

How do we read multimodal advertising posters?

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We will be happy to
discuss the study,
scan the code!



INTRODUCTION

Deliberate ambiguity is often employed in advertising to pique the interest of the reader. Deliberate ambiguity in slogans has a positive effect on appreciation [Lagerwerf, 2002].

What eye movements can tell us about why ambiguous posters are appreciated? This study attempts to clarify the features of the functioning of lexical ambiguity in multimodal advertising discourse by comparing reading patterns of ambiguous and unambiguous advertisements.

Multimodal poster here is a poster consisting of verbal and non-verbal components such as text and image.

MATERIAL

14 advertisements with
ambiguous slogans



'Sleep, sleep, I'll cover you.
A reliable partner for sound sleep.
Shop "Everything for the house".'

the verb *cover* in the slogan has
two meanings: idiomatic 'cover for
someone' and literal 'cover smth
with smth'

14 unambiguous
advertisements



'The rabbit will not protect.
Baby on board must be in a child
safety seat.
Social advertising'

the slogan is unambiguous

Ambiguous slogans contain a polysemous word or phrase, which actualizes its ambiguity thanks to two components of an advertising poster. A picture and an advertising text fragment support different meanings of a polysemous word. The slogan becomes ambiguous, and a word-play arises, creating humorous effect.

There is no biasing context for the reader to select the appropriate meaning. Both dominant and subordinate meanings of an ambiguous slogan are appropriate and supported within the same context.

All the posters are in Russian. All of the ambiguous posters were assembled from outdoor advertisements or found online. We edited posters in Adobe Photoshop® without changing the headline. All of the posters have the same structure, picture-text layout, background colour, font. The number of characters in the text on the posters does not differ significantly for ambiguous and unambiguous posters (54 VS 59, $p = 0.673$).

Average number of symbols in ambiguous slogans is 16, in unambiguous — 19 symbols. The length of the slogans does not differ significantly between posters ($p = 0.1$).

EXPERIMENT

36 Russian participants were asked to examine 28 advertising posters.

The instruction was as follows:

1. look at the poster as long as you need
2. rate the poster on a scale from 1 to 5: how attractive and original is this poster?
3. check if the statement about the poster is correct or not
4. repeat with the rest of the posters

The experiment lasted for 15-20 mins.

Apparatus: EyeLink 1000 Plus (SR Research), monocular recording.

RESULTS

The first fixation was made on the verbal part of the posters significantly more often than on the picture (761 VS 247, $p < 0,001$). Readers spent significantly more time reading the text (Me = 4036 s) then looking at the picture (Me = 2129 s) ($p < 0.01$).

Total dwell time does not differ for ambiguous and unambiguous posters (see the table below). Readers made almost the same number of fixations on ambiguous and unambiguous posters, but fixations on ambiguous posters were significantly longer.

	ambiguous posters	unambiguous posters	p (Mann-Whitney)
total dwell time (median)	6275 s	6197 s	0.528
number of fixations (median)	32	32	0.752
median fixation duration	183	180	$< 0.001^*$

While looking at advertisements, readers on average made 6 switches between text and picture.

Readers spent significantly more time reading unambiguous slogans and made more fixations, but fixations on ambiguous posters were significantly longer (see the table below).

	ambiguous slogans	unambiguous slogans	p (Mann-Whitney)
total dwell time (median)	1362 s	1481 s	0.024*
number of fixations (median)	7	8	$< 0.001^*$
median fixation duration	170	168	0.029*

DISCUSSION

Readers start perceiving multimodal advertisements from text and spend more time reading text than looking at a picture, which supports the results of [Rayner et al., 2001].

The presence of ambiguity in advertisement does not impact ad perception as a whole strongly, but it has an effect on how the ambiguous slogans are read: unambiguous slogans are read significantly longer.

The presence of ambiguity in advertisement, when verbal and non-verbal parts of advertisement support different meanings of an ambiguous slogan, does not induce switches between text and picture. These switches may be interpreted as attempts to integrate text and images [Holsanova, 2014].

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CONTACT

Thank you for your attention!

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