



## MULTIMODAL METAPHOR IN ADVERTISING: CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

**Nguyen Thi Anh Dao<sup>i</sup>**

Bac Lieu University,  
Vietnam

### **Abstract:**

Multimodal metaphors relate to areas, including advertising. Therefore, advertisers always know how to effectively exploit and promote the image in commerce, business, and even advertising, because the preeminence and goal are to sell products and provide the best services for their consumers. Throughout this article, the writer explores a few notable features when analyzing multimodal metaphors used in advertising. At the same time, based on looking at some examples, it is clear that multimodal metaphors can be misinterpreted when they are placed in different contexts and from different cultural perspectives. Then, the writer offers a few suggestions to guide people's understanding of multimodal metaphors in advertising, which are becoming more and more useful in the context of integration and development.

**Keywords:** visual metaphor, multimodal metaphor, advertising, cultural perspectives

### **1. Statement of the problem**

A metaphor is a rhetorical device in which things and phenomena are mentioned by naming other things and phenomena that have relatively similar features. According to the typical work of Andrew Ortony (1979) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), multimodal metaphor is understood as a transition from the linguistic level to other domains and carries additional cultural connotations. In fact, multimodal metaphor is not simply understood as a matter of language creation, but as a way to embellish the poem and spice up the speech. Moreover, it is one of the central issues of human perception.

Advertising includes activities and forms of commercial promotion that simply introduce goods and products without direct buying, selling and consuming activities. Advertising appears in many places, many forms and many means, etc. Advertising is an economic activity. At the same time, it is also a cultural creation and affects the interests of consumers. Therefore, advertising is a product of culture, reflecting new cultural values that have an impact on people's perception, behavior, lifestyle, culture and aesthetics.

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [ntadao@blu.edu.vn](mailto:ntadao@blu.edu.vn)

The use of multimodal metaphor in advertising from cultural perspectives is a correct request because each culture has different values, from which there are also different customs. Therefore, it is required that those who use multimodal metaphors in advertising must grasp and apply them appropriately and promote the highest efficiency.

## **2. Research content**

### **2.1. Multimodal metaphor in advertising from cultural perspectives**

Multimodal metaphor is expressed in different ways (visual symbols, written symbols, verbal symbols, gestures, sounds, music, smells, tastes and relationships, etc.). Multimodal metaphor is widely used in advertising, comic book, poster, gesture, music, sculpture, architecture, dance, film, television and other fields including most spheres of human social and cultural life. Particularly in the field of advertising, multimodal metaphor becomes a means to convey cultural experiences to promote human understanding. However, each culture is different, so it is also important to pay attention to using multimodal metaphors in advertising appropriately. Specifically, in advertising in Western culture, the lion symbolizes strength and power. Therefore, in the French car brand Peugeot 308, the lion's head with a well-groomed mane is meticulously finished and covered with a thin layer of indium - a rare superconducting metal with the ability to transmit superior radar waves, can be chrome plated and extremely high corrosion resistance gives a luxurious feel. But the question is why the Peugeot logo takes the image of a lion? Because the image of the lion is a clear representation of strength, majesty and a spirit of commitment that never falters; equal quality in terms of speed, power, and durability. The image of the lion that appears frequently in Greek mythology is the name of the gods, in which the legend of the beast Chimera with the powerful appearance of a lion still preserves the history books to this day. Therefore, the French car company Peugeot 308 is known and loved by everyone.

In Eastern culture, the tiger meets all the characteristics such as bravery, courage and daring to attack even larger animals stronger than it. Thanks to that, the tiger is one of the species that has become a symbol of incomparable might and strength. Therefore, it is deified by humans. Many countries include the tiger in social, cultural and artistic life. Right in the Larue beer advertisement, the tiger brand appears very close to Vietnamese culture. Larue beer originates from France with the brand name "houblons", but when coming to Vietnam, the painters redraw the label with the image of a golden tiger to show the strength, optimism, and love of Vietnamese people's life.

In Arab countries, alcohol and pork are two things that are not advertised. Advertisers, therefore, need to be very careful when addressing "hot" issues, which are prohibited under Islamic regulations. However, alcohol and pork are advertised in Asian countries, including Vietnam. Therefore, advertising is the mirror that clearly reflects society and country. Not simply a method of selling products, advertising is also to create a voice and awareness about the cultural life of the nation.

The culture in Western countries has high freedom of speech and the way of life and thinking is also more open, so it is not too heavy to talk about hot issues. Therefore, advertisers of products do not care much about their product image metaphors about these topics. If they

advertise on this "hot" topic, they often give gentle images that are not too strong and harsh. In Eastern countries, which have a culture that emphasizes collectivism between human relationships and people, as well as believes in "behavior", about finding a balance with nature, heaven and earth (feng shui) and the harmony in life, emotional attachment to the family as well as long-standing tradition, advertisers need to be careful when offering advertising images with sensitive metaphors that will meet objections from the public.

In sum, the metaphors on both the destination and the source are shown exclusively through advertising that combines visual and verbal methods. Therefore, in order to convince the audience as well as their customers, the producer uses multimodal metaphors to express from the cultural perspectives of each nation.

Therefore, in the field of advertising, multimodal metaphor is used to suit different cultures to help consumers feel loved and trusted.

## 2.2. Misunderstandings of multimodal metaphor in advertising from cultural perspectives

According to Ick and Politi (1989), the problem is how advertisers can understand their intended meaning for the audience. Indeed, the use of metaphor always carries the risk that the person is consciously or subconsciously dealing with the characteristics with which the person communicates. This can happen if the reputation of a source domain is somehow affected after the metaphor is manipulated because then the target domain becomes vulnerable to unwanted mappings. Imagine that unexpected discovery or even just a rumor that Rembrandt's "Nachtwacht" is actually fake.

Figure 6: The metaphor *Shoe Is Tie*, as discussed in Forceville (1996).



Source: Forceville.

**Figure 7:** Hint at the metaphor *Black Hair Is Niqab*.



**Note:** Provenance and date unknown.

This is clearly seen in Vietnam, many agencies recently use images of ethnic minorities to advertise to attract attention, with millions of views and shares on social networking sites. However, it is worth mentioning here that the image of ethnic minorities is incorrectly reflected in their good nature, even misleading the community about the cultural identity of ethnic minorities. Taking advantage of the honesty and simplicity of ethnic minorities, many advertisements have made up the image of ethnic minorities who are very naïve and foolish. Even in some cases where the scene is a communal house of the Ba Na people, but the actors wore Ede clothes. A lot of advertising content carries ethnic prejudice, which greatly affects the spirit of national solidarity as well as the fine customs and traditions of the Vietnamese people in general, and the cultural identity of the ethnic minorities in particular.

### 3. Conclusion

In short, multimodal metaphor in advertising is a very right request to bring about high efficiency. However, advertising individuals and organizations need to consider it from a cultural perspective, that is, when using metaphors in advertising, they must pay attention to the environment, cultural lifestyle of the community and ethnic group. At the same time, these metaphorical images are not allowed to cause misunderstanding by recipients and lose the value of their inherent cultural identity. Therefore, we should never forget that the relevance and meaning of the images metaphorically in advertising have a great influence on the culture of the community and the nation.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Author**

Nguyen Thi Anh Dao is working at Bac Lieu University, Vietnam. She conducts research on language.

### **References**

- [1]. Almeida, CM, & Bibiana F. (2015). Metaphors range from variety to multimodal in the Portuguese sports newspaper *A Bola*. *RBLA, Belo Horizonte*, (2), 403-420.
- [2]. Black, Max (1979). More about metaphor. Print: Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, pp. 19-43. Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press.
- [3]. Bounegru, Liliana, and Charles Forceville (2011). Metaphors in editorial cartoons representing the global financial crisis, *Journal of Visual Communication* 10: 209-229.
- [4]. Carroll, Noel (1996). A note on film metaphor. *Theorizing the Moving Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 212-223.
- [5]. Cienki, Alan and Cornelia Müller, Eds, (2008). *Metaphor and Gesture*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- [6]. Cila, Nazli (2013). *Metaphors We Design By: The Use of Metaphors in Product Design*. PhD thesis Technical University Delft, The Netherlands. ISBN: 978-94-6191-890-1
- [7]. Forceville, C. (1996). *Metaphor in advertising*. London/New York: Routledge.
- [8]. Forceville, C. (2007). Multimodal metaphor in 10 Dutch TV commercials. *The Public Journal of Semiotics*, I (1), 15-34.
- [9]. Forceville, C., & E. Urios-Ararisi. *Multimodal metaphor [M]*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). and European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).