are all members of a linguistic community. One may claim, despite these favourable circumstances, that failure may still occur: "[…] si une schématisation donne à voir, c'est à celui qui regarde de lui donner un sens." (Grize, 1997: 95), but this kind of event-risk is part of a small percentage, successfully minimised in a conceptual advertising approach.

Conceptual print advertising discourse easily avoids interpretation failure thanks to the fact that it is located, in our opinion, "[...] dans les relations entre le sujet et son environnement social, culturel, historique et technologique" (Paveau, 2006: 128) and it allows "non seulement l'organisation de l'expérience, mais également des prévisions quant aux discours qui seront produits" (*idem*, page 124). Or, paraphrasing Coseriu, we state that conceptualised print advertising is a socio-cultural[1] system achievement through individual act; that is the reason why we consider that the event-risk is minimized.

To conclude the interpretation failure problem, our conceptual approach argues that "things, events and phenomena" are constantly reconsidering themselves, therefore, when interpretation stops, it is because it has acquired positive cognitive consequences.

Since "Advertisements are one of the most important cultural factors moulding and reflecting our life today. They are ubiquitous, an inevitable part of everyone's life..." (Williamson, 2002: 11) and we are subjected to hundreds of advertisements each day (Cacioppo and Petty, 1985, Harris, 2004), we acknowledged the fact that advertising has become more and more aggressive. Still, we consider that – despite wide-spread assumptions – advertising has actually a restricted role in buying commodities, and that aggressive advertising has even a more restricted role, because it often initiates specific psychological

[1] The term "socio-cultural" is not contrasted here to "individual", but to "internal", our conceptual approach of print modern advertising provides a continuum of the collective-individual relations.

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rejection mechanisms. Jones (2002) advocates that only "a substantial minority" of the vast amount of advertising is efficient because of low-involvement audience (not a benevolent audience, unwilling to trust the advertiser or the advertisement) and low-involvement commodities (products lacking affective or financial high values, usually purchased when needed).

Our present concern is with the mentioned "substantial minority" of the advertising and particularly, with the possible reasons to decode an advertisement. We do not intend to address marketing or psychological researched strategies, we have looked for those reasons meant by Grize (1997: 59) in: «Mais une inférence ne procède pas sans raisons». In this respect too, we derived our present conceptual approach from both cognitive-psychological relevance theory (Wilson and Sperber, 1986) and from Grize's short, but illustrative account on meaning: „Le problème est qu'il est impossible de parler de signes sans faire allusion au sens, qu'une schématisation est un signe et qu'il est ainsi nécessaire de traiter explicitement du sens. […] Le sens est quelque chose qui se présente avec les signes. […] pour qu'il y ait du sens, il est nécessaire de postuler une double activité, celle du locuteur d'une part et celle du locuté, conformément au schéma général adopté dans cet ouvrage. Le locuteur propose des signes dans l'intention de faire sens et le locuté leur *donne* sens."(Grize, 1997: 91,92). Mention must be made that we are aware of the fact that relevance theory is neither a linguistic one («Bien que la théorie de Sperber et Wilson concerne principalement des problèmes d'interprétation d'énoncés en situation de dialogue, elle n'est pas à proprement parler une théorie linguistique [...]» - Moeschler, 1996: 31), nor designed within the scope of discourse analysis, but we consider that it offers a comprehensive meaning determination procedure, suitable for the distinct type of print advertising discourse. The cognitive approach within relevance theory offers further insights into the relationship between mental representations and language, which we apply to the meaning comprehension process of print modern advertising.

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We believe that our conceptual approach is able to offer the above-mentioned reasons to determine the meaning of advertisements, particularly of those designed in a prominent conceptual manner – able to chase away "la terreur du signe incertain". At this point, we have to mention that, obviously, most part of advertising is conceptualised (belonging to different periods of time, we use the term "modern" in Everaert-Desmedt's acceptation, from 1984, referring to a specific type of advertising, not a specific time period), but we also bear in mind a certain type of conceptual representation, inspired by Gärdenfors' theory of conceptual spaces (2000)[2], which, in our opinion, is able to issue a distinct type of advertising – part of the eco-publicity trend (Teodorescu, Bejan, 2003), in contrast with intertextuality – seen as the most radical and aggressive advertising strategy (Cvasnîi-Catanescu, 2003).

We chose print advertising because "Print is only one system of signs among many, the one which most emphasizes logic, conceptual thought and substantive content." (MacCannel, 1987), considering that it suits better our conceptual approach, in which "Meaning reduces to conceptualization" (Langacker, 1986). We also consider that print medium of discourse transport serves our aim best, since one major modification in its structure has noticeable consequences on the "ensemble of a discursive genre", concerning both the nature of the texts and their manner of reception (Maingueneau, 2007).This statement, corroborated with the cognitive system evolution – in relevance theoretic terms – may induce the idea that advertising evolved accordingly, "geared to the maximisation of relevance" (Wilson and Sperber, 2003). Therefore, print advertising discourse in space conceptual representation model is a normal cognitive consequence or a stage, among others, in advertising development.

[2] According to Gärdenfors (2000), a concept may be conceptually represented in a dynamic geometric structure, as a *region*, with the aid of axes (*quality dimensions*) and *points* (exemplars of the concept), representation that allows discussion in terms of *objects* being close to each other and *objects* as central representatives of a concept.

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1. Intertextuality – conceptual delimitations

2.1. Intertextuality as a *Property*

According to Charaudeau and Maingueneau (2002), intertextuality is a concept which "désigne à la fois une propriété constitutive de tout texte et l'ensemble des relations explicites ou implicites qu'un texte ou un groupe de textes déterminé entretient avec d'autres textes. Dans la première acception, il est une variante d'interdiscursivité."

In 1928, V. Propp discovered the same redundant pattern of Russian folk stories – built upon "a right functions succession"– which can be considered a first intertextual structure. M. Bakhtin analyses Dostoievski's novels in terms of polyphony, notion which constitutes the base of the intertextuality concept with the French narratology. J. Kristeva (1967) treats the concept in terms of text/meaning production. Her ideas are further developed by R. Barthes, who states that "Ce qui fonde le texte, ce n'est pas une structure interne formée, comptable, mais le debouche du texte sur d'autres texts, d'autres codes, d'autres signes: ce qui fait le texte c'est l'intertextuel."(1973: 31, 32).

In a restrictive and literary perspective, intertextuality presupposes "une relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs texts" or "présence effective d'un texte dans un autre" (Genette, 1982: 8).

M. Riffaterre approaches intertextuality in a cognitive-stylistic perspective, concerned with the reader-text relation: "L'intertextualité est la perception, par le lecteur, de rapports entre une oeuvre et d'autres, qui l'ont précédée ou suivie. Ces autres textes constituent l'intertexte de la première. La perception de ces rapports est donc une des composantes fondamentales de la littérarité d'une oeuvre [...]" (1980).

With L. Jenny (1976), intertextual strategy is a positive construction, more than a confusing addition of influences, it is a labour of texts transforming and assimilation, operated by a central text.

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2.2. Intertextuality as a *Function*

To a large extent, intertextuality may be considered a relation of each text (sentence) with other texts (sentences), which are absorbed and transformed, in the same literary culture; thus, intertextuality is a functioning principle to each text (Bidu-Vranceanu et alii, 2001: 273).

D. Maingueneau makes a distinction between intertextuality and intertexte: the latter is represented by convoked texts, such as quotations, allusions, paraphrases; while intertextuality is the implied rule system which supports this intertext (1984: 83), either in an internal or external manner. J.-M. Adam (2006) defines the "interdiscourse" term in relation to intertextuality, which is viewed as one form of the general relationships between discourses. With a more precise perspective, Charaudeau (2006) states that "[...] l'intertextualité pourrait être considérée comme sous-ensemble de l'interdiscursivité dans la mesure où il s'agit de configurations textuelles répertoriables telles qu'on peut les trouver dans les citations directes ou indirectes […]".

In this respect, and in concordance with our approach, we consider Adam's remarks particularly pertinent: "Si l'intertextualité est un aspect de la circulation des textes d'une culture donnée dans la «mémoire discursive» des sujets (Moirand, 2004), elle n'est pas pour autant assimilable à l'interdiscours et aux préconstruits culturels. Elle en est un aspect et, en ce sens, l'intertextualité, issue du champ de la sémiotique littéraire, peut être considérée comme un concept opératoire de l'analyse textuelle des discours en général". (Adam, 2006)

Taking into account our cognitive-functional perspective and the object of research, print advertising discourse, we addressed the concept of intertextuality considering it a function[3], not a property, we understood the "inter" element in terms of "effect over" or "inter-action". In this respect, advertising discourse is

[3] The term "function" is used here according to Jakobson, 1969, while the term "functional" encompasses both Jakobson's and Hjelmslev's (1943) definitions of function.

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not only the application field of intertextuality, but it equally becomes a source of intertextuality (Zafiu, 2005).

The most important aspect – within our conceptual research approach - of the intertextuality concept is: "L'intertextualité ne concerne donc pas uniquement le mode de production d'un texte, mais elle détermine également les conditions de son interprétation." (Détrie, Siblot, Verine, 2001: 158). In our opinion, in order to satisfy the previous claim, intertextuality (considered a function) needs a cognitive treatment of its area and means of functioning: intertextual function operates most successfully in terms of conceptual representation, at the above mentioned level of "prédiscours" or "cadres prédiscursifs collectifs" (Paveau, 2006: 128,124). Or, with Adam's already mentioned view as "concept opératoire", intertextuality is competent enough to "pose les problèmes théoriques de la contextualisation des énoncés et de leur interprétation ainsi que de la définition de l'énonciation comme «moment où langue et discours se conjoignent» (Peytard, 2000)." Under these specific circumstances, intertextual function directs interpretation process. And, as we intend to demonstrate, with print modern advertising discourse, meaning comprehension process is best supported and directed by conceptualised intertextual operators.

3. Relevance – conceptual delimitations

3.1. Relevance as a *Property*

Relevance (according to Relevance Theory – Wilson and Sperber, 1986) is a property of any *external stimulus* or *internal representation* which results in an input to cognitive processes. In other words, an utterance, or another type of external stimulus, such as a gesture, or of internal communication, such as an idea, which provides an input to cognitive processes (analysing, comparing, categorizing, understanding, etc.) may be relevant to an individual at a certain moment in time.

Such an input is relevant if, as a result of its processing, it is linked to existing information and from this connection, a pertinent conclusion yields.

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Given the multitude of inputs available at any time, which may be relevant to an individual, it must be mentioned that "relevance is not just an all-or-none matter but a matter of degree" (Wilson and Sperber, 2003). Relevance theory argues that, given the way our cognitive system evolved, we have an automatic tendency to maximise relevance, i.e. to pick up the input that is more relevant than others, according to individual's ability and preferences. The following statement constitutes the *cognitive principle of relevance* (Wilson and Sperber, 2003): "Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance." This constitutes also the starting point of our hypothesis: print modern advertising is relevant if its meaning acquires relevance from all possible directions, at all levels. In our opinion, optimal relevance is given by a conceptual space representation of intertextual operators.

3.2. Relevance as a *Function*

Achieving cognitive effects (pertinent conclusions in relevance theoretic terms) requires the processing of inputs (external or internal). This process involves effort, undertaken in the expectation of some reward (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 49), in the form of positive cognitive effects. Therefore, the relevance of an input may be assessed in terms of cognitive effects and processing effort, or the relevance is a function of the input and the processing effort.

4. An intertextual analysis

Further, we will try and demonstrate that a print intertextual advertising is deficient in meaning determination unless its intertextual operators are conceptualised.

The advertisements we chose from our surveyed corpus represent high-involvement commodities – such as cars, which involve decisions based on certain major aspects, such as: high financial values, safety, size and type, optional facilities, etc.

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We will discuss first the Citroën advertisement, in order to prove that there are intertextual operators, but they are poorly conceptualised, and the subsequent consequences.

We disposed the two advertisements one besides another in order to contrast them, in terms of displayed conceptual representations.

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A first intertextual element is the co-presence of the text and image (definite characteristic of most advertising), in a simple particular manner, which emphasizes the two major concepts illustrated (the "Citroën" concept and the "facilitate" concept). The first concept is well represented by the aid of two surfaces detaining key-information (the car itself and its name), but it is not well supported by the second concept's linguistic form: "La vie devient facile avec une voiture" – despite the period of time circumstances, the use of the indefinite article creates confusion, which car makes life easy? A car or the Citroën car? This may be one interpretation, among others, but this is exactly what we are implying: confused representations lead to confusing message. Although there are many linguistic forms enumerating different ways of possible facilitated activities for the virtual client – in order to acquire a more persuasive effect –, they extend the "Citroën" concept too much, making it too complex and difficult to exact representation.

We also detected other intertextual marks: the figurative elements cumulated in classic motifs of modern advertising, such as the central exposure of the commodity, elliptical arguments in the product description, the consuming of the product and the consumer's universe, rather difficult to represent in a geometric space conceptual manner since there is a multitude of different concepts to represent.

At a first sight, this advertisement appears straight and clear, it contains a lot of intertextual operators, fact which makes it relevant, with respect to meaning comprehension procedure (the most important concept – "Citroën" – is easily detectable, but not beyond any suspicion, as we mentioned). But it does not address optimal relevance since the meaning comprehension process is complexly structured, involving much cognitive effort.

5. A conceptual analysis

We will begin by analysing the second advertisement, then we will try to extrapolate the findings to the first "Citroën" advertisement, in order to consolidate our statement.

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The aim of our conceptual analysis is to illustrate the role of different quality dimensions in determining a particular concept of the commodity, within a space conceptual representation of a print advertising discourse.

The first element to notice is the partly kneeled woman, her hands in the air, enthusiastically smiling. In front of her, a sidewalk with two palms imprinted, in the lateral edges two barriers with warning yellow lights. Following the guided reading of the pictorial, the headline reads: "So luxurious, you'll feel famous". The first inference resorts to encyclopaedic knowledge, by the aid of intertextual operators, thus, the audience may infer that the woman marked her handprints in the sidewalk, just like celebrities do in Hollywood. Given the explicit content of the pictorial, one may infer that the woman is not in Hollywood (the car in the background reveals six children and a driver looking in the direction of the woman), and correlating this inference with the previous one and with the text of the headline, one may assume that the car is so luxurious that it made the woman act and feel like a celebrity.

In terms of representation of the "car" concept in this advertisement, the above inferences – not exclusively, others being possible – may assign high different salience weights for the quality domains – part of the "luxury" concept – and they may as well seem too numerous when analysed. But they are all co-working in determining the meaning of the "luxury" conceptual representation as part of the "car" concept – its conceptual representation is discretely minimised (the car itself is in the background, its name and logo being written in the right corner of the pictorial) in favour of the conceptual representation of "luxury".

However, our purpose is not to decide whether intertextuality strategy prevails conceptualisation, or vice-versa. In our opinion, excessive intertextual operators overburden the advertising discourse and consequently, its meaning comprehension process. Thus, the first "Citroën" advertisement would have addressed optimal relevance if it had eliminated part of its intertextual ope-

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rators. We consider that print modern advertising – with systematised intertextual operators, within a major space conceptual representation, treated in terms of quality dimensions of that major concept – addresses optimal relevance.

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