

ELAD-SILDA

Études de Linguistique et d'Analyse des Discours
Studies In Linguistics and Discourse Analysis

ELAD-SILDA

ISSN : 2609-6609

Éditeur : Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3

5 | 2020

Metaphors We Manipulate with

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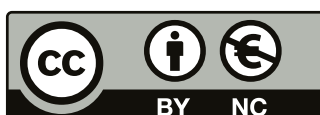


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The persuasive vs. manipulative power of multimodal metaphors in advertising discourse

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This is a conceptual paper whose purpose is, first, to contribute to the definition and understanding of features that could help to trace a demarcation line between the notions of *persuasion* and *manipulation*; second, to enquire into some of the possible ways of measuring the manipulative, as opposed to persuasive potential of metaphors and determine whether the use of metaphors necessarily entails a form of manipulation and if so, how; third, to study the implications of the degree of lexicalisation of a metaphor for its persuasive / manipulative force; finally, to enquire into the proportional relationship between multimodality and manipulative potential. In other words, my goal is to understand whether multimodal metaphors bear greater potential for manipulation as compared to their monomodal counterparts. These enquiries are addressed within the framework of the theory of semiotics and pragmatics developed by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). To ground my argument some examples of promotional metaphors from the car industry are discussed.

Keywords: multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), multimodal promotional metaphor, car industry, advertising discourse, persuasion, manipulation

Les objectifs de cet article de recherche théorique sont multiples. Premièrement, il vise à contribuer à la définition et à la compréhension des caractéristiques qui pourraient mettre en lumière les différences entre les notions de *persuasion* et de *manipulation*. Deuxièmement, dans la perspective de contribuer à l'identification de pistes pour mesurer le potentiel persuasif ou manipulateur des métaphores, notre étude se propose d'élaborer un modèle qui permettrait de mesurer ce potentiel. Aussi, l'article vise à déterminer si l'utilisation des métaphores implique forcément une forme de manipulation et, si tel est le cas, de quelle manière. Troisièmement, notre étude propose d'analyser l'impact du degré de lexicalisation d'une métaphore sur sa force persuasive / manipulatrice. Finalement, l'article étudie la relation proportionnelle entre la multimodalité et le potentiel de manipulation. En d'autres termes, nous proposons d'analyser les métaphores multimodales pour comprendre si elles présentent un plus grand potentiel de manipulation que les métaphores monomodales. Ces questions sont abordées à la lumière de la théorie de la sémiotique pragmatique développée par le philosophe américain Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Pour appuyer nos conclusions, quelques exemples de métaphores publicitaires provenant de l'industrie automobile sont étudiés.

Mots-clés : analyse de discours multimodale, métaphore publicitaire multimodale, industrie automobile, discours publicitaire, persuasion, manipulation

Introduction

Have you ever wondered how come some advertisements make you enjoy watching them? Is it even possible to enjoy an advertisement, whose purpose is, after all, to influence your consumption habits, make you believe certain things and act in certain ways? But we perfectly know that we are being advertised to and like to think that advertisements do not work, or, at least, not on us. Yet, each year companies spend enormous sums of money on advertising and hiring experts in marketing who should adapt to the ever-changing consumer, understand and anticipate their desires and adapt marketing discourse and strategies to appeal to their target audience.

Thus, for instance, as awareness of global climate change issues spreads, consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of consumption habits on their environmental footprint. Purchasing a product or using a service is no longer considered to be inconsequential; rather it is thought of as a political act, which goes beyond consumers' needs. These changes in our society have led to the advent of the green and responsible consumer with alternative consumption practices. Quite naturally then, marketers and advertisers have adapted their communicative strategies to target this new 'sustainable consumer'. As Mühlhäusler [1999: 168] explains:

The changing approaches of green advertisers have had a not necessarily unintended side effect: that of shifting the responsibility for the environment away from the big producers to the consumers. The earth is saved not by factories stopping the manufacture of hazardous products, but by consumers making responsible choices.

As the target audiences of advertising discourse have evolved, the discourse itself has undergone tremendous transformations and drastic shifts to develop into a completely new form. Hence, for instance, as far as the car industry is concerned, Mühlhäusler [1999: 175] notes that:

[...] through sophisticated advertising cars are increasingly presented in or adjacent to natural environments rather than next to glamorous people and opulent mansions as was customary in earlier periods of car advertising.

The almost ubiquitous representation of cars in natural environments, mainly mountainous roads, is of course intentional and bears a specific significance. This technique can be referred to as *framing*, a concept that Kress and Van Leeuwen [2001: 2] define as:

the ways in which elements of a composition may be connected to each other, through the absence of disconnection devices, through vectors, and through continuities and similarities of colour, visual shape and so on. The significance is that [...] connected elements will be read as belonging together in some sense, as continuous or complementary.

Therefore, such framing in which cars are represented adjacent to nature is 'suggestive' of the message that the car that is being promoted is environmentally friendly. Inasmuch as this is not true in the majority of cases, this technique can be considered as manipulative. It is all the more manipulative as claims about the environmentally friendly nature of the product are not overtly stated but rather suggested implicitly through framing. The implicit in contrast with the explicit manner in which messages are conveyed is believed to be one of the basic features that differentiate manipulation from persuasion. A rhetoric tool that is largely tapped into in advertising discourse to convey meaning implicitly is metaphor. Enquiring into the manipulative power of metaphors is the purpose of the present study.

Indeed, metaphors and other manipulative tools are extensively used in advertising to convey messages implicitly. As Hollis [2011] argues:

Successful advertising rarely succeeds through argument or calls to action. [...] No one likes to think that they are easily influenced. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that we respond negatively to naked attempts at persuasion.

Thus, marketers use sophisticated techniques to appeal to the new 'multiliterate consumer', who is increasingly aware of marketing strategies. Another major challenge for marketers is to succeed in reaching what Hollis [2011] calls "an increasingly digitally distracted and time poor audience". This is one of the reasons why multimodal resources are heavily tapped into to render the promotional message more appealing and capture the target audience's attention. Multimodality, thus, is a key aspect of modern advertising discourse and the present study addresses multimodal metaphors.

In the opening section, some of the major theories of metaphor are outlined in an attempt to gain understanding of its nature and functions, focusing on a perspective that has been given little attention so far, namely, the semiotic view on metaphor. Next, an enquiry is carried out into the subtle differences between the notions of *persuasion* and *manipulation* in general, and in particular, as far as multimodal metaphors are concerned. After a

brief review of types of metaphors, an attempt is made to determine the source of manipulative power in metaphors and a model of analysis is put forward.

However, before studying the manipulative power of promotional metaphors, a common ground needs to be reached as to the nature and functions of metaphor in the first place. This endeavour is addressed in the section that follows.

1. Defining and understanding metaphors

From the time that Aristotle introduced it in his *Poetics* in the fourth century, metaphor has been studied extensively by specialists from a variety of disciplines (including philosophy, rhetoric, linguistics and literature); and yet no common agreement has been reached as to the way metaphors are to be defined and understood. The section that follows presents an overview of major theories of metaphor.

1.1. Metaphor theories: an overview

The most prominent views about metaphor put forward so far can be grouped into four major theories as follows. First, the 'comparison theory' of metaphor or the so-called 'similarity view' [Abrams 1999: 155], as put forward by Aristotle and used traditionally to analyse metaphors until recently, holds that the features being compared actually pre-existed the use of the metaphor. Consequently, metaphor is seen as an analogy, and its use, as seeing the similarity between two disparate things. As Abrams [1999: 155] explains, this view assumes that:

a metaphor serves mainly to enhance the rhetorical force and stylistic vividness and pleasantness of a discourse.

In view of the above quotation, it can be stated that the comparison theory focuses on the rhetorical and poetic function of metaphor.

The comparison theory was later replaced by the 'interaction theory' of metaphor, as developed by Black [1954-1955]. However, Black's theory was actually an expansion of Richards's treatment of metaphor. In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* Richards [1936] introduced the terms *vehicle* for the metaphorical word and *tenor* for the subject to which the metaphorical word is applied, and proposed that [1936: 93]:

when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction.

Almost twenty years later, in his influential essay entitled "Metaphor" [1954-1955], Black refined and greatly expanded Richards's ideas. Black [1968: 40] later proposed that each of the two elements in a metaphor has a "system of associated commonplaces", consisting of the properties and relations that we commonly attach to the object, person, or event. These are called by Richards [1936] the grounds of a metaphor. When we understand a metaphor, the system of commonplaces associated with the 'subsidiary subject' (equivalent to Richards's 'vehicle') interacts with the system associated with the 'principal subject' (Richards's 'tenor') so as to 'filter' or 'screen' that system, and thus effects a new way of perceiving and conceiving the principal subject. When using a metaphor, we actually use a 'subsidiary subject' to foster insight into a 'principal subject', this process, for Black [1968: 46], is a distinctive intellectual operation.

Stanford [see Berggren 1962: 243] calls our capacity to use metaphors "stereoscopic vision": the ability to entertain two different points of view at the same time. So according to this view, metaphors create similarity. Furthermore, both for Richards [1936] and Black [1954-1955], a metaphor cannot be viewed simply as a rhetorical or poetic tool in that it affects the ways in which we perceive and conceive of the world.

In his essay "What Metaphors Mean" Davidson [1978] suggested that the question of metaphor is 'pragmatic', rather than semantic in that it consists in the use of a literal statement in such a way as to suggest or imply meaning. In a similar stance, Searle [1979] proposed that to explain metaphor a distinction is to be made between 'word, or sentence meaning' (literal meaning) and a speaker's "utterance meaning" (the metaphorical meaning that a speaker intends to convey). Consequently, Searle attributes a primary role to the speaker's intention. It could therefore be stated that, in the pragmatic theory of metaphor speaker's intentionality, as well as the context of utterance, are of key importance to understanding the function of metaphors.

Finally, the 'cognitive' theory of metaphor or 'Conceptual Metaphor Theory', known as CMT, prominent since the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live by* in 1980, claims that metaphor profoundly structures the ways human beings perceive what they know and how they think. Lakoff and Turner [1989] introduced the cognitive view on metaphor with special attention to its relevance for the analysis of metaphors in poetry. They conceive of metaphor as a projection or mapping across 'conceptual

domains' (source domain and target domain). In using and understanding a metaphor, part of the conceptual structure of the "source domain" is "mapped" onto the conceptual structure of "target domain" in a one-way "transaction" (as distinct from an "interaction"). However, as pointed out by Forceville [2008: 463], a major drawback of conceptual metaphor theory is that it has so far largely ignored multimodal aspects of metaphors.

In view of the aforementioned theories of metaphor, it seems more relevant to explore the manipulative and persuasive functions of metaphor drawing on the pragmatic view, where the speaker's intention and the context of utterance are taken into consideration. The view upon which the present account of metaphor will be grounded, within a broader pragmatic perspective, is Peirce's (1839-1914) conception of metaphor, which as will be demonstrated is consistent with the overall cognitive theory.

1.2. The semiotic view of metaphor (C. S. Peirce 1839-1914)

The use of the term *view* rather than *theory* is intentional, since we cannot really speak of a Peircean theory of metaphor, given that there are few instances of the term *metaphor* in his writings. Still, Peirce's view on metaphor is insightful in understanding the subtle differences between persuasion and manipulation, as well as the way metaphor fulfils these functions.

To begin with, metaphors are instances of signs in the broadest sense in which Peirce understood the concept of *sign*. In 1867, Peirce classified signs based on their mode of representation, into Icons, Indices, and Symbols, which represent their objects through resemblance, contiguity and convention, respectively.

Metaphors, for Peirce, are iconic signs, and he distinguishes several kinds of icons that he calls *hypoicons* and which are further classified according to their mode of representation as follows [CP¹ 2.277, c. 1902]:

[t]hose hypoicons which partake of simple qualities [...] are *images*; those which represent the relations [...] are *diagrams* (example a roadmap that shares a form with some particular territory); those which represent the representative character of a [sign] by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*.

1 The chief published collection of Peirce's writings is the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, hereafter referred to as CP. In referring to these volumes, we have adopted the established method of reference used by all Peirce scholars. Thus, CP 2.277 means volume 2, paragraph 277 of the *Collected Papers*. Where relevant, the date of the text is given.

But what is the ground for the representation of metaphorical icons? Anderson [1984: 458] clarifies that:

the materiality of the metaphor, that is to say the basis for creating the similarity, is a feeling, a first, a pure icon which its creator perceives.

“Feeling” as meant by Peirce, is “distinct from objective perception, will, and thought” [CP 1.302], as feelings are vague and pre-analytical. Thus, as Anderson [1984: 459] explains:

the ground of a metaphor is an “isosensism” between a metaphor and its icon which is created by its author. Moreover, what resemblance obtains between the constituents of a metaphor is created in the articulation of the metaphor.

This view, which is coherent with the pragmatic theory, highlights the role of the author as well as the context of occurrence of a metaphor. In line with this view, the present study argues that to gain a thorough understanding of metaphors, the latter need to be studied with regard to their context of occurrence, as well as the speaker’s intentionality. The particular context that I am interested in is advertising discourse.

1.3. The function of metaphors in advertising discourse

The use of metaphors in advertising bears multiple advantages and thereby serves specific purposes, such as facilitating comprehension [Lakoff 1993] and memorisation [Gray & Snyder 1989], as well as enhancing motivation to read and process promotional messages [Goodstein 1993] due to the creative and novel manner in which those are delivered. What is more, metaphors help to unleash imagination [Zaltman & Coulter 1995]. Their use allows advertisers to carry the consumer away from the real world into an imaginary one – what would their life be like if they bought the product or used a particular service? Consuming then equals offering oneself a better future.

When it comes to considering advertisers’ intentions in the use of metaphors, some questions arise. Are metaphors understood at all by the consumer? Are they ‘correctly’ understood and interpreted after all? As argued by Phillips [1997], promotional metaphors are not always comprehended by the audience in the way their creators intended. Interestingly, thus, these questions turn out to be of no relevance to the advertiser inasmuch as some of the messages conveyed (ambiguous messages) are intentionally meant to be misunderstood, or understood only by a certain category of consumers,

while at the same time intentionally excluding others. Therefore, making sure metaphors are correctly interpreted by everyone might not be the intention of advertisers.

While considering the persuasive or manipulative power of metaphors, the speaker's intention is of key importance, as suggested by the pragmatic view, for the use of metaphors does not necessarily entail manipulation. In other words, metaphors are not inherently and absolutely manipulative, though they constitute a powerful resource which perfectly serves the manipulative intention of those who tap into them. In this, it is vital to consider advertisers' intentions in using metaphors in the design of their discourse.

2. Persuasion vs. manipulation

When considering the differences between persuasion and manipulation, it could be stated that these two communicative acts differ as far as the target audience's will is concerned. In a persuasive process, reasonable arguments are provided so as to make the target audience change their minds through what seems to be a voluntary decision, whereas in the process of manipulation some form of control is exercised to influence the target audience in, for instance, designing the message and carefully shaping the context in which it is delivered in such a way as to make the target think or believe something regardless of their will. Furthermore, persuasion and manipulation differ regarding the way in which the speaker's intention manifests itself. Thus, for instance, in persuasion the speaker's intention to convince is overt and messages are explicitly conveyed, whereas in manipulation this intention is covert and communication is carried out rather implicitly by means of implying messages instead of clearly stating them. The elements of will and control bring me to a paradigm discussed below, which might serve to draw a further distinction between persuasion and manipulation.

2.1. Thinking vs. reasoning

Examining the operation of thought, Peirce notes that it can be of two kinds – controlled and uncontrolled, the former being referred to as reasoning, against thinking. The role of the uncontrolled thought, i.e. thinking, is particularly remarkable in perception, where the mind analyses the direct impressions of the senses. The evidence they bear is compelling and irresistible [CP 5.115]. Furthermore, percepts as the impressions of our senses are fleeting and can therefore be neither modified nor withdrawn, in that they are beyond our control. However, once the direct percept is formed,

it is immediately interpreted by our thought, whereby perceptual judgments or, as Peirce calls them, “perceptual facts” are formed [CP 4.539]. These judgments, which are the descriptions that the mind makes of the evidence provided by the senses, serve as the raw material for all further reasoning.

Despite their being intricately linked, a distinction is to be drawn between reasoning and perception, as Peirce explains [CP 2.144]:

reasoning is a very different thing indeed from the percept, or even from perceptual facts. For reasoning is essentially a voluntary act, over which we exercise control.

Unlike reasoning, perception is forced upon us and is thereby utterly beyond our control [CP 5.115]. The distinction drawn by Peirce between thinking and reasoning is insightful in throwing light into the differences between manipulation and persuasion. While persuasion is based on reasoning and arguments, it is thinking, which is based on perceptual judgments, that underlies manipulation. While reasoning can be controlled, thinking is totally uncontrollable.

Considering the differences between persuasion and manipulation, it could be claimed that in the former case, the speaker’s intention is to talk the interlocutor into something by providing reasonable arguments so that the person would change their minds, whereas in manipulation, the speaker’s intention is to influence and tacitly exercise control rather than persuade through careful design of the message to be delivered. There seems to be a strategy underlying manipulation that consists in hiding some information from the audience intentionally, while at the same time highlighting some of its features so as to draw the target’s attention to specific aspects of the message that is being conveyed. Manipulation requires deliberate organisation of the information to be communicated. Careful selection is made of the points to which the attention is drawn. Metaphors perfectly serve this purpose in that, first, the choice of a particular metaphor over another directs the target audience’s attention away from possible interpretations and focuses on one particular domain. Furthermore, through selective projection and the ‘highlighting-hiding principle’, as suggested by Kövecses [2002: 79], metaphors allow for the selection of elements to be hidden and highlighted with utmost precision. It is maybe for this power that metaphors have been widely used to convey scientific convictions or religious and political ideology throughout history, but their use is also particularly prevalent in advertising discourse.

2.2. Context of use and user intention in advertising discourse

To understand the function of promotional metaphors, it might be useful to inquire into the specificities of the context in which they appear, namely, advertising discourse. What is the intention specific to this discourse genre? Is it to make a rational appeal, persuade through reasonable arguments, or influence the consumer implicitly through salient clues and emotional appeal? In advertising discourse, target audiences are prompted to buy a product or use a service without necessarily being reasonably convinced that they need the products or services they are being lured to. As Danesi [2015: 1] points out, the strategy specific to advertising discourse lies in venturing into domains of unconscious thought. That is why, despite the fact that studies [Stern 1988; Morgan & Reichert 1999] suggest that the majority of consumers do not really comprehend and interpret correctly the meaning of metaphors in advertisements, the latter are still widely used by advertisers. The tacit nature of messages delivered in advertising discourse is further put forward by Danesi [2015: 5] when he claims:

[L]ike poetry, advertising discourse is intended to *suggest*² meanings through allusion, metaphor, irony, analogy, humour, and the like.

As mentioned, there are many advantages linked with the use of metaphors in advertising discourse, such as stimulating the public's imagination and facilitating memorisation. But the question to be dealt with at this point is the following: what is the added value of multimodal metaphors as manipulative devices? This question is addressed in the following section, which deals with different types of metaphors.

3. Types of metaphors: monomodal vs. multimodal metaphors

As compared to monomodal (e.g. linguistic or pictorial metaphors), multimodal metaphors have a greater potential for manipulation as in 'selective projection' the senses are solicited to project the desired features with greater accurateness.

2 Emphasis is added.

3.1. Multimodal metaphors and manipulation

To begin with, let us make it clear that multimodal metaphors should not be assimilated with nonverbal metaphors, as one of the modes involved in the former can be language itself, spoken or written: for instance, a voiceover accompanying images in a video, the lyrics of a song, a running tagline or a printed caption. Forceville [2008: 463] defines multimodal metaphors as:

metaphors in which target, source, and/or mappable features are represented or suggested by at least two different sign systems (one of which may be language) or modes of perception.

Thus, for instance, one of the mappable features can be represented by an image, while another by language or sound. Interestingly, one and the same feature can also be simultaneously represented by several modes. For example, to convey joy or a feeling of happiness several semiotic resources (music, image, sound or language) can be tapped into simultaneously. This definitely constitutes an added value for multimodal metaphors as explained further. The specificities of multimodal metaphors are discussed in the following section.

3.1.1. The specificities of multimodal metaphors

While discussing the advantages of multimodal metaphors, Forceville [2008: 463] points out the following four features. Firstly, multimodal metaphors are characterised by 'perceptual immediacy'. What is meant here is that audiences do not have to engage in complex meaning-making processes in order to perceive and make sense of the message conveyed through an image. Meaning is perceived with great immediacy, unlike some purely verbal messages conveyed through a linguistic metaphor. Secondly, Forceville [2008: 463] explains that multimodal metaphors bear 'medium determined specificities':

Pictorial and multimodal representations have different, medium determined ways of cueing the similarity between target and source than language has.

Thirdly, this type of metaphor allows for '*greater cross-cultural access*':

Inasmuch as sounds and pictures are more easily recognized transnationally than (unfamiliar) languages, pictorial and multimodal metaphors allow for greater cross-cultural access than verbal ones.

While cultural specificities would still markedly dominate the ways in which metaphors are understood and interpreted, due to their perceptual immediacy, multimodal metaphors bear a greater potential to be understood transculturally. Finally, multimodal metaphors are endowed with greater 'emotional appeal'. As Forceville [2008: 463] puts it:

Pictorial and multimodal source domains probably have a stronger emotional appeal than verbal ones.

After all, as the saying goes "a picture is worth a thousand words".

In what follows, two more characteristics of multimodal metaphors will be put forward. First, the 'simultaneity' of communicative action exercised through different modes. It consists in communicating a single message simultaneously tapping into different semiotic resources and using different modes of communication. This feature is believed to entail greater capacity of metaphors to 'impact' audiences, in that it serves to 'reinforce' one and the same message by simultaneously communicating it through different semiotic modes.

Another characteristic, which is related to what Forceville [2008] calls *medium determined specificities*, is the 'accurateness' of communication afforded by multimodal metaphors. Given that the latter afford numerous and diverse semiotic resources, they can benefit from what is known as 'semiotic affordances' in the design of the message to be conveyed. As explained in the *Online glossary of multimodal terms* [MODE 2012], the concept of *semiotic affordances* refers to:

the potentialities and constraints of different modes – what it is possible to express and represent or communicate easily with the resources of a mode, and what is less straightforward or even impossible – and this is subject to constant social work. From this perspective, the term 'affordance' is not a matter of perception, but rather refers to the materially, culturally, socially and historically developed ways in which meaning is made with particular semiotic resources.

This definition is adapted from Kress [2010], who first puts forward the term *semiotic affordances*. Bezemer & Kress [2015: 31] provide a further account of semiotic affordances underlining the social dimension of meaning-making:

What a sign-maker does is shaped by what other sign makers have done before her or him, in response to similar social and semiotic needs. That prior, socially shaped, semiotic work produces socially organized sets of (material and conceptual) semiotic resources, making distinct semiotic organizational

entities for meaning-making available to individual sign-makers.

This characteristic of multimodal metaphors allows their authors to make a careful and accurate selection of semiotic resources at their disposal, based on the specific affordances of a given resource. For example, to make a message memorable, or trigger imagination, visuals can be chosen, while language could most efficiently clarify a message and music would best afford pulling emotional strings. To gain insight into the inner workings of multimodal metaphors, let us consider the following example of a multimodal promotional metaphor used in a commercial for the New Peugeot 508.

3.1.2. Multimodal metaphors in advertising: case study

A CAR IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

To promote its second generation 508 series car released in 2018, Peugeot chose a novel metaphor, namely *A car is a musical instrument*. By choosing this metaphor a parallel is drawn between the domains of music (in particular, classical music) and driving: the driver is a musician and an artist, driving is musical performance and the car is a musical instrument. The selective projection focuses on features such as precision, harmony and passion. Semiotically speaking, multiple modes are tapped into to draw the parallel between the two domains, such as language (written text and voiceover), visual mode (images, gesture), music and sound.

Figure 1. New Peugeot 508 – What Drives You? Opening scene (still 1) [EX1]



Figure 1 above shows the opening scene of the commercial. We can see a man approach the car and take the driver's seat. A voiceover asks "Ready?" and some people, probably technicians, walk around and check the last details to make sure everything is ready. This scene, which is rather dark, reminds us of the behind the scene hustle, preceding an artistic performance, the moment before the artist steps onto the stage. This idea, however, would not be that clear if it were not for the written text (on the bottom left corner) accompanying the scene which reads "RIOPY³. Pianist. About to perform a musical stunt". This image is immediately succeeded by another, representing an ensemble of musicians (a string quarter), starting their performance. As if to accompany the artists with his piano, RIOPY moves his fingers over the dashboard, making a gesture which resembles playing the piano (the dashboard is the keyboard).

Figure 2. New Peugeot 508 – What Drives You? Gesture to represent the piano keyboard (still 2) [EX1]



After the upbeat (the sound of a driving car, and a single piano note), the car comes onto the track: this scene is particularly bright in contrast with the opening scene. The track on which the car drives is represented as a stave⁴, and as the car drives along the track, images are accompanied by

3 Jean-Philippe Rio-Py, known as RIOPY, is a French pianist and composer.

4 The five lines and four spaces between them on which musical notes are written [Cambridge Dictionary 2020].

dynamic classical music. Interestingly, even though this is not a commercial for a green car (e.g. electric or hybrid), the car is pictured amidst dense vegetation, as Figure 3 below shows.

Figure 3. New Peugeot 508 – What Drives you? Green framing (still 3) [EX1]



Throughout the commercial the car is represented amidst trees and green mountainous scenes. The orchestra, accompanying the artist (i.e. the driver), is installed on the sidewalk, also surrounded by dense vegetation. As mentioned above, this technique serves to suggest the environmentally-friendly nature of the promoted car. We can also see the Peugeot logo, displayed on the bottom right corner throughout the commercial, so that the viewer can associate the commercial with the brand.

On the bottom left corner, it is written "Željavo, Croatia". By mentioning a place which exists in reality, the advertisers aim at setting the scene for a real event. The message that is conveyed is that everything is real in the commercial. The purpose is to give credibility to the overall promotional discourse.

As the commercial unfolds, the audio and the video modes allow to map such features as harmony (with nature and among artists performing the music), outstanding and admirable performance (as the public would admire an artist on the scene), success and fame (if you have recognised RIOPY, or read his name in the beginning), precision (as the car drives along the stave and perfectly follows the curves traced on it with notes, also, as two cars

drive close to each other without causing an accident), joy of performing, enjoyment and enthusiasm (expressed through gesture: nodding the head with the rhythm of music), approval and satisfaction (after the performance is over RIOPY looks at the other driver, nods with satisfaction and smiles) and a mixed feeling of calm and energy.

The mapping of the feature 'precision' is equally realised in the verbal mode with the tagline "Discover the beautiful sound of precision", which appears at the end of the commercial. Thus, the verbal mode comes to reinforce the message previously conveyed through the visual mode. The verbal mode, which is rarely used throughout the commercial, also serves to conclude it by addressing the audience with the following question: "New Peugeot 508. What Drives You?" This tagline throws light into another basic feature the advertisers want the target audience to map – the drive, i.e. the energy, passion and determination to achieve things. Classical music is what drives RIOPY, this is what he is 'passionate' about. Driving the new Peugeot 508 is like indulging in one's passion. You will enjoy driving this car as RIOPY enjoys playing the piano. It will give you the drive and the energy you need to accomplish things you love.

It should be noted that both mappable features 'precision' and 'performance' have been used in the car advertising discourse before. Already in 1986, Honda used the tagline "Precision Crafted Performance" [Torrance 2016] to launch Acura, its luxury car brand. Therefore, what is novel about Peugeot's commercial is the parallel it draws between the domains of musical performance and driving to map those features.

To appeal to a larger audience, a different version of the commercial was designed with the tagline "Don't miss a beat" for the Peugeot 308 model. Here the metaphor DRIVING IS MUSICAL PERFORMANCE was adapted to refer to music in general (and not only to classical music). Figure 4 below shows the visual representation of the metaphor used in this commercial:

Figure 4. Peugeot 308. Don't Miss a Beat. (still) [EX2]



As the above discussed examples illustrate, by tapping into different semiotic resources, multimodal metaphors target different senses and engage with various modes of communication to better capture attention, trigger emotions and structure meaning-making processes. Different modes of representation and communication help to reach maximum precision and efficacy in the accomplishment of metaphor's potential by providing more versatile semiotic resources.

Thus, while conceiving multimodal metaphors, their authors can choose semiotic resources which best suit their communicative intent and the overall context of communication. This brings us to the manipulative intention in the use of metaphors and the need to address the ways in which multimodal metaphors can contribute to the accomplishment of this intention.

3.1.3. The added value of multimodal metaphors in manipulation

How do simultaneity and accurateness afforded by multimodal metaphors provide them with an added value when it comes to manipulative communication? As mentioned, one of the distinctive features of manipulation is the element of control. Firstly, multimodal metaphors, due to the simultaneous nature of their communicative action, help to reinforce the message and thereby increase its impact and semiotic pressure on the audience. Secondly, due to the accurateness afforded by multimodal metaphors, advertisers can carefully choose the semiotic modes involved in the design of metaphors, and thereby exercise greater control on the

audience. By carefully designing the metaphors and the thoughts, feelings and emotions they will trigger for the public, advertisers are able to better manipulate their target audiences.

Another added value of multimodal metaphors, as compared to verbal ones, is the greater ambiguity they afford. This might seem quite paradoxical given the arguments that were put forward to account for the accurateness of the communication that can be achieved using multimodal metaphors. When talking about accurateness as a distinctive feature of multimodal metaphors, what is referred to is not the clarity of the message conveyed, but rather the accurateness with which semiotic resources can be chosen to design the message and project the desired features. However, this does not mean that multimodal metaphors are necessarily ambiguous but that if needed, to meet the speaker's specific intentions, greater ambiguity of the communicated message can be reached through the use of multimodal metaphors. As Forceville [2008: 464] argues, in verbal metaphors ambiguity is reduced by linguistic rules that govern them. However, "[i]n pictures [...] there is no such linearity, nor grammatical 'rules' for disambiguating target and source".

Therefore, it could be stated that multimodal metaphors, unlike monomodal ones, bear a greater potential for manipulation as they better serve metaphor's 'highlighting-hiding principle' [Kövecses 2002: 79]. In particular, in "selective projection" as put forward by Fauconnier and Turner [2002: 47] different modes are involved to project the desired features with utmost accurateness (using sound, colour, form, etc.), while making sure to leave out the undesired properties and relations of the source domain. This selective projection is indeed construed as manipulative in itself.

However, it should be noted that "semiotic affordances" are not fixed, but, as Bezemer & Kress [2015: 31] argue, they are "*changeable* and *changing*: sign-makers constantly expand and transform modes and their resources by making new signs".

The capacity of metaphors to grow semantically as pointed out by researchers such as Charteris-Black [2000] is addressed in the next section.

3.2. Creative vs. conventionalised metaphors and manipulation

Once created, metaphors become conventionalised through frequent use. Therefore, it is common to speak of novel or creative metaphors as opposed to conventionalised ones. As Anderson [1984: 461] puts it:

[a]t an outset, a creative metaphor [...] has no resembling antecedent and resembles itself alone. [...] [I]t lacks the precision of conventional reference or of a univocal shared quality.

Consequently, Anderson [1984: 463] clarifies: “[t]he referent which a metaphor creates is not fully closed – it is an open individual”.

In other words, a newly created metaphor’s meaning is “vague in its non-fixity” [Anderson 1984: 464] and therefore open to a range of interpretations. However, metaphors grow semantically, and their referent increasingly moves from vagueness to preciseness. At the outset, we cannot specify comprehensively the meaning of a metaphor, as Anderson [1984: 464] explains:

We select certain parts of the open referent and conventionalize them. The more they are conventionalized, the more symbolic they are in Peircean terms. This, then, finally gives us our second level of metaphor: the new level is merely what is commonly called a frozen or dormant metaphor. Certain parts of the referent are simply crystallized by an interpreter and conventionalized by habitual use.

Creative metaphors thus serve as ground for conventionalised ones. Once freshly created and vague, creative metaphors grow into conventional signs (symbols) through habitual use and develop a precise meaning which “we accept at face value” [Anderson 1984: 464]. The vagueness or preciseness of a metaphor are determined by the extent to which the contours of its referent are clearly defined. In other words, whether or not the feature or the set of features to be mapped from source to target domains are clearly determined and known to the public. The process of definition of the contours of a metaphor’s referent is accomplished through its use. The more a metaphor is used, the clearer its referent becomes. Therefore, the vagueness of the referent of a creative metaphor is due to its novelty. As, for instance, in the example discussed above *A CAR IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT*, at first glance, this creative metaphor is vague as its mappable features are unclear. In contrast, a conventional metaphor, which has been frequently used in car advertisements and whose referent is therefore more precise, is – *A CAR IS POWER*.

Indeed, *A CAR IS POWER* is probably the most widely used metaphor in the car advertising industry. Its use has been prevalent even in advertisements for gasoline, as in the 1964 advertisement for Esso extra gasoline, with the tagline “Put a Tiger in your Tank” and the promotional claim “New power-formula Esso extra gasoline boosts power three ways” [EX3]. However, the *A CAR IS POWER* metaphor affords a wide range of interpretations. The *Cambridge Dictionary* [2020] defines *power* as “the ability to control people

and events”, “strength”, “an official or legal right to do something”. The metaphorical meaning of A CAR IS POWER has been made precise through the frequent use of this metaphor throughout the history of car advertising. Below some examples of its most commonly used referents are discussed.

3.2.1. CAR IS MASCULINE POWER / VIRILITY

The A CAR IS POWER metaphor has been extensively used in car advertising to refer above all to masculine power or virility. Just to give a few examples, the 1996 slogan for Daihatsu Hijet MPV minivan reads: “Picks up five times more women than a Lamborghini” [EX4]. The A CAR IS VIRILITY message is further reinforced through the short text accompanying the image which implies success with women and a warranty for potency:

Forget your Italian racers. This little babe-magnet is the Daihatsu Hijet MPV. [...] Two sun roofs for when things get hot. And even a 3 year/60,000 mile warranty for guaranteed staying power.

More recently, Fiat’s Super Bowl commercial for the crossover 2015 Fiat 500X, entitled “The Fiat Blue Pill” [EX5] equally taps into the A car is masculine power metaphor.

Figure 5. Fiat 500X Super Bowl commercial. “Blue Pill” (still) [EX5]



The commercial features an aging lover who is about to take his last remaining “blue pill”. As it accidentally falls out of the window, the pill bounces all over the city and lands into the open gas tank of a Fiat 500X (see Figure 5 above). The latter swells up to become “bigger, more powerful, and ready for action”. The advertisement ends with the suggestive tagline “Coming this Spring... Hold Out a Little Longer”.

Likewise, the 2004 commercial for VW Golf GTI taps into the *A CAR IS MASCULINE POWER* metaphor with its slogan “For Boys Who Were Always Men” [EX6]. In a similar stance, Oldsmobile’s advertisements with the taglines “Separates the men from the boys” (1968) [EX7] and “If your friends could see you now” (1972) [EX8] tap into the *a CAR IS VIRILITY* metaphor. One of Mercury’s slogans in the late 1960s was “Mercury, Man’s Car”. Finally, the 2001 advertisement for Toyota Celica, featuring the Little Red Riding Hood with the wolf and the catch phrase “Performance you can use” [EX9] draws a parallel between the car’s performance and masculine performance.

3.2.2. CAR IS POWER IN NATURE

The second most widely used context for the *A car is power* metaphor is nature. Though the idea of power is still prevalent, it is now treated differently: owning a car is being powerful, but in relation to nature, so, the power metaphor is to be understood as *A CAR IS POWER IN NATURE*. Volkswagen resorts to this metaphor to promote its cars, Beetle (Bug) and Rabbit, in a TV spot released in 1964 [EX10] and printed magazine adverts (1979) [EX11]. Thus, in its classic snowplow commercial, which features the Bug driving in a landscape with a heavy snowfall, the voiceover addresses the public, asking the following question:

Have you ever wondered how the man who drives the snowplow drives to the snowplow? This one drives a Volkswagen. So, you can stop wondering.

The driver of the Bug, who is a snowplow driver, has chosen this model to drive to work for its capacity to stand against the bad weather, manoeuvrability and good performance even during a heavy winter storm.

Another two-page magazine advert for the Volkswagen Bug draws on the *A CAR IS POWER IN NATURE* metaphor, namely, the “It Takes You To extremes” (1970) [EX12], featuring the Bug in extreme weather conditions, with the following tagline:

It takes you to extremes. From 40 below to 140 above. From the snows of the Arctic to the sands of the Sahara.

More recent examples include adverts from Chevrolet, Nissan and Peugeot. In 2010, Chevrolet chose the tagline “Don’t let nature make you insignificant” [EX13] to promote its Captiva Extreme. Similarly, with its catch phrase, “Get Lost. We dare you” [EX14] Nissan makes promotional claims about its SUV’s onboard GPS mapping system, off-road suspension and four-wheel drive, once again harnessing the power metaphor. Other examples include Mini’s “Just Snow” TV spot for its Cooper (2010) [EX15] and the “Let it Snow” printed advert (2012) [EX16] for the Countryman series.

As the two men featured in the “Just Snow” commercial (2010) [EX15] are trying hard to clean-up their front yards, as can be imagined, to be able to get their cars out (Figure 6), their neighbour, a female driver of Mini Cooper, gets her car out of the garage quite effortlessly (Figure 7). After all, it is “Just Snow”, for such a powerful car as the Mini Cooper.

Figure 6. Mini Cooper, Just Snow. 2010 TV commercial (still 1)
[EX15]



Figure 7. Mini Cooper, Just Snow. 2010 TV commercial (still 2) [EX15]



To conclude, A CAR IS POWER is a conventional metaphor. Its referent has been conventionalised and thereby rendered precise, through the frequent use of this metaphor in the history of car advertising.

3.2.3. Volvos are rubbish

In a paper on car advertising, the title “Volvos are rubbish” may sound quite surprising and provocative. You might think, “Is this a criticism of the Volvo brand?” If not, what might this mean? As the metaphor is creative, its referent is vague and its meaning escapes us. This is, in fact, the official caption for an outdoor poster to claim Volvo’s commitment to reduce their environmental footprint by using “at least 25% recycled plastic in cars by 2025” (2019) [EX17]. Another vivid example of a creative metaphor used in what was to become a legendary car advertisement is Volkswagen’s 1969 advert, featuring a space shuttle and the slogan: “It’s ugly but it gets you there”. This advert, designed by Bill Bernbach of the DDB (Doyle Dane Bernbach) agency to promote Beetle’s efficacy, made a huge impact on the public due to its simplicity and creativity.

To revert to the above made distinction between creative and conventionalised metaphors as vague and precise respectively, it could be stated that creative metaphors are vague in that, by drawing novel, unusual parallels between previously unrelated domains, they offer diverse avenues of exploration.

In contrast, conventionalised metaphors, which have been frequently used and are therefore familiar to us, evoke more specific interpretations. Their referents are more precise and the mappable features – more obvious.

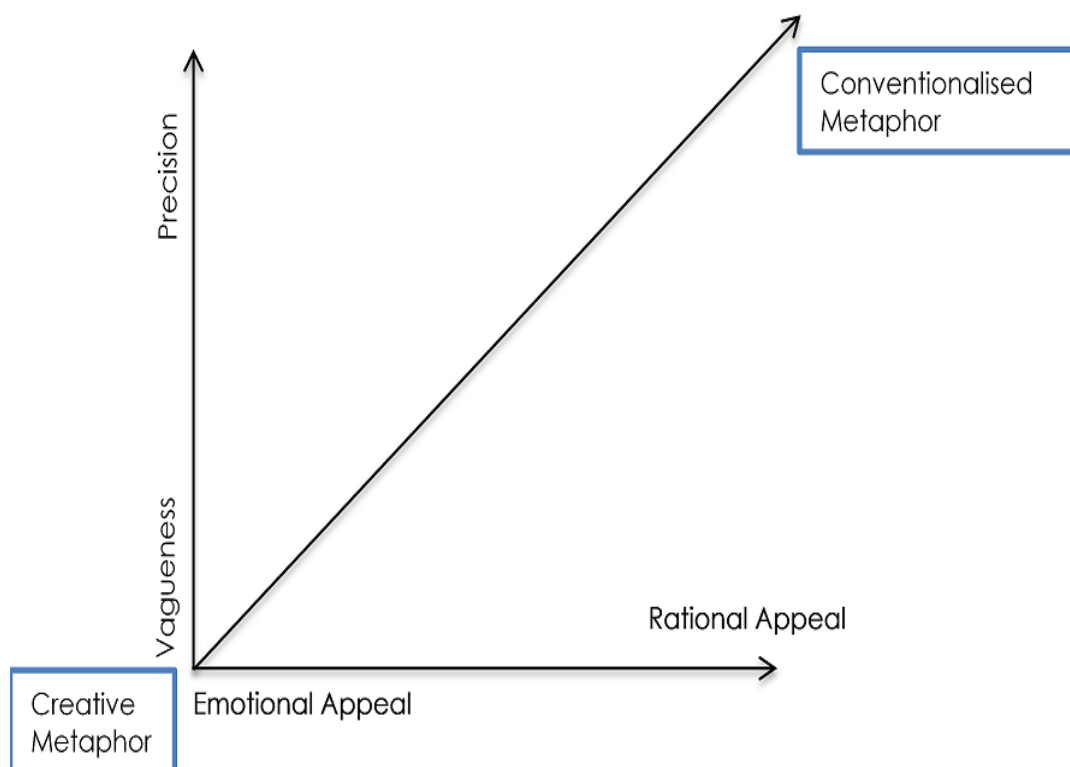
The distinction between the two levels of metaphors – creative and conventionalised – based on the degree of vagueness and preciseness they carry seems helpful in understanding the differences between the persuasive and manipulative functions of metaphor. In the next section, this distinction is used to establish a paradigm that would allow me to measure the manipulative potential of metaphors.

4. Creative and conventionalised metaphors and their manipulative / persuasive potential

The present study argues that, in advertising discourse, it is the creative level of metaphors that is tapped into to build manipulative metaphors, while conventionalised metaphors are used more for their persuasive power. However, conventionalised and creative metaphors should not be thought of as inherently persuasive and manipulative respectively. Instead, we can talk about potentialities they bear for grasping our attention and influencing us regardless of our will or of our being conscious of such influence. As pointed out earlier, the advertiser's intention as well as the context of communication are key factors in the realisation of this potentiality.

Figure 8 below represents a paradigm, whose purpose is to contribute to the understanding of the metaphor's manipulative power based on the degree of vagueness or precision of its referent.

Figure 8. Measuring metaphor's manipulative power based on its degree of vagueness



The vertical axis represents the variable of vagueness or precision of the metaphor's referent. Thus, a creative metaphor is endowed with vagueness, while a conventionalised metaphor's referent is more precise. As the referent's vagueness moves toward preciseness, creative metaphors grow into conventionalised ones.

The horizontal axis represents the type of appeal that metaphors make – emotional or rational. Hence, due to the vagueness of their referent, creative metaphors are mostly used to create impressions and make emotional appeals, while owing to their precision, conventional metaphors might better serve rational argumentation.

Before going any further, let us clarify what manipulation consists in when it comes to advertising discourse, whose purpose is to influence the target audience's behaviour in terms of consumption choices and trigger the consumer's desire to buy a product or use a service. As Hollis [2011] claims:

Successful advertising rarely succeeds through argument or calls to action. Instead, it creates positive memories and feelings that influence our behaviour over time to encourage us to buy something at a later date. No one likes to think that they are easily influenced. In fact, there is plenty of evi-

dence to suggest that we respond negatively to naked attempts at persuasion. Instead, the best advertisements are ingenious at leaving *impressions*.

The above quotation is particularly true about car advertisements, since we rarely rush to buy a car after having just seen an advertisement for it. The car being an expensive commodity, its purchase is often a resultant of a long decision-making process. Therefore, what can be particularly manipulative about advertising discourse in general is the impression that the target audience gets – that of not being influenced and making reasonable decisions when it comes to buying a product. Hence, we are fond of some advertisements and we enjoy watching them not because they influence us, but just because we like the way they are designed, or, at least, this is what we like to think. But what this really means is that some advertisements manage to engage with our emotions, insidiously making us forget what the advertiser's primary intention is. Triggering emotions is what creative and multimodal metaphors are particularly good at. They also catch our attention and appeal to us, creating interest and arousing our curiosity. What makes this possible is their novel and creative nature.

The referent of creative metaphors being vague, the message they carry is elusive. Indeed, the meaning of creative metaphors is often hard to understand at first as in "Volvos are rubbish" or "It's ugly but it gets you there" [EX18]. At first glance, the message seems to be beyond our grasp and is therefore tempting and desirable. The meaning of a creative metaphor is intriguing, it calls for further investigation, makes us want to know more and thus manages to focus our attention. This is why creative metaphors can bear a greater manipulative potential as compared with the conventionalised ones, which are familiar to us. Let us consider the following commercial, which starts with an epic music, beautiful images of the sky and sounds of the wind. A voiceover accompanies the visuals, adopting a calm and mysterious tone. It says: "It's like the wind, some say, or gravity" [EX19]. Then an elegant image of a ballerina follows to represent visually the gravity metaphor (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9. Creative metaphor example (still) [EX19]



Then the voiceover continues with:

You can't see it, but you know it's there. You can't find its button on the dash, or its chapter in the owner's manual.

By now the audience might have guessed that the commercial relates to a car, but still does not know what is being promoted. Our curiosity being aroused, we can then hear:

We have no drawings of it. We don't know how much it weighs... can't time it on the track. Ask ten of our engineers about it and get ten different answers, but there's no debate about its existence. After just one day behind the wheel it's the most valuable part of the car, the irreplaceable component, the thing you love more and more with every passing mile. The thing you instantly miss in any other car.

It is not until the fifty-third second of the commercial that lasts one minute and thirty seconds that the mysterious and intriguing component of the car is unveiled – its soul:

For reasons mysterious and many every Porsche ever built has one and always will.

So, the commercial was for the new Porsche Taycan (2019), an electric car, as the tagline “Soul, electrified” [EX19] announces. As we can notice, it includes no promotional claims or arguments as to the technical features of the car. The only thing the commercial wants us to know and believe is that every Porsche has a soul and that this one’s is electrified.

This example perfectly illustrates the intriguing and mysterious aspect of creative metaphors. It also demonstrates that the whole metaphor does not have to be novel. A creative metaphor can be conceived by simply mapping and focusing on a novel feature. Indeed, the A CAR IS HUMAN / A LIVING BEING metaphor is not new and has been already used extensively in car advertisements. Some of the examples include the 1969 Dodge Charger printed advert “The Eternal Triangle” [EX20], where the car is represented as the mistress and the 1980 Chevrolet Monte Carlo advertisement with the tagline “Even standing still it knows how to move you” [EX21]. Therefore, what is creative about the Porsche commercial and the metaphor it draws on is the feature that has been chosen to be mapped and highlighted – the soul.

Creative metaphors, as in the Porsche Taycan example, are smart and thereby cognitively more stimulating and attractive. The target audience’s mind clings to them and strives to solve the riddle they unfold, to understand the message behind. Indeed, it is the cognitive function of the mind to continue processing information unless it is made sense of. This is how creative metaphors build impressions and become memorable. Their potential of influencing us implicitly is more powerful. It is not the meaning of creative metaphors that is necessarily manipulative, but the intriguing manner in which it is conveyed and the insidious way in which it acts upon us, grabbing our attention, triggering emotions and becoming memorable.

Concluding remarks

Referring to metaphors Abrams [1999: 156] notes:

philosophers adverted to metaphor only to warn against its intrusion into rational discourse [...] on the ground that figurative language, serves only to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement.

This view suggests that the primary purpose of metaphors is to mislead, and that its use is thereby necessarily manipulative. However, in line with the pragmatic theory of metaphor, the present study suggests that speakers’ intentionality as well as the context of utterance are of key importance

in understanding the function of metaphors and measuring the extent to which their use is manipulative. Metaphors are not inherently manipulative but they allow for manipulation.

Furthermore, when it comes to measuring the manipulative potential of metaphors, a distinction is to be made between creative and conventional metaphors. The conventional metaphor's referent is known, its use is usual and the meaning it conveys – ordinary, unlike creative metaphors which are novel, unusual and perceived as extraordinary. Because of their preciseness and familiarity, conventional metaphors can make rational appeals, while creative metaphors bear greater potential for manipulation. As metaphors undergo semantic growth and the vagueness of their referent vanishes into precision, they are more likely to serve persuasive purposes.

The primary purpose of advertising discourse being to influence consumers and therefore to exercise control over their decisions and the consumption choices they make, it could be claimed that advertising discourse mainly taps into creative metaphors to trigger attention and make emotional appeals. In doing so, advertisers make an extensive use of the manipulative power of metaphors.

To distinguish persuasion from manipulation, two criteria can be used – the overall purpose of communication and the transparency of the speaker's intention. The purpose of a persuasive act of communication is to convince the target audience in such a way as to let them make a conscious and thoughtful decision voluntarily. Unlike persuasion, manipulation aims at influencing the public's decision-making so that decisions are made unconsciously and sometimes against the public's will. Furthermore, in persuasion the speaker's intention to convince is overt and messages are explicitly conveyed or stated, whereas in manipulation this intention is covert and communication is carried out implicitly by means of implying or suggesting messages. Therefore, when a message is not clearly and explicitly stated, but only suggested or implied, the advertiser's communicative intent can be characterised as manipulative. Also, a message is manipulative inasmuch as it is conveyed (for example, visually) without being verbally articulated (as in the case of suggesting the environmentally friendly nature of cars through framing techniques or by using the green metaphor).

Finally, multimodal metaphors best serve the manipulative intention of advertisers in that they allow for both maximum 'accurateness' of representation (in mapping and selective projection) and 'simultaneous' transmission of the intended message through different modes. By tapping into different semiotic resources, multimodal metaphors appeal to the

senses and convey a more powerful message which is reinforced through simultaneous communication in different modes. The transmitted message therefore carries in it a more powerful impact on audiences.

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